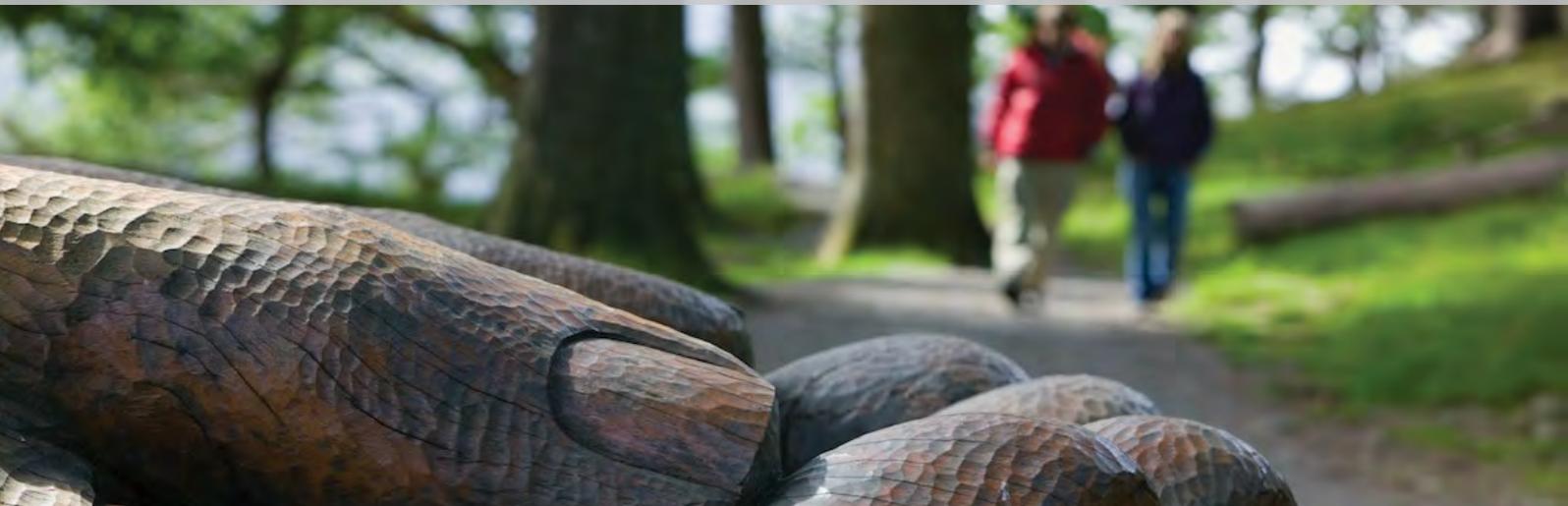


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Environment
Resilience
Resources
& Support

Briefings for Elected Members



BRIEFING 5:

Creating Resilient Communities

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Introduction

The UK is experiencing changing weather patterns and increasing severe weather is causing disruption to peoples' homes, businesses and services. Taking practical actions now helps us to cope with extreme weather, such as heavy rain, drought or heatwaves, and reduces economic losses from such catastrophes. This briefing explores some of the ways to build resilience into your local communities so they can cope with extreme weather, explains your role as an Elected Member, who to involve, and key questions to consider. It includes case studies and links to further information. A separate briefing covers your responsibilities for Flood Risk Management.

Why It's Important

While Emergency Plans are crucial during a crisis, it is better to avoid emergencies in the first place. It is vital that resilience planning is considered as important as response planning.

Reduced reliance on local authority services: The elderly, the very young, and people with long term illnesses are most at risk from extreme weather. Community groups and voluntary organisations can plan to take on a support role, reducing the immediate and long term demand on social care and health services.

Reduced demand on emergency services: Setting up local communications networks to relay risk and response messages around the community reduces the number of calls to the emergency services.

Economic benefits: Resilient businesses understand the risks from severe weather, such as staff being unable to get to work or an inability to receive supplies, distribute product or carry out banking transactions. Planning to deal with these risks in advance can reduce losses or even business failure due to severe weather.

Reducing anxiety and a sense of powerlessness: In and after a crisis people need to know they are supported, what will happen and how they will be helped to deal with it. In the 2007 floods people reported "waiting for someone to knock on the door and say 'Can we help?'" and feeling "on the edge all the time".

Community support and confidence: Working together to cope with or develop plans to respond to extreme weather breaks down boundaries and can change the way people interact and solve problems. Following the Cockermouth floods, a local GP offered AgeUK a peppercorn rent to share premises: their volunteers support people to stay in their homes, reducing hospital visits, and the NHS savings support further community health initiatives.

Multiple benefits: Well-considered responses to climate risks can address many issues at once, such as incorporating public green space, cycle paths or habitats into flood management plans.



