

Runnymede Borough Council's Sandbag Policy

1.0 Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to inform staff, residents, businesses, partners and other stakeholders as to how Runnymede Borough Council (RBC) plans to assist the community during a flooding incident, focusing on the provision and distribution of sandbags within the Borough.

2.0 Scope

2.1 This policy will cover RBC's provision and distribution of sandbags in the borough of Runnymede during a flooding incident.

3.0 Definitions

3.1 Key terms are defined below:

Sandbag: This can either be a bag filled with sand, a bag and sand provided separately, or an alternative product e.g. the Hydrosnake product (which inflates following its submersion in water).

Community Sandbag Distribution Centres (CSDCs): A location where sandbags can be collected by local residents to assist them in the defence of their residential property. These centres will be supported by RBC, but will be primarily managed by the community volunteers. They are only considered for large scale major incidents.

Vulnerable People: People who are unable to manage their welfare during a flood event. Many vulnerable people will be known to RBC and other partners such as Adult Social Care or the NHS as current service users. However some people will become vulnerable as a result of flooding, for example by becoming housebound and having no support network or because of a loss of utilities.

Community Resilience Group: A collection of individuals who voluntarily come together to assist in supporting others during an emergency.

Borough Emergency Centre (BEC): The command and co-ordination centre for RBC, opened in response to any major emergency. It is managed by RBC Officers.

4.0 Introduction

4.1 The Borough of Runnymede has one of the highest risks of river (fluvial) flooding in England. In August 2015 there were 11,617 residential

properties in Flood Zone 2, 7,831 residential properties in Flood Zone 3a, 1,303 commercial properties in Flood Zone 2, and 604 in Flood Zone 3a. A large number of properties are also at risk of ground water flooding.

4.2 There are no duties on RBC to provide sandbags to the community. The decision as to whether an attempt is made to protect dwellings rests with the property owner.

4.3 In many cases, sandbags provide little protection from internal property flooding relating to rivers, and none from ground water flooding. However, if sufficient numbers of sandbags are placed, together with waterproof plastic sheeting to all areas of potential water ingress (including air vents), in some cases they can be effective in defending a property.

4.4 Aside from the limited effectiveness of sandbags, their distribution has previously presented significant challenges to RBC. Valuable resources that could have otherwise supported the emergency response, such as defending infrastructure, assisting with evacuation, emergency homelessness provision and other types of emergency assistance, have been diverted to filling and distributing sandbags. There are also very real risks to RBC staff around driving and walking through flood water.

4.5 This policy is based on the following assertions:

- It is not currently possible to deliver sandbags to all that need and request them.
- It is not possible to assist in the placing of sandbags at properties.
- Sandbags have a limited role in protecting properties from internal flooding.
- The previous distribution method of sandbags consumed significant RBC resource that could have been used in other more productive ways, either for supporting other elements of the emergency response or maintaining critical services.
- As a Council we want to be innovative and cost-effective in finding solutions.

5.0 Policy

5.1 Major Incidents

5.1.1 When a major flooding incident is anticipated, RBC's strategic objectives are to focus its resource on preserving life by:

1. Distributing sandbags to areas/locations considered key strategic points which either have a positive net effect on reducing flood risk to multiple properties or protecting key infrastructure.
2. Supporting the distribution of sandbags to residential properties via Community Resilience Groups at Community Sandbag Distribution Centres (CSDCs) by:
 - a. supplying sand and empty bags/Hydrosnakes and equipment;
 - b. assisting in communications; and
 - c. assisting with other logistics and intelligence.
3. Where no Community Resilience Group exists, RBC will endeavour to provide sand and empty bags/Hydrosnakes at specific locations initially managed by RBC staff, but with a view to finding volunteers to later lead.
4. Ensuring there is promotion of contact numbers for Vulnerable People without a support network to be able to contact a Community Resilience Group representative for assistance.
5. Providing guidance regarding when Vulnerable People may wish to consider evacuating their properties.
6. Supporting the community through providing timely communications.
7. Maximising goodwill and collective responsibility.

5.1.2 Community Sandbag Distribution Centres (CSDCs)

5.1.2.1 RBC, in consultation with community groups where possible, will make a decision as to whether activation of one or more Community Sandbag Distribution Centres (CSDCs) is/are necessary. This will be based on information provided by the Environment Agency, the Met Office and from observations on the ground locally by RBC staff and Community Resilience Group representatives.

5.1.2.2 Should it be determined that one or more CSDCs is/are required, RBC will make contact with relevant Community Resilience Group contacts and deploy staff and equipment as per the operational plans.

5.1.2.3 The aim of a CSDC will be to provide a location where residents

can collect a provision of sandbags to help defend their residential properties. RBC will endeavor to provide continued support to the CSDCs through providing equipment, supplies of sand and empty bags, and advice.

5.1.2.4 The final location(s) of the CSDC(s) will be determined by RBC, in consultation with relevant community based groups, at the time of a potential flooding event. To assist with this process, a number of the most suitable locations have been pre-identified, each with a corresponding operational plan should it be required. Where possible, these operational plans have been developed in conjunction with specific community resilience groups.

5.1.2.5 RBC will ensure that there is regular communication between the CSDCs and the Borough Emergency Centre (BEC) in order to ensure activities are closely monitored and co-ordinated with the multi-agency response. Where possible, this link will be via a Community Resilience Group lead. Where none is identified it will be through an RBC Officer.

5.1.3 Provision and distribution of sandbags at CSDCs

5.1.3.1 Responsibility for obtaining sandbags will always remain with the property owner and there is no automatic right to sandbags. Many products are available from the market to assist in the protection from flooding and where householders are at risk they are strongly advised to make their own arrangements to deal with a flood. However, RBC will endeavor to assist residents who are at risk of flooding through providing sandbags at Community Sandbag Distribution Centre (CSDC) for residents to collect a provision (subject to supplies).

