

Storm Desmond hit the North Lancashire area on the 5th December 2015. This led to record water heights in the River Lune, with extensive flooding of surrounding land, property and roads.

Water ingress into Lancaster's main electricity sub-station led to a loss of power to 55,000 homes (over 100,000 people) from 10.30pm on Saturday 5th December, to 6am on Monday 7th, with an intermittent supply after that.

Mobile phone communications were also lost throughout this time, due to lack of power to transmitters. Many roads were partially or fully blocked by flooding.

Our climate is changing and we can expect the frequency and magnitude of impacts such as flooding and heatwaves to put strain on health and social care services.



Halton –with-Aughton Village

Photo Credit: CLASP

Key Impacts on Social Care in the First 48 Hours

Local care-agencies faced a number of challenges to their infrastructure and systems.

Loss of Power:

- Care agencies could not take phone calls, receive messages on answerphone systems, or access email.
- Equipment in clients' homes was not able to function, such as electric chairs/hoists.
- Clients had no electric lighting and often no heating or source of hot drink or food.
- Electricity North West has a "Priority Services Register" of customers who may need extra support during a power cut. This scheme is reported to have responded well, however only a very small minority of private care clients are registered with it.

Loss of Communication Networks:

- Mobile phone networks went off-line and many modern landline handsets did not working due to dependence on a power supply.
- Staff were not able to contact agencies to let them know if they could not work (e.g. due to their children being off school – many schools were closed for multiple days).
- Care agencies were not able to contact clients to advise if carers could not attend, or to check on client welfare.
- Care agencies were not able to contact staff to rearrange rotas.

Impacts on Social Care Users in Halton-with-Aughton

Halton-with-Aughton is a village, with a population of c.2,300 approximately 3 miles east of Lancaster.

33% of village residents are over 60 years old, compared to 23% nationally (2011 census). The village has a higher than average proportion of residents accessing private, or state funded social care services.

Some households in lower parts of the village were directly flooded during Storm Desmond, and the whole village was affected by the secondary impacts - the village was cut-off on its main access roads and had no power for almost 48 hours.

- **Many clients of private social care agencies did not receive any visits from care-workers on Sunday 6th or Monday 7th December.**
- Many of those who did have a functioning land-line phone handset received no contact from their care agencies to check on their welfare, or inform them that carers would not call.
- Residents, many with complex health needs, spent almost 48 hours without heating as the (commonly gas or oil) household central heating controls were not operational due to the power-cut.
- The lack of electricity to power tilt/rise mechanisms of chairs left some people unable to mobilise around their property. Others were not confident to move around their homes in the dark without assistance.
- Back-up batteries in some people's emergency call button systems failed after just a couple of hours.
- An 80 year old client of social care agency, with very limited mobility, who was reliant on nearby family for all her care needs during the power-cut said: *"I was lucky, I don't know what I'd have done without them"* and expressed great concern for those who had been left alone.
- Due to the cold, darkness, and limited mobility some residents stayed in bed from 4pm, two days running, as the light fell with no power.

Longer-term Impacts

- The experience has made social care users we spoke with more aware of their vulnerability and dependence on external support.
- Confidence and progress of rehabilitation may have been affected.
- In one known case a social care client, and interviewee for this case study, became very reluctant to leave the house in the weeks following the storm, was readmitted to hospital, and sadly died in January 2016.



One resident has added battery lights and a torch onto her walking frame, concerned in case of any future events.

Adapting and Preparing Local Services

Community Resilience

During the storm event, and in the following days with no power, a number of local people in the village of Halton provided emergency assistance on an ad-hoc basis to those residents they knew to be vulnerable, many of whom are dependent on health and social care services.

The community centre was opened as a hub/drop-in centre, although the building itself was also without power. Volunteers, supplied by the local shop, prepared hot meals via gas cookers and distributed them to those that were known to the community centre, such as members of its elderly lunch club.



One of Halton's bridges over the River Lune Photo credit: CLASP

The impact of the storm has led the Parish Council to consider preparing a Village Emergency Plan, for which they are receiving assistance from Lancaster City Council officers.

Drawing on Local Intelligence

An initial village meeting was held in January 2016 to draw together local experiences of the Storm. At this meeting Age UK Lancaster and Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service introduced the Parish Council to the assistance they can make available, such as distribution of "Safe and Warm Packs" for vulnerable residents.

Both the Fire and Rescue Service and Age UK have good relationships with most care-agencies serving the Halton area. Potential was identified for the care-agencies to distribute information inviting their service-users to opt-in to any future local emergency support schemes in Halton. Further planning for this will commence in February 2016.

Building Health Sector Resilience

As our climate continues to change it is critical that all parts of the health and social care system, including the communities they serve, take action to prepare.

Vulnerable people are at heightened risk from extreme events such as flooding such as flooding, heat and cold. Social care providers, local authority Health and Wellbeing Boards, and NHS commissioners all have an important role to play in improving the health and wellbeing of local communities. You can contact your local Health and Wellbeing Board via your local council website, to discuss these issues in your area.

Contact

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