

Councillor briefing pack: Resilient communities

Ensuring your community is resilient to the impacts of extreme weather



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Key facts

- During the storms and flooding in winter 2013/14, **over 2 million customers suffered power cuts**, of which 16,000 were without power for more than 48 hours.ⁱ
- In the UK, **excess deaths from high temperatures** are projected to triple to 7,000 per year on average by the 2050s as a result of climate change and a growing and ageing population.ⁱⁱ
- **Vulnerable groups** of people such as those affected by poverty, poor health and, disabilities will tend to experience disproportionate negative effects from extreme weather and climate impacts such as flooding.ⁱⁱⁱ
- The 2012 floods in the Upper Calder Valley are estimated to have cost Calderdale Council **£2.5 million**. Only a fraction of this (£86,000) was recovered from the Government through the Bellwin scheme.^{iv}

Why it matters

Adapting to local climate risks is now a critical element of effective planning for the future safety, health and prosperity of our communities. Extreme weather already has devastating effects on communities, and extreme weather events are becoming more common as our climate changes.

Taking action to adapt to climate change will help to make council services and the communities and businesses they serve more resilient to extreme weather in future. Acting early can lead to significant cost-savings in the longer term. Extreme weather costs councils and communities significant amounts of money. For example, the initial clear-up of the storm damage in 2013/14 is estimated to have cost Devon County Council around £3 million^v. Defra suggests typical damages per household flooded in the UK in 2010 were £23-30,000.^{vi}

Under legislation such as the Civil Contingencies Act, Flood & Water Management and the EU Water Framework Directive, councils have various statutory duties relating to community resilience. In carrying out these duties, councils will increasingly need to consider the effects of climate change on the levels of risk they face, e.g. in relation to flooding, water scarcity, heatwaves, extreme cold and high winds.

What difference can taking action make?

As well as avoiding some of the costs associated with extreme weather, potential outcomes for councils include:

- **Helping the most vulnerable in society** through ensuring that services can still be delivered in the event of extreme weather, or that suitable contingency plans are in place. Many councils now incorporate climate change risk assessments as part of their planning of services.
- **Saving money** through avoiding costly disruption to homes, schools and businesses which might otherwise impact

on payment of council tax and business rates. Taking early action to respond to the risks presented by extreme weather need not always be expensive. Even simpler measures, such as property-level flood protection, maintaining river beds and banks or ensuring adequate insurance cover, can reap dividends.

- **Promoting biodiversity** and improving the natural environment – some of the most effective ways of dealing with extreme weather events are through green and blue infrastructure measures, such as tree planting and sustainable drainage systems. These can often be delivered through planning agreements on new developments.
- **Attracting investment** in key sites and sectors through addressing weather-related risks to key sites and infrastructure, including vital transport infrastructure, and demonstrating a proactive approach to risk assessment and management. If your area is prone to climate-related risks, this could be key to demonstrating that the area is ‘investor-ready’.

What role can you play as an elected member?

- **Leadership:** Do emergency plans, community risk registers and associated risk assessments take into account the impacts of climate change? If you are an upper tier authority, is an up-to-date flood risk management strategy in place, with adequate systems and resources in place to implement it? As well as being a statutory responsibility, making sure adequate systems are in place can support a quick and effective response to severe weather incidents.
- **Partnership:** The risks posed by extreme weather events can only be managed effectively through collective, coordinated action by a range of organisations. Councillors can play a key role in ensuring that their council is co-operating well with

other key organisations like the Environment Agency and emergency services.

- **Communicating:** Councillors can play a vital role in raising awareness amongst the communities they serve about the risks posed by climate change and advocating for their community in seeking to build resilience to those risks. Are there vulnerable groups who are particularly at risk? Or businesses which are particularly susceptible?
- **Mobilising:** Councillors should ensure that they understand the key risks to their communities so that they can then mobilise support for the key actions needed to increase resilience.
- **Signposting:** A very wide range of agencies are involved in managing risks and responding to emergencies when they occur. The general public often have little awareness of the different roles and responsibilities and councillors can play a key role in promoting awareness and understanding, so that communities are reassured and know who to turn to in the event of concerns arising or emergencies occurring.
- **Supporting:** Local resilience forums (LRFs) are multi-agency partnerships made up of representatives from local public services, including the emergency services, local authorities, the NHS, the Environment Agency and others. They aim to plan and prepare for localised incidents and catastrophic emergencies. Councillors can support their work and make sure the LRFs are aware of the particular issues within their communities.
- **Scrutiny:** Councillors can play a key role in enabling strong and timely delivery by asking the right questions of officers and partners.

