

<b>Report title</b>	<b>Runnymede Borough Council Flood &amp; Sandbag Policy</b>
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<b>Department</b>	Chief Executives Office
<b>Exempt?</b>	No
<b>Exemption type</b>	Not Applicable
<b>Reasons for exemption</b>	Not Applicable

**Purpose of report:**

To resolve

**Synopsis of report:**

The current RBC policy and revisions was created in the aftermath of the devastating flood which occurred in 2014. The policy now falls due for major revision to reflect current best practice.

**Recommendation(s):**

A review has been carried out of the Council's Sandbag Deployment Policy against current best practice implemented by the Environment Agency and other Councils in the region. The review also considers the Councils mandated role and responsibilities, the effectiveness of sandbags in protecting properties and the safety of residents and Council workers. The Report recommends a change to the Council's current policy to the effect that the Council will not provide sandbags to residents in the future.

**1. Context and background of report**

- 1.1 Runnymede's geography, geology, and hydrogeology, place it at high risk of major flooding, the most recent major event being in 2014.
- 1.2 Major natural flood events in the Borough result from fluvial (river), pluvial (rain) and clearwater (ground water) flooding or a combination of these.
- 1.3 District and Borough Councils are not mandated to provide sandbags during a flood. Districts and Boroughs are required support to residents affected by a flood by providing refuge and/or alternative emergency accommodation if their normal residence becomes uninhabitable.

- 1.4 The Environment Agency is the principal flood defence authority. Under the Water Resources Act 1991) the Environment Agency has permissive powers for the management of flood risk arising from designated main rivers
- 1.5 Surrey County Council is the Lead Local Flood Authority for Surrey with numerous responsibilities under the Flood Risk Regulations 2009 and the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. In essence the county council has overall strategic responsibility for flood risk management in Surrey other than the main rivers which devolve to the Environment Agency
- 1.6 As the Highways Authority, Surrey County Council are also responsible for highway drainage on all non-trunk roads in the county.
- 1.7 Trunk roads drainage and flooding managed by Highways England
- 1.8 Floods create a dangerous environment. Identified risks from flood water include:
  - Contaminated water from drains and rivers presenting health risks particularly to the vulnerable residents
  - Hidden objects and hazards, uneven and slippery surfaces make it difficult to walk with trips and entrapment being a particular concern
  - Uncovered manholes can be difficult to see and can drag people down into a whirlpool
  - Flowing water is a powerful force when the volume is increasing. As little as 4 inches (10cms) can knock an adult off their feet
  - Temperature – being immersed in water below 15<sup>o</sup> can quickly overwhelm the ability to move and respond
  - Drivers can easily become trapped by rising flood waters. 6 inches of water can cause a driver to lose control of a small vehicle, putting themselves at risk of injury and water in the internal workings of the vehicle can cause the engine to stall.

## **2. Report and, where applicable, options considered and recommended**

- 2.1 The Council's Sandbag Deployment Policy has been reviewed against current best practices implemented by the Environment Agency (EA) and other Councils in the region. The review also considers the Councils mandated role and responsibilities, the effectiveness of sandbags in protecting properties and the safety of residents and Council workers.
- 2.2 The EA does not provide policy advice on the subject. In dialogue with the EA, we have been informed:
- 2.3 The EA primarily uses sandbags for anchoring objects e.g., flood barriers, manhole / drain covers; or wrapped in plastic sheeting to divert flows
- 2.4 The EA does not issue sandbags to members of the public.
- 2.5 Sandbag barriers must be several bags deep and wrapped in heavy duty polythene or plastic to provide any protection.
- 2.6 The EA has identified environmental concerns in disposing of contaminated waste (including sandbags)
- 2.7 Other Councils who have adopted a 'no sandbag' policy or a restricted sandbag policy include:

