

Co-ordinating police and other response organisations in flood emergencies – identifying and sharing good practice – Report on Workshop 21st June 2011

Meeting Background

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 has been in force now for some 6 ½ years and has led to a radical shift in the responsibilities of police and other response organisations for emergency management across the UK. With the requirement to produce community risk registers and more information than ever before on flood risk and severe weather, the Act has had a notable effect on flood emergency management. Various organisations are increasingly anticipating emergencies and applying risk matrices to the both planning and operations. In Scotland, these organisations include most notably the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), under its statutory duty to provide flood warning, and local authority emergency planning teams, with the police performing a central role in event co-ordination and inter-agency communication.

A recent development reflecting this close joint working in the response to both flood and other severe weather emergencies has been the Scottish Flood Forecasting Service providing daily Scotland-wide updates of flood risk and predictions up to 5 days ahead. This system went online in spring 2011. Live questions include: how do emergency plans best adapt to the new far-in-advance forecasting, including severe weather warnings and risk-based approaches? How do Scottish police forces best co-ordinate with other groups (notably SEPA, the Met Office, the other emergency responders as well the public) in response to flood emergencies of varying scale, including during the recovery phase? SIPR arranged a workshop of key actors in Scotland in the field of flood emergency management to share good practice, bringing together the police, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), local authorities, NGOs and academics. The focus of this workshop was on learning from past events, current practice, and looking to the future

The meeting took place on 21st June 2011 and ran as follows

At 9:45 **Nick Fyfe Director, SIPR**– welcomed everyone to the Institute and **Tom Ball, lecturer in Geography** and co-organiser/ chair of the event, gave an introduction to the day, set the context for the workshop and covered the intended outcomes. The main objective was to pause for reflection on past experience among emergency response organisations and look forward to the application of increased information, much of it real-time, emanating from forecasts and warnings.

At 10:00 the first session began, entitled – **Flood Risk & Advances in Forecasting and Warning**. This session was led by **Michael Cranston (SEPA)** who spoke on *Developments in flood forecasting and warning in Scotland*. Michael ran through many recent developments and summarised the ways SEPA was responding to recommendations on meeting its new flood warning responsibilities coming out of the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009. **Peter Buchanan (Met Office)** and **Richard Maxey (SEPA)** then developed this theme by looking at the operation of the recently-established. *Scottish Flood Forecasting Service - state of the art hydrological and meteorological developments*, followed by **Alan Motion (Met Office)** who spoke on the development of *Climate Impact Risk frameworks*, looking ahead to flood forecasting in a changing climate.

At 11:20 Session 2 commenced, examining **Managing Flood Emergencies**. The theme was aiming at learning from practical experience of response planners and the emergency responders in both England and Scotland. **Stephen Woodhouse (Scottish Government Resilience Division)** spoke on *Planning for resilience to severe flooding in Scotland*. Stephen's talk set the framework for operations north of the border, covering the guidance and supported offered by the Scottish government to responders and the important role of the Scottish Government Resilience Room (SGoRR). **Supt Ian Birnie (Grampian Police)** and **Inspector Paul Scobbie (Tayside Police)** then covered *The Police role and joint working in emergency response, lessons learned from events, use of forecast data in emergency planning*. Their perspective was put forward in a wide-ranging summary of tactical response and co-ordination from two local Strategic Co-ordinating Groups (SCGs). Lessons learned from events included the need for specific plans to cover different types of flood emergency, accurate data to make proper assessment of the scale of the event (this was referred to as 'building a picture', with local contacts vital), ensuring all contact numbers are in place, early decision making and considering the media and public alerts at the earliest stages. The development of asset and capability registers was an important and useful recent development for both SCGs.

Diane Jackson and **David Snaith** (Environment Agency, NW) then added a contribution from south of the border: **Experience with interagency co-ordination and use of information sources during floods in the NW of England**. Focusing on the devastating November 2009 flood event in Cumbria, their talk covered some valuable ground, including the use of flood forecasting and the value of preparations that could be put in place as the result. A key area also was the extent to which lessons learned from the devastating Carlisle floods that hit the Agency's NW area in 2005 could be and were applied to reduce as far as possible the damage in 2009. Focusing particularly on the town of Keswick, this was a succinct summary of how community engagement with responders in emergency planning really can lead to tangible results in an event.

The third and final session of talks at 12:00 focused on the transition **from response to recovery**. **Jim Gill MBE**, Emergency planning officer from Scottish Borders Council, summarised his *Local Authority's Experience of Flood Warnings and Working with the Emergency Services to Build Community Resilience*. Providing a bridge between the themes of the preceding two sessions, one of the key focuses was on the support given by the council to self-help groups in the Scottish Borders whose enhanced awareness allows an early, community led response to flooding. Finally, **Paul Hendy, Scottish Flood Forum**, gave the perspective on the influential and vital assistance that his organisation gives alongside emergency responders in the aftermath of the event. Paul's talk on *Reducing impact on communities and businesses and securing recovery* gave everyone a reminder that flooding has a human face, and that the recovery period is in many ways as or more vital than the event itself for emergency response plans to contend with.

After lunch a breakout session followed with discussion on three main areas:

- a) Response to forecasts and warnings of flooding
- b) Co-ordination between police and emergency services
- c) Securing business and community continuity in the aftermath

Groups were invited to comment on

- What works well now
- What could be improved
- What additional co-ordination is required
- What additional resourcing is required

The facilitators were Joss Rouillard, David McCollum and Ed Hall (University of Dundee)

In the **Plenary discussion** Chair: Prof. Chris Spray (IHP-UNESCO Centre for Water Law, Policy and Science, University of Dundee). in terms of what works well , most agreed that the recent development in flood forecasting and warning were worthy of much praise. There was some call for a need to standardise the ways in which the infrastructure and property assets at risk were displayed on maps and use local knowledge (especially those of farmers) as much as possible. There was still some concern on appropriate trigger levels, in spite of the simplified flood warning codes, to act as the catalyst for putting flood emergency plans into action and a single, real-time mapping system allied to a GIS accessible via field computers could offer potential for further co-ordination. In terms of resourcing and community links, a consistent way to identify vulnerable groups both before and in the aftermath was called for.

Summary

Overall, the day was a fascinating and valuable meeting of key actors in flood risk management and emergency response from across the UK. The geographical spread was more extensive than many of the eight police-led Strategic Co-ordinating Groups (SCGs) usually encountered at meetings, and led to some valuable dissemination of experience and stimulating discussion. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive with many calling for more events of this nature where discussion could be wide ranging and constructive.

Talks and photos from the event can be accessed at http://www.sipr.ac.uk/events/Flood_emergencies_210611.php