FACT BOX

Predicted Weather Changes in the North West

The climate in the North West is set to get warmer during the summer and wetter during the winter with periods of more intense weather events. The main impacts will be an increased risk of **storms and flooding**, but also an increased risk of **heatwaves** particularly affecting urban areas, increased likelihood of summer **droughts** and changes to growing seasons.

CASE STUDY

Trees to Beat the Heat

There were an estimated 60 deaths were in the North West as a result of the 2006 summer heatwave¹. In urban areas, increasing summer temperatures are expected to cause significant health problems for the elderly, people with severe illnesses and young children. Increasing green infrastructure (trees and plants) provides evaporative cooling and shading to counter extreme temperatures. Knowsley Council has doubled woodland cover since the early 1990s, and is planting urban trees as part of the Green Streets programme.

Councillor Eddie Connor from Knowsley Council said:
“The Green Streets programme is fantastic because it helps to green our urban areas by planting street trees in existing neighbourhoods such as Northwood in Knowsley. Our local communities are involved in the process, choosing trees and loving the changes to their areas. Even in difficult economic times, the evidence of the importance of tree planting and the reaction of local residents speaks for itself. It pushes so many buttons for the council, our residents and most vulnerable communities – bringing people together, making neighbourhoods more attractive, stimulating the local economy, improving air quality, boosting mental and physical health and well-being, and creating wildlife friendly areas, as well as keeping people cooler and capturing rainwater to reduce flooding, both of which are crucial in a changing climate.”



Knowsley Council



How Can Elected Members Make a Difference?

Elected members are in a pivotal position to help create resilient communities, with a role spanning constituents and involvement with public sector, voluntary organisations and businesses.

- **Communicating:** Explaining why resilience is important, drawing on experiences either within your district or in other areas. Showing how people, businesses and other organisations can work together to increase their resilience. Using local media to inform people of the local risks and ways to reduce vulnerability to them.
- **Networking:** Bringing together people and organisations with the right range of skills to plan for resilience and start to work together.
- **Mobilising:** Being able to enthuse, motivate, and build the confidence of others. Making the case for actions and for establishing clear effective plans.
- **Signposting:** Knowing what support can be drawn on from the council, the Environment Agency, other support agencies, and community, faith, business groups and charities.
- **Supporting delivery:** Helping to make sure your authority has plans in place to support resilience groups to start up and resources to work with them.

Supporting Community Networks to Respond During Weather Extremes



The Snow Angels Community Interest Scheme recruited more than 40 volunteers in a pilot scheme in Northwich, Cheshire, to help older and more vulnerable people during cold weather. People on the assisted bin collection list were used as a starting point to help identify vulnerable community members, and more than 80 people signed up to the scheme. Volunteers made regular telephone calls and visits, and provided practical help such as with shopping, path clearing, heating problems, and delivery of meals. Although the model was developed for extreme cold weather, it is applicable to other extremes such as heatwaves and flooding. The scheme was promoted through the council's Low Carbon Communities network.

CASE STUDY

Councillor Jane Colville from Ashton Hayes Parish Council said: "We want to integrate community resilience into our Neighbourhood Planning process. Snow Angels is a practical and engaging way to get people thinking about community resilience, and will be a springboard for wider awareness and action. Communities already support each other during cold weather, and we want to complement this neighbourly activity to ensure that the most vulnerable people get the assistance they need. We have worked with a range of partners to set up Snow Angels, learning from experiences in Northwich. In particular, we have been able to make connections to the local community and established groups, such as the TimeBank, which will coordinate the Snow Angels volunteers and enable the project to get up and running quickly. Strong links to Cheshire West and Chester Council are also important; our district Councillor helped us financially to get the project started when we incurred funding delays, and her wider networks and contacts often prove beneficial in making things happen."



Who to Involve

A wide range of people, departments and organisations should be involved from within the council and across the public, private, voluntary and community sectors:

- Local authority services and members such as those responsible for Housing, Neighbourhoods, Education, Social Care, Economic Development.
- Local voluntary, community and third sector organisations and groups that have on-the-ground networks and capacity to help, e.g. churches and faith groups, charities, transition town groups, neighbourhood groups, resilience forums.
- Parish councils.
- Registered social landlords.
- Emergency services such as fire and police.
- Health and social care sectors.
- Nursing and care homes, nurseries, primary schools.

Supporting Community Emergency Planning

Irwell Village lies at the confluence of the rivers Irwell and Ogden. Because it is very difficult for emergency services to reach during severe weather, its residents wanted their own flood action plan. Support from Rossendale Borough Council's emergency planner, the Environment Agency and National Flood Forum working with the Irwell Vale and Lumb Residents' Association helped make this happen. The scheme details the actions the community can take when weather conditions delay external support.

