

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 26 JANUARY 2016
title: FLOODING IN RIBBLE VALLEY DECEMBER 2015
submitted by: CHIEF EXECUTIVE
principal author: MARSHAL SCOTT

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To report on the floods in the Ribble Valley in December 2015 and the action taken.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 December 2015 has been one of the wettest months on record in the United Kingdom. High water levels in the rivers and on land coupled with record rainfall meant we were faced with a number of flooding incidents throughout December.
- 2.2 Following Storm Desmond and due to incessant rain on 12 December 2015, the culvert in Brookside Close, Whalley overflowed and a torrent of water ran down King Street, flooding approximately 20 properties in that area. There were also a small number of properties flooded at Ribchester and in Clitheroe and Barrow.
- 2.3 On 26 December 2015, as a result of Storm Eva, there was widespread flooding affecting parts of Whalley, Billington and Ribchester. There were also reported incidents of severe flooding in other parts of the Ribble Valley.

3 RESPONSE TO THE EMERGENCY

- 3.1 Our Emergency Planning Incident Room was set up in Committee Room 1 throughout December to ensure our work and that of the Emergency Services was fully co-ordinated. Most weekends in the lead up to Christmas saw the incident room open and staffed by the Emergency Planning Officer and Raynet volunteers.
- 3.2 On Christmas Day and Boxing Day, weather forecasts predicted that major flooding was likely in Whalley and Ribchester. The incident room was manned to deal with the emergency response from mid afternoon on 25 December until 7pm on 26 December 2015. In terms of the emergency response and evacuation, the response from the Emergency Services/Army/LCC and ourselves was exemplary and resulted in a major evacuation in Whalley.
- 3.3 The rest centre at Roefield Leisure Centre on Boxing Day was unavailable due to Christmas closure and whilst Longridge Civic Hall was opened, floods in Ribchester made it inaccessible from Whalley. We therefore decided to deviate from our Emergency Plan and found an alternative rest centre at Whalley Golf Club, which was subsequently opened and staffed by LCC. Most residents evacuated made their own arrangements, although 6 residents did avail themselves of the services at Whalley Golf Club with 3 of these being unable to return to their properties and placed in local hotels on the night of 26 December 2015.

4 RECOVERY OPERATION

- 4.1 The flooding affected approximately 250 households in Whalley, Billington and Ribchester with Whalley and Longworth Road in Billington being worst affected.

- 4.2 On Sunday 27 December 2015, CMT, the Leader of the Council, the Emergency Planning Officer and Head of Engineering met in Whalley to assess the situation. It was immediately clear a vast and prompt cleanup operation would be needed. Skips were promptly ordered to help with the clearance of flood damaged contents and it quickly became apparent that many more would be required. Throughout the day skips were continually being provided at various sites in Whalley, at Longworth Road, Billington and in Ribchester. The Council website was updated to set out the help available.
- 4.3 Staff from the Environment Agency were also on site carrying out door to door surveys of affected properties.
- 4.4 Street sweepers were also brought in to sweep mud and sediment from the streets affected in Whalley and Billington. This proved challenging given parked cars, some streets being cobbled, sightseers and mud and debris being cleaned from properties.
- 4.5 During the late afternoon a Ministerial visit was made to Whalley by Liz Truss MP the Minister for the Environment, Oliver Letwin MP the Minister for Government Policy in the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and James Bevan Chief Executive of the Environment Agency.
- 4.6 On Monday 28 December Whalley Village Hall was opened by Whalley Lions to receive donations and goods supplied by various individuals, charities, volunteers and groups. Volunteers visited households affected and helped residents in clearing houses and cleaning and disinfecting them. The work of the Lions, volunteers and local residents was phenomenal.
- 4.7 Thousands of sandbags were organized and delivered in-case there was more flooding later in the week and distributed around Whalley and Longworth Road, Billington with the help of volunteers and contractors.
- 4.8 The power companies (North West Electricity and British Gas) arrived to begin the process of checking gas and electricity supplies. More skips and street cleaning was arranged with the addition of a mechanical footway sweeper. The Utility companies were working in conjunction with the Council, volunteer electricians and service providers to restore power as quickly as possible. The floods had risen in many properties above the height of meters and fuse boxes which meant they had to be replaced.
- 4.9 A number of increasingly distressed residents began to present themselves in need of accommodation because their homes were unfit to live in. These were placed in local hotels. Other issues raised were health problems, insurance problems and landlord issues amongst many others. This pattern was to repeat itself for the rest of the week with continual demand for:-
- Drain clearance
 - Skips
 - Road cleaning
 - Sand bags
 - Temporary accommodation
 - General help and assistance
- 4.10 Senior Council staff were available to talk with and discuss any particular issues with residents the whole of the week and as you can imagine this was a very difficult and stressful time for all involved.

