

Community Flood Warden Scheme – Doncaster



Image of Bentley Toll Bar, Doncaster flood in 2007 © [Chris Northwood](#) (used under a [Creative Commons licence](#))

1. SUMMARY

This case study is about how communities and service providers in Doncaster were able to learn from flooding events in 2007 in order to develop a community flood warden scheme in flood affected areas. Community flood wardens can help to disseminate information to other residents and businesses about preparing for and responding to flooding. If particular people who are vulnerable to flooding can be identified, these can be made known to a community flood warden who can provide extra assistance or information if required. Community flood wardens are also an extra pair of eyes and ears on the ground and can monitor river levels. It is also recommended that where property level protection has been installed, flood wardens or a flood group are formed in order to help to communicate warnings and support people to fit property flood protection (e.g. floodgates), particularly if they are less able to do so, for example due to their age or health.

It will be of benefit to other councils, particularly those in urban areas. It will also be useful for organisations who work on flooding where they feel that there is some mistrust between them and the local community, particularly following experiences of extreme weather events.

2. ACTIVITIES

After flooding in early 2007, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council and the Environment Agency helped to call a workshop to learn lessons from the floods. It was attended by local residents, businesses, staff and the media. It revealed the disempowerment felt by local residents and their lack of knowledge about the causes and consequences of flooding. The key observation from this was that those involved in flood risk management needed to build on local knowledge and also develop timely warning systems.

Five areas were identified that were thought to be particularly at risk of future flooding. By September 2011, a number of local residents were identified as 'Community Flood Wardens'. Community flood plans were developed with the partner organisations (listed below) who also provided support for helping to prepare and train the wardens. The process also highlighted physical improvements that could be made to increase flood resilience.

The opportunity to deal with the flooding arose after previous experience of a significant flood event. Often, many innovative and useful initiatives emerge in response to disaster. However, by learning from the experiences of others, proactive local authorities, and other interested parties, can put these initiatives into practice to help prepare for extreme weather in advance so that the most socially vulnerable are not unduly affected.

Partners: Amongst others, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC), the Environment Agency, South Yorkshire Police, South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue and local residents.

Length of Time: 4 years from identifying the problem to identifying Community Flood Wardens.

3. OUTCOMES

- The main outcomes included increasing the voice and power of local residents in flood risk management.
- Using local knowledge, combined with technical expertise, helped to direct public resources more wisely to address flood mitigation, for example, by understanding where flood defences needed to be maintained.
- Wardens were trained to watch specific sections of the river, so allowing earlier warnings to be relayed to the Environment Agency. Cascade systems were implemented in order to alert people more quickly in the event of a flood warning.
- Physical improvement in the flood defences of certain areas (flood defence walls and banks) has also been achieved since the wardens can spot potential repairs in a timely manner..
- The activities have led to improving local resident' knowledge about the source of flooding, how to prepare for it, and how to mitigate it. During a dry run of the community flood plan (as part of *Exercise Watermark – a national emergency preparation event*), the flood wardens in all five areas were clear on their responsibilities and gained greater confidence in their abilities.
- The community flood wardens were supported by a number of local partner organisations including Doncaster Council, South Yorkshire Police and South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue (amongst others).
- It is thought to have reduced flood risk in the Borough and has also increased trust between local residents and the official agencies involved in managing flood risk. This was particularly low following the experience of flooding in 2007.
- Increased trust has meant that Doncaster MBC has ceded power to the flood wardens to close roads as and when they deem it to be essential during a flood warning or incident.
- The work has also had a tangible benefit in improving people's comments on planning policy and the prioritisation of flood defence schemes. In addition, the Flood Wardens also linked up across sectors to establish communication with area regeneration initiatives and Tenants and Residents Associations.

4. BARRIERS

- A long lead time is required to establish an effective set of responses and full involvement.
- Activities need to be built on what is achievable and practical.

5. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- ✓ Recognise that there are a lot of pre-existing assets in communities.
- ✓ Provide spaces in which multiple public agencies can come together with residents to discuss issues and come to mutual decisions. You might want to read the *Climate Just* message on [Awareness Raising](#) so that you can reach the most socially vulnerable.

- ✓ Work hard to maintain good working relationships with numerous partner organisations. Sometimes the work is hard and the process lengthy, but it will result in better outcomes for everyone involved. You can read the *Climate Just* message on [Working in partnership](#), which discusses collaborative working.
- ✗ Don't promise what you can't deliver – this will result in distrust. Whatever you do promise, make sure that it is delivered.

6. LINKS

- This is adapted from a longer case study available from the [Cabinet Office](#):
- A case study on Doncaster MBC's more recent work on flooding (24 pages) was produced as part of the ["We Sense It" Research Project](#).
- National Flood Forum: [How to set up a Flood Action Group \(10 Steps\)](#).
- As yet, there is no accredited training for flood wardens. Contact the [National Flood Forum](#) for more support.

7. CONTACTS

- Rosalind McDonagh, Emergency Planning Manager, Doncaster Borough Council
- Email: Rosalind.mcdonagh@doncaster.gov.uk