



The Pitt Review: Learning Lessons from the 2007 Floods

EPS Briefing Note

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Introduction

- Following the flooding in June and July 2007, Sir Michael Pitt was commissioned to undertake an urgent review of the multi-agency response and recovery thus far. The Interim Report was published on Dec 17th (see http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/thepittreview/interim_report.aspx) with the final report due for publication later in 2008. The report makes 15 urgent recommendations (see **Annex**, pp4-5) and 72 associated Interim Conclusions. These are strategic in nature but the overwhelming majority has implications for Emergency Planners in the UK, and the Republic of Ireland and, indeed, across the globe.
- The aim of this briefing note is to ensure that EPS members are informed about the broad themes of the report and likely implications and, most importantly, how individuals and their organisations may contribute to these, including a formal response to the Pitt Review Team on behalf of the EPS that the Environmental Risks Working Group is compiling.

Background

- The three months from May to July were the wettest since records began and the events that followed have been linked to the deaths of 13 people. They also resulted in damage to approximately 48,000 homes and 7,000 businesses. Power and water supplies were lost, railway lines, eight motorways and many other roads were closed and large parts of five counties and four cities were brought to a standstill.
- Regional-scale flooding occurred in Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Yorkshire and Humberside and 6 Gold Co-ordinating Groups (GCGs) were activated to manage the collective response of local responders in these areas. A Regional Civil Contingencies Committee (RCCC) was also formed by the Government Office for the South West (GOSW), the first since their introduction under the Civil Contingencies Act (2004).
- While fatalities and casualties were small in number, given the scale of the emergency the report regards this as something of a near miss. Had the situation been only slightly different, utility failures would have greatly compounded the primary impacts of the incident and the consequences would have exceeded the resources available to responders. There is much to learn, both positive and negative, from the report in full.

Key Themes

The following themes are extracted from the report as a whole and while not exhaustive make a good summary of the report.

Climate Change and Flood Risk

- Flood risk will probably increase as the effects of climatic change manifest themselves; it is vital therefore that government policy address adaptation to the impacts of climate change now, including flooding.

- The accuracy and resolution of flooding forecasts could be developed through better information sharing and improved modelling.
- Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) have the ability to ensure that the potential impacts of improved flood models are taken into account for multi-agency planning.

Business Continuity - Utilities

- Some Category 2 Responders do not have in place adequate Business Continuity (BC) or Contingency Plans. The we ask whether BC duties on Category 2 Responders should more closely reflect those placed on Category 1 Responders. Indeed, should Category 2 Responders have a statutory duty to have in place Business Continuity Plans to BS25999 Standard?

Critical Infrastructure

- The report differentiates between 'Hard Critical Infrastructure' (utility networks and facilities, transport links etc.) and 'Soft Infrastructure' (schools, GP Practices etc.). Both require identification and protection but the mechanisms to do this are very different.
- The Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) programme (run by the Security Services) deals only with protecting the CNI from threats, not hazards like flooding; the report proposes a new, parallel agency to do this.
- The location of facilities and networks designated as CNI is largely unknown at the local level. Such knowledge is essential for an effective response.

Category 2 Responder Participation – Planning and Response

- Some utility companies do not participate fully in the LRF process, detracting from the quality of planning and the response that is possible.
- Utility companies often do not inform Category 1 Responders of critical sites and hence prevent pre-planning to protect them.

Multi-Agency Emergency Planning

- Local Authorities should have primary responsibility for pluvial (surface water) flooding.
- LRFs have an important role to play in flood planning at the local level. The report gives five specific recommendations to LRFs (Recommendations 2, 4, 10, 12 & 13), principally to:
 1. Identify specific areas of pluvial (surface water) flood risk;
 2. Review water rescue responsibilities and capabilities;
 3. Review Rest Centre and social infrastructure locations (schools, equipment storage locations etc.) against hazard exposure;
 4. Known what critical infrastructure is in their area of responsibility;
 5. Develop door-knocking warning procedures by local authorities;
 6. Make arrangements to more closely involve the media in local planning and response to support warning and informing.

Role of RCCCs

- There is often confusion over the role of RCCCs. Their purpose is to provide the link between the local response (managed by GCGs) and Central Government

(managed by the Cabinet Office Briefing Room or COBR) for *information and support purposes only*, not for command, control or communications. In other words, they *are not* a regional tier of command and control between COBR and a GCG.

Importance of Activating Early

- In several cases coordination structures were not established or their formation was delayed. The report emphasises the benefits that multi-agency co-ordination brought to the response and recommends that, if predicted reliably, GCGs should activate *in advance* of an emergency, either virtually or in person.