The plan is built round a Community Contact system: three people are volunteers to act as contacts and the links to key agencies. The community has around 170 people and 80 houses, a nursery and local business. The plan clarifies what should be done in different situations and enables neighbours to help each other. Practical plans, like putting in place flood barriers, checking on and supporting vulnerable people and liaising with the different emergency and other authorities mean the community can be resilient and confident that they can avoid or manage crises.



Key Questions

Understanding Your Risks

- Have you identified how past weather events have impacted your businesses and communities (a Local Climate Impact Profile)?
- Do you know what the most likely impacts of climate change are going to be for your local area? Think of extremes: rainfall (floods and droughts); temperature (snow and heatwave); wind (storms, tornadoes). Draw on data from the UK Climate Impacts Programme and neighbouring areas.
- Do you know how your communities may be vulnerable to these changes and where the most vulnerable people are located?
- Do you have single points of failure? If the village shop closes, what happens if the village is cut off by snow? Is your emergency response team housed in a flood risk area?
- Do you know how your authority's own staff and services will be affected by weather and climate change, and how this will affect the community you serve?

Developing a Community Plan

- Which organisations are already involved in supporting your community and businesses and are they aware of the need for resilience planning?
- Can other local community groups mobilise support for developing community plans?
- What actions are you or other groups already taking which may not have been driven by the need to increase resilience but could be beneficial e.g. Age UK befriending or hospital visiting schemes? Also look at gaps in what is currently being done.

Supporting Local Resilience

- Do you have a Resilience Plan for the Local Authority that incorporates climate risks to reduce the vulnerability of your services?
- Do you have an Emergency Response Plan that addresses the growing risks of climate change and is reviewed as these impacts become clearer?
- Have you identified simple resources that can make a big difference to resilience: e.g. providing support to organise and run community meetings; having a stock of sandbags in a local community hall; providing grit bins on all hilly roads?
- Does the council publicise ways households and businesses can take responsibility for emergency planning – e.g. completing a “Family Flood Plan” (available from the EA)?
- Does the Local Authority consider climate and weather risks and resilience in decisions on new development and redevelopment?
- Have you identified opportunities to reduce long term risks of flooding, drought, and excessive heat through better management of water and green infrastructure?
- Do you review progress on a regular basis and share it with community groups and businesses?



Community Recovery in Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire

The town flooded twice in the summer of 2012. In June the rivers Calder and Hebden Water burst their banks devastating local shops, houses and the infant school. Just two weeks later the town was back under water. Residents and businesses supported by the Council helped each other to recover quickly: 'pop-up shops' sprang up in spare premises, businesses were housed temporarily in a chapel and the Arts Festival office. The local insurance brokers provided free support to businesses in making their flood claims.

Six months later most shops have installed flood gates and the school has replaced furniture and fittings with items that can be easily moved upstairs. The town held a Food and Drink festival in the autumn, and to promote tourism and business recovery, the Council invested in a valley-wide Christmas local shopping promotion The Valley of Lights attended by over 10,000 people. The community remains alert to the next inevitable flood, but it has gained enormous comfort from the experience of working together through a crisis.



Councillor Janet Battye (Deputy Leader) said: "It's really important that all Councillors listen and learn from what's happened in the floods. We learned that water can do damage to any property, even on a hill. We have set up a flood recovery team which is devising a longer-term flood resilience plan. Our Neighbourhood Coordinator was central to organising the immediate response to the floods, coordinating volunteers to help people flooded out of their homes. He is now running the flood resilience team. Personal emergency planning means businesses and people have looked at their property and learned about what they need to do to protect them from future floods. While partnership work is vital to ensure both recovery and long-term resilience is effective so we're working with the Environment Agency, Yorkshire Water, the Canal and Rivers Trust and Network Rail on our plans."



“Weather can take us all by surprise. Don’t wait for an emergency to kick-start community resilience planning!”

Resources

Climate Ready: Support service to help businesses, public sector and other organisations in adapting to a changing climate

www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/137557.aspx

Climate Resilient Communities: Guidance from CLASP on how communities should be better prepared to help themselves in severe weather conditions and start to mitigate the effects of climate change upon their community

www.claspinfo.org/resources/climate-resilient-communities

Climate Local: Supporting council action on carbon reduction and climate resilience, including the Climate Local Commitment

<http://bit.ly/OiLM7v>

Climate UK: Resources and local approaches to resilience and adaptation

www.climateuk.net

¹ Department of Health (2012). Heatwave Plan for England. Making the case: the impact of heat on health – now and in the future
www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_134157.pdf