- Spelthorne
- Elmbridge
- Epsom & Ewell
- Guildford
- Waverley

- 2.8 Sandbags cannot protect property from clearwater flooding.
- 2.9 The health and safety hazards created by a flood prevent sandbag distribution in a flooded area. Similarly, residents should not be encouraged to enter flood water to go to sandbag distribution centres.
- 2.10 Informal advice from the environment agency indicates that it requires a minimum of 30+ sandbags wrapped in plastic / polythene to offer any protection to an 'average' domestic property. The Council does not have the capacity to hold sufficient supplies to provide sandbags at this scale.
- 2.11 The provision and distribution of sandbags via distribution centers requires significant human resources who are then not available to man respite centers and alternative accommodation.
- 2.12 Sandbags are heavy, bulky, and difficult to manage, especially for elderly residents and may create risk of injury, particularly for vulnerable residents.

### **3. Policy framework implications**

- 3.1 The current sandbag policy no longer reflects best practice and is not 'fit for purpose' and requires amendment.
- 3.2 The Council will not provide sandbags to residents in the future.
- 3.3 The Council will continue to encourage residents and businesses in the Borough to consider and implement their own, independent flood protection measures.
- 3.4 The Council will continue to support residents and flood groups by directing them to support networks, providing advice and relevant contact numbers.
- 3.5 If the recommendations are approved, the revised sandbag policy will be updated on the Council's website and a communication campaign carried out to ensure that residents are aware of the change ahead of the winter flood season.
- 3.6 The campaign will prioritise residents who live areas of the borough which are vulnerable to flooding. Local ward councillors will be supported to ensure they are fully briefed with respect to options for residents including self-resilience in a flood situation.

### **4 Resource implications/Value for Money**

- 4.1 Both EA guidance and that from other local authorities say that sandbags are not effective at defending against all types of flooding. This means that if the Council were to provide sandbags, a householder trying to make a claim for compensation against the Council if their house was flooded would be unlikely to succeed (although not guaranteed if negligence could be established).

- 4.2 The main insurance risk for the Council stems more from the risk to volunteers manning sandbag distribution centres. If a volunteer sustains an injury working at one of the distribution centres and the Council has not had the time to provide proper training (due to the fact that it is an emergency situation) on how to properly lift heavy loads etc, any untrained volunteer sustaining a long-term injury, could mean the Council is liable for a substantial compensation claim.

## **5. Legal implications**

- 5.1 There are no legal implications from the proposed change in policy.

## **6. Equality implications**

- 6.1 The Council has a duty under the Equality Act 2010 (as amended) (the Act). Section 149 of the Act provides that we must have due regard to the need to:

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act,
- b) to advance equality of opportunity
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share protected characteristics.

- 6.2 The current Sandbag Policy was assessed by way of an Equalities Screening followed by a Full Impact Assessment based on the need to consider the impact the Policy may have had on the nine characteristics protected by the Act. The Equalities Screening identified that the characteristics of age, disability, pregnancy and maternity and race may have been affected by the Policy. The Full Impact Assessment highlighted that there was a lack of information in terms of the number of vulnerable people who did not have a support network but concluded that the Policy had put in place mitigation measures mainly in terms of access to Community Resilience Groups.

- 6.3 If the decision is to amend the current Policy, it is recommended that a new Equalities Screening Assessment is undertaken to consider any impact the changes may have on the people with characteristics protected by the Act.

## **7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications**

- 7.1 There are no environmental/sustainability/biodiversity implications of the proposed amendment to the Council's Sandbag policy other than the potential reduction in the generation and disposal implications of contaminated waste/

## **8. Other implications (where applicable)**

- 8.1 Risk management - The adoption of the change in policy will reduce the Council's risk exposure
- 8.2 Communications issues relating to report - If the recommendation of the report is adopted, the Council's current Sandbag Policy and website will be amended and a

communication campaign will be carried out to inform and ensure that residents are aware of the changes ahead of the winter flood season

**9. Timetable for Implementation**

9.1 If the recommendation of the report is adopted this will be implemented with immediate effect.

**10. Background papers**

None

**11. Appendices**

The current Runnymede Borough Council Sandbag Policy is available here:



Sandbag\_policy.pdf