Summary and Next Steps

- The initial view of the Environmental Risks Working Group is that the Interim Report of the Pitt Review provides a comprehensive account of events before, during and after the 2007 floods, covering the wide range of topics and issues in impressive detail. The Urgent Recommendations and Interim Conclusions offered are refreshingly frank and are welcomed and there is a feeling that the findings of this report will lead to positive change and lessons learned in the UK and Republic of Ireland and across the globe. However, many of the recommendations *are not new* and will require significant changes in cultural, social, economic and political beliefs and actions if they are to be fully realised.
- The Interim Report is open for public consultation and we strongly encourage Emergency Planning professionals (whether EPS members or not) to have your say and contribute to the overall findings. The Environmental Risks Working Group is compiling a formal response on behalf of the EPS or, alternatively, you can reply direct to the Pitt Review Team, as per below:

EPS Environmental Risks Working Group

- *Deadline:* Wednesday 5th March 2008, to collate all response in time for the Pitt Review Team's deadline
- *Web:* http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=MbadWj_2f4x1RZ6SuRSdnyug_3d_3d
- *Email:* christine.lowe@southwark.gov.uk
- *Mail:* Emergency Planning, London Borough of Southwark, Great Guildford Business Square, Unit 322 / 3, 30 Great Guildford Street, London, SE1 0HS

Pitt Review Team

- *Deadline:* Monday 31st March 2008
- *Web:* <http://interactive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/flooding/comments/index.asp>
- *Email:* ThePittReview@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk
- *Mail:* The Pitt Review, 2nd Floor, 22 Whitehall, London, SW1A 2WH

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Annex

- *REC 1:* The Review recommends that more frequent and systematic monitoring of groundwater levels at times of high risk should be undertaken by the Environment Agency, which should begin as soon as possible to predict and mitigate further serious ground water flooding from this winter onwards.
- *REC 2:* The Review recommends that the Environment Agency, supported by local authorities and water companies, should urgently identify areas at highest risk from surface water flooding where known, inform Local Resilience Forums and take steps to identify remaining high risk areas over the coming months.
- *REC 3:* The Review recommends that the Environment Agency should urgently develop and implement a clear policy on the use of temporary and demountable defences.
- *REC 4:* The Review recommends that all Local Resilience Forums urgently review their current local arrangements for water rescue to consider whether they are adequate in light of the summer's events and their local community risk registers.
- *REC 5:* The Review recommends that all Local Resilience Forums should undertake an urgent review of designated rest centres and other major facilities to ensure either that they have the necessary levels of resilience to enable them to be used in the response to flooding and other major emergencies, or that alternative arrangements are put in place.
- *REC 6:* The Review recommends that the Cabinet Office, with other departments, should urgently consider the costs, benefits and feasibility of establishing arrangements for the urgent acquisition of supplies during a major emergency, including the use of call-off contracts or the creation of national or regional stockpiles of equipment and consumables.
- *REC 7:* The Review recommends that Department of Health guidance clarifying the role and accountabilities of organisations involved in providing scientific and technical advice during a major incident should be implemented as soon as possible and understood by Gold Commanders.
- *REC 8:* The Review recommends that the guidance currently under preparation by Cabinet Office to provide local responders with advice on the definition and identification of vulnerable people and on planning to support them in an emergency should be issued urgently.
- *REC 9:* The review recommends that, in order to effectively fulfil its Lead Department role for flood risk management and emergency response, Defra needs to urgently develop and share a national flood emergency framework.
- *REC 10:* The Review recommends that Category 1 responders should be urgently provided with a detailed assessment of critical infrastructure in their areas to enable them to assess its vulnerability to flooding.
- *REC 11:* The Review recommends that the Environment Agency should work urgently with telecommunications companies, consulting the Information Commissioner as necessary to facilitate the roll-out of 'opt-out' telephone flood warning schemes to all homes and businesses liable to flooding, including homes with ex-directory numbers.

- *REC 12:* The Review recommends that Local Resilience Forums urgently develop plans to enhance flood warnings through ‘door-knocking’ by local authorities based on an assessment of the post code areas likely to flood.
- *REC 13:* The Review recommends that Local Resilience Forums urgently make arrangements to involve local media representatives in the local preparedness and response to support their public information role.
- *REC 14:* The Review recommends that members of the public make up a flood kit – including key personal documents, insurance policy, emergency contact numbers (including local council, emergency services and Floodline – 0845 988 1188), torch, battery or wind-up radio, mobile phone, rubber gloves, wet wipes or antibacterial hand gel, first aid kit and blankets.
- *REC 15:* The Review recommends that members of the public increase their personal state of readiness and resilience to floods by following the Environment Agency’s practical advice, where appropriate, as summarised below:
 - Make sure you have adequate insurance. Flood damage is included in most buildings insurance policies but do check your home and contents are covered.
 - Access the Environment Agency’s website to check flood risks to property (this can be followed up by advice from the Agency, for example whether the property in question is protected to some degree by physical defences).
 - Contact the Environment Agency to be registered on their Flood Warnings Direct scheme (however, this does not apply to surface water flooding or sewerage flooding and people should also make sure they remain alert to weather forecasts).
 - Keep vital possessions, such as financial and legal documents and items of sentimental value, upstairs or stored as high as possible in waterproof containers and have plans in place to move items at short notice.
 - Make a list of other useful numbers you may need – your local council, the emergency services and your Floodline quick dial number.
 - Make sure you know where to turn off your gas, electricity and water. If you are not sure, ask the person who checks your meter when they next visit. Mark the tap or switch with a sticker to help you remember.