- 4.11 By Tuesday the Government had announced its financial support package for those affected by Storm Eva [26 December] and more staff were brought in to produce the £500 flood grants for those involved.
- 4.12 Over £100,000 was paid to residents either by cheque [Thursday 31 December] or by Bank Transfer on 5 January 2016.
- 4.13 Staff were also brought in to man emergency telephone lines set up in the council office, to update the website, post on social media and generally assist with recovery.
- 4.14 The Leader, Ward Councillors and many other Council members were also on hand to provide support and assistance. Our MP Nigel Evans provided a key role in supporting his constituents and on numerous occasions put pressure on Insurance Companies to take a more pragmatic approach.
- 4.15 By Thursday all properties had power restored and were capable of running at least a limited electricity supply. Also we had provided some 7,000 sandbags, arranged accommodation for 30+ families and more than 100 Skips.
- 4.16 By New Year's Day we started to scale back our presence although we continued on site in Whalley until Tuesday 5 January.
- 4.17 Week beginning 4 January we processed the council tax relief to properties affected and invited applications for business rate relief. The relief schemes based on Government guidelines are attached at Appendix A.
- 4.18 We continue to receive many requests for support and the ongoing work of the Council has been severely disrupted. I anticipate this could continue for many weeks to come.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Council has incurred considerable expense in helping residents and businesses recover from flooding. The main elements being:-

- Evacuation
- Provision of Sand Bags
- Provision of Skips
- Street and Footway cleaning
- Temporary Accommodation
- Temporary provision of Electricity

The cost so far comes to over £60,000 and is expected to grow as invoices outstanding are paid.

The Government have a scheme, the Bellwin Scheme, to reimburse local authorities in dealing with emergencies. The scheme allows expenditure to be reclaimed once a threshold has been reached. Ribble Valley's threshold is £12,720. We believe that all expenditure in excess of this threshold will be reimbursed.

- 5.2 Separately to the expenditure incurred directly by the Council in responding to the emergency, the Government have announced a series of grants/financial aid to households and businesses flooded by either of these storms:-
 - Flood Grants of £500 to each household flooded
 - A minimum of 3 months Council Tax relief for households flooded with a further 3 months for any temporary accommodation required

- Property Resilience Grants of up to £5,000 per flooded property for households and businesses
- Business Rate relief of 3 months for businesses flooded
- Grants to Businesses.

All except the latter being administered by this Council and being reimbursed by either the County Council or the Government via a Section 31 Grant.

6 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- Endorse the action taken
- Continue to support our residents and businesses affected by flooding;
- Agree to the Council Tax and Business Rate Relief schemes as set out in Annex A;
- Authorize the Director of Resources to seek to recover expenditure incurred on the floods from Central Government under the Bellwin scheme.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Ribble Valley BC 2015-16 Council Tax Flooding Relief Scheme

The Flooding Incident that this scheme applies to is where domestic properties have been flooded as a result of Storm Desmond or Storm Eva in Ribble Valley.

