

Flooding: Opposition Day Debate

House of Commons

4 March 2020



KEY MESSAGES

- Councils are working hard to support those affected by the flooding, and other damage and disruption from the adverse weather.
- A strategic national response to flooding is vital in supporting local efforts. All affected councils and areas should also have the opportunity to engage directly with the new cross-Whitehall Flood Recovery Taskforce. Councils should have their say in how the £4 billion the Government has committed to flooding over the next five years is spent.
- Government should also introduce mandatory anti-flood requirements for new homes which are included in building regulations. These would require developers to introduce measures like raised electrical sockets, fuse boxes, controls and wiring; sealed floors; and raised damp-proof courses.
- The Environment Agency has warned against building new homes on flood plains.ⁱ Councils will always seek to minimise the dangers of flooding to properties, and, where the Environment Agency have been consulted, 97 per cent of cases are in line with their adviceⁱⁱ. Where building does take place in an area where there is a risk, councils need to be reassured that adequate flood defences are in place so that the dangers of flooding and damage to properties are minimised.
- The Bellwin scheme has been activated for council areas affected by these storms. Councils have some concerns about the operation of the emergency Bellwin scheme, in terms of its geographic coverage and the bureaucracy associated with applying for it. It was therefore very positive that the Government has announced additional support under the Flood Recovery Framework
- The draft Flooding and Coastal Erosion strategy proposes additional activity for councils, for example from 2025 the Environment Agency and lead local flood authorities will advise local planning authorities on adaptive approaches. We support the ambition, but these proposed measures are in addition to current activity being undertaken by local authorities. There is a need to identify skills, capacity and resources to deliver these measures. The development of a formal mechanism for sharing expertise, and experience of flood risk appraisal approaches would be one method to help.
- Investment in flooding and coastal erosion relies heavily on public sector contributions. Private sector and community contributors are more likely to come forward if public funding models are fit for purpose and deliver local, place based solutions. We are calling for a more flexible funding model, and for capital and revenue funding to be devolved into a single place-based pot to allow local areas to support a more diverse set of outcomes that meet local priorities, instead of prioritising funding according to nationally set outcome measures.
- Government should broaden the scope to enable tax relief for all flood defence projects and further promote the relief available. Currently, businesses can only get

Briefing

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tax relief if the Environment Agency has allocated funding by way of grant-in-aid to the project. Additional levies to alleviate flood risk should not count toward the cap on council tax/local flexibility.

- In addition, Government should allow other areas to adopt the power given to the Somerset Rivers Authority to raise a Shadow Precept from April 2016 for additional funding for flood risk (where there is local agreement).

FURTHER INFORMATION

The LGA maintains a Severe Weather Hub, this has information for councils on how to respond during extreme conditions.ⁱⁱⁱ The resource is designed to help local authorities prepare for, and react to, bad weather and ensure effective communication with your residents.

In addition, in July 2019 the LGA made a formal response to the Environment Agency's draft flooding and coastal erosion strategy. This sets out our position in more detail.^{iv}

ⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/feb/25/avoid-building-homes-on-flood-plains-says-environment-agency-head>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environment-agency-corporate-scorecard-2018-to-2019-quarter-four/environment-agency-corporate-scorecard-quarter-four-2018-to-2019>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://local.gov.uk/topics/severe-weather/severe-weather-hub>

^{iv} <https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/lga-response-draft-national-flood-and-coastal-erosion-risk>