How it's done

There are lots of options available to councils to support your community to become more resilient to extreme weather. Not all of the areas below will be relevant to your council; these are intended as suggestions and ideas for consideration.

Council estate/services – for example:

- Ensure that risks to council buildings, facilities (e.g. schools, leisure centres and nursing homes) and depots are assessed and mitigated. As well as more obvious risks, such as flooding, consideration needs to be given to risks such as summer overheating in schools, healthcare facilities and nursing homes.
- Ensure insurance cover is based on an up-to-date understanding of risks. Gloucestershire County Council's foresight in considering the risks of future flooding enabled it to adequately insure the County's schools in 2006/07 and save £1.9 million when the county was flooded in 2007.^{vii}
- Councils have a statutory duty under the Civil Contingencies Act to ensure business continuity management plans are in place. Of particular importance is ensuring that contingency plans are in place for council services where they impact on vulnerable groups, e.g. ensuring continuity of social care in the event of flooding or other extreme weather events.

In council-led plans – for example:

- Ensure that Local Plan policies reflect and respond to evidence on key local climate risks and opportunities.
- Proactively maintain the Flood Risk Management Strategy and the register of flood risk management structures.
- Develop and deliver green and blue infrastructure (e.g. trees and sustainable drainage systems) strategies to help address the risks of flooding and overheating, and to provide multiple other benefits, e.g. recreation, health, air quality and biodiversity (see Birmingham case study, below).

In partnership – for example:

- Engage proactively with communities and local businesses about climate risks and responsibilities to encourage greater awareness, ownership and resilience. Make use of the Climate Just tool to map vulnerability to climate impacts (see below).
- Work with Local Enterprise Partnerships to ensure climate risks and opportunities are built into economic growth plans.
- Develop joint funding bids for resilience measures, e.g. partnership funding for flood management measures in conjunction with local businesses.
- Support the development of community flood plans in areas of higher risk and encouraging local residents and businesses to sign up to the Environment Agency's Flood Warnings Direct service.

Working with the emergency services and other stakeholders, **Leeds City Council** and the other core cities have produced a Climate Vulnerability Mapping Tool to protect residents from temperature extremes, flooding and high winds. The tool will help to increase the level of preparedness through enabling more effective prioritisation of emergency responses and through more informed strategic planning of adaptation actions. The tool is now being adapted for use in other cities including Liverpool and Sheffield. Further information is available [here](#).

Leicestershire County Council has delivered the Farming for Water programme to support the management of flood waters through natural interventions such as pond creation and expansion, introduction of woody debris and 'leaky barriers' to watercourses and native tree planting. As well as reducing and slowing the amount of water reaching settlements downstream, the project is delivering landscape-scale conservation to benefit wildlife and biodiversity. Further information is available [here](#).

Produced in conjunction with a range of partners, **Birmingham City Council's** Green Living Spaces Plan seeks to capture and demonstrate the multiple benefits of natural green and water spaces. This includes their role in building resilience to climate change, e.g. through reducing the urban heat island effect and through managing flood risk. The Plan has been approved as informal guidance by the City Council. The Green Living Spaces Plan is available [here](#).

Further information

The National Adaptation Programme – sets out what government, businesses, the third sector and society are doing to become more climate ready (UK Government)

Community resilience: resources and tools – online resources to enable individuals, communities and organisations that support them to take part in emergency preparedness activities (Cabinet Office)

Climate Just Tool – an exploration of how far social justice is considered in local adaptations to climate change across the UK (Joseph Rowntree Foundation)

Extreme weather communications guide – a good practice guide for councils on communicating during periods of extreme weather (LGA)

Climate Local – Acting on climate change: Ward councillor workbook - a learning aid for councillors on the roles, opportunities and drivers for council-led action on the changing climate (LGA)

6 steps to flood resilience – guidance on making flood resilience technologies part of an overall Flood Risk Management strategy (BRE and Manchester Universities)

Endnotes

- i. Adaptation Sub-Committee, 2014. Managing climate risks to well-being and the economy
- ii. Adaptation Sub-Committee, 2014. Managing climate risks to well-being and the economy
- iii. HR Wallingford et al, 2012. The UK climate change risk assessment 2012 evidence report
- iv. House of Commons Environment, Food & Rural Affairs Committee, 2014. Managing Flood Risk, Vol 1 & 2.
- v. Devon County Council, 2014. Extreme weather resilience report
- vi. Quoted in: Frontier Economics, 2013. The economics of climate resilience: Appraising flood management initiatives - a case study.
- vii. CAG Consultants, 2009. Adapting to climate change: Local areas' action.



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