The definition to be used for this scheme is from the National Flood Emergency Framework for England. Therefore the definition of flooded properties is:

Properties Flooded are those properties where it is considered that the property has been flooded internally. i.e. water has entered the property:

- Basements and below ground level floors are included
- Garages are included if in the fabric of the building. Garages adjacent or separate from the main building are not included
- Includes occupied caravans and park homes but not tents

Minimum Relief for all properties affected

A 100% Council Tax discount will be applied to all properties that were flooded or were not liveable for any period of time for a minimum period of 3 months. This could include:

- Where gardens/adjoining land/outbuildings have been severely affected
- Where services such as sewerage, drainage, and electricity are severely affected
- Upper storey flats (above ground level) where accessibility or impacted services mean the property is unliveable.

Where possible this relief will be granted automatically and if, as a result of the relief being granted the Council Tax account goes into credit, a refund will be issued to the Council Tax payer.

Where residents have been required to move into temporary accommodation a parallel 100% discount will also apply where they become liable for Council Tax at the temporary accommodation. To access this discount residents will need to provide details of the temporary accommodation and confirmation that they are liable for Council Tax at that address.

Where a resident's property has been flooded or rendered unliveable due to multiple separate flooding events they will be allowed a discount in respect of each event. However the discounts will run concurrently, meaning that someone affected by both storms would see their discount apply for 3 months after they became affected by the second event.

Properties that are unoccupied for more than 3 months

A 100% Council Tax Discount will apply to all properties that have been flooded or rendered unliveable due to the flooding and which remain unoccupied for more than 3 months as a result of the flooding.

- The relief will apply for the period the property remains unoccupied and unliveable
- The relief will cease on reoccupation of the premises.
- An application will be required to be made to Ribble Valley Borough Council.
- The total period of relief granted will not exceed a maximum of 12 months.

This also applies to any parallel discount that has been applied where residents have been required to move into temporary accommodation.

Affected properties that were unoccupied at the time of Storm Desmond or Storm Eva

Properties which were 2nd Homes at the time of the flooding will not be entitled to the relief. Other affected properties which were empty and unoccupied and which were flooded or became unliveable as a result of Storm Desmond or Storm Eva will be entitled to the relief for a maximum period of 3 months.

Where it is not possible to award the relief automatically further information/evidence may be required from the Council Tax payer before awarding the relief.

NNDR flood relief – December 2015 – policy for Ribble Valley BC

To be awarded as discretionary rate relief under s47 of the LGFA 1988 and funded via s31 LGA 2003.

The flooding incident that this scheme applies to is where business properties have been flooded as a result of Storm Desmond or Storm Eva between the 3rd and the 26th December 2015.

The policy is to award 100% rate relief for a minimum of three months, or until the business restarts trading from the property if longer, up to a maximum of 12 months and state aid de minimis levels. The relief applies for the full three months even if the premises reopen within that time.

The relief will be given where;

- i) The property has been flooded in whole or in part as a result of the adverse weather conditions, and
- ii) As a result of that flooding, business activity has been adversely affected, and
- iii) The rateable value on the day of the flood event was less than £10 million.

This policy does not cover water damage caused by failure of a water main, internal water systems or failure of a sewerage system, (unless the failure was itself caused by the adverse weather conditions).

Ratepayers will be required to apply for the relief and to provide details of the adverse effect of the flooding upon their business. Ratepayers may also be required to confirm that the award of relief will not cause state aid limits to be exceeded.

The relief will apply for three months. A fresh application can be made if the business is not trading from the premises after three months, which will be considered by the Council.

Where a hereditament has been flooded more than once and business activities are adversely impacted, only one period of 3 months relief will be granted and this will be effective from the first date on which the above criteria were met.

Empty Properties

The scheme does not cover relief for any hereditament which was empty at the time it was flooded as there was no business activity on the premises at the time. Where a hereditament becomes empty after the flood then it will receive the normal 3 or 6 months (as applicable) empty property rate free period or will continue to receive the balance of the flooding relief.