5.1.3.2 As a guide, RBC believes around 10 sandbags should be offered per household. However, the lead representative of each CSDC reserves the right to limit the quantity of sandbags which can be taken at any given time in order to help manage demand and supply.

5.1.3.3 A CSDC may also co-ordinate with local Community Resilience Group representatives to assist with the distribution of sandbags to the local community directly.

5.1.3.4 The localised logistics will be for the CSDC and Community Resilience Group representatives to determine, however close co-ordination with the BEC will be necessary to ensure clear communication to the public is provided, as well as relevant logistical support.

5.1.4 Vulnerable People

5.1.4.1 All responding agencies should prioritise their resources on protecting those most vulnerable. RBC will be working closely with multi-agency partners to ensure that Vulnerable People are contacted and provided the care required during and after a flood event. This may include the provision of medication, services such as meals on wheels, support where there is a loss of utilities such as running water, or in some cases evacuation and shelter in suitable, supported accommodation.

5.1.4.2 It is accepted that many Vulnerable People will find it difficult to access sandbags through visiting the CSDCs. Where this is the case, Vulnerable People are strongly encouraged to reach out to an available support network, such as family, friends or neighbours should they require assistance with sandbags. If no support network is available to an individual, RBC will ensure there is promotion of contact numbers for Vulnerable People without a support network to contact a Community Resilience Group representative.

5.2 Minor Incidents

5.2.1 When a minor flooding incident is anticipated, RBC's strategic objectives are to focus resource on preserving life by:

1. Distributing sandbags to areas/locations considered key strategic points which either have a positive net effect on reducing flood risk to multiple properties or protecting key infrastructure.
2. Supporting the distribution of sandbags in the area at risk, possibly with the support of Community Resilience Groups by:
 - a. supplying sandbags in the nearby vicinity;
 - b. assisting in communications; and
 - c. assisting with other logistics and intelligence.
3. Providing guidance regarding when Vulnerable People may wish to consider evacuating their properties.
4. Ensuring there is promotion of contact numbers for Vulnerable People without a support network for assistance.
5. Support the community through providing timely communications.
6. To maximise goodwill and collective responsibility.

5.3 Health and Safety

5.3.1 The health and safety of Runnymede staff, community volunteers and the general public is a key priority. As such, a number of guidelines have been decided upon by the RBC Health and Safety Advisor, in conjunction with the Emergency Planning Team and the Direct Services Manager.

5.3.2 Guidelines for general public:

- Sandbags are limited to ten per vehicle.
- Children under the age of 16 who present at the CSDCs are required to stay in the vehicle at all times, and under no circumstances will they be permitted to assist in any activity relating to filling or moving sandbags.

5.3.3 Guidelines for volunteers:

- Each volunteer will be given a health and safety briefing upon presenting at the CSDC and prior to engaging in any work. Formal training prior to an event is not necessary.
- Volunteers are to be rotated among different tasks throughout their shift, in order to avoid fatigue and/or injury.
- Adequate break-times and refreshments must be provided for.

5.3.4 First Aid

5.3.4.1 It is crucial that there is one person who is trained in First Aid on site at each CSDC at all times, and that a first aid kit is provided.

5.4 Insurance

5.4.1 Volunteers are covered under RBC's Public Liability Policy and therefore if they are responsible for causing damage or injury, any claim that arises will be dealt with under RBC's Public Liability Policy.

5.4.2 RBC also has a Personal Accident Policy for volunteers. This means that if a volunteer suffers an injury during their work which leaves a permanent disability, however minor, they will be entitled to compensation.

5.4.3 If a volunteer suffers an injury which they feel is due to the negligence of RBC or its staff, they can pursue a claim under the Public Liability Policy.

5.5 Communications

5.5.1 Public awareness prior to a flooding event

5.5.1.1 The public will be made aware of the new Sandbag Policy through:

- i) press releases;
- ii) having an article on the newsreel of the Council's homepage;

iii) producing a number of tweets on Twitter linking to the article on our website;

iv) through our regular engagement with the Community Resilience Group members;

v) having articles and reminders in our e-newsletter;

vi) asking resident association secretaries to make their members aware of the articles; and

vii) producing a hard copy leaflet to deliver to our vulnerable clients who may not have access to the above digital information and delivering it through our Meals on Wheels and Community Transport services. This leaflet would also include more general advice for vulnerable people during an incident.

5.5.2 Public awareness during a flooding event

5.5.2.1 RBC will provide information regarding any CSDCs established during a flooding event, particularly regarding their location and to encourage volunteer support. The most suitable method of information dissemination will be determined at the time, following a consideration of the nature and scale of the particular event, and of any arrangements being put in place, with consideration of all the communication channels listed in 5.5.1. The contact details of willing Community Resilience Group representatives will also be promoted, to enable residents without their own support network to establish contact with volunteer groups and organise access to sandbags. There will also be the usual check-ups about general welfare with anybody on the Vulnerable People list performed in partnership with other organisations including Surrey County Council.

5.5.3 Public awareness after a flooding event

5.5.3.1 As with information prior to and during a flooding event, RBC will disseminate information regarding the disposal of used sandbags. As before, the most suitable method of communication for this will be identified at the time, based on consideration of the nature and scale of the operation.

5.5.4 Communication between CSDCs and RBC

5.5.4.1 To coordinate the provision of resources during a major incident, a nominated volunteer at each CSDC will be provided with a contact for the BEC. The localised logistics will be for the lead Community Resilience Group representatives to determine, however close coordination with the

BEC will be necessary to ensure clear communication to the public is provided, as well as relevant logistical support.