

Background and Context

On the night of Friday 7 / Saturday 8 January 2005, severe storms and unprecedented rainfall on already saturated ground fell across Cumbria. Over the Friday night and into Saturday, this caused extensive flooding and storm damage particularly in the Carlisle area.

The impacts of this included:

- 3 deaths
- 1,925 homes and business flooded - to 2 metres
- 3,000+ people homeless for up to 12 months+
- 40,000 addresses without power
- 3,000 jobs put at risk.

The range of needs and problems which arose was very wide and included:

- health
- psychological
- emotional
- spiritual
- educational
- temporary accommodation
- financial (including council tax, rents, benefits, grants, etc.)
- insurance
- dislocation from normal support or services
- transport
- employment
- house repair and refurbishment
- together with other vulnerabilities caused or heightened by the emergency.

How the Topic was Handled

A multi-agency community support centre, branded "Communities Reunited" was established with the following terms of reference:

1. To co-ordinate the delivery of appropriate welfare assistance to address the immediate needs set out above.
2. To identify and address the medium-term welfare needs of flood affected residents.
3. To support and help sustain the flood affected communities during their period of displacement.
4. To support the communities during the repair and refurbishment of flood-damaged properties.
5. To identify appropriate actions, interventions, and projects to assist the sustainability of these communities in the longer term

Communities Reunited operated from a city-centre main base and, initially, with a presence in each of the worst affected community areas. It

operated until 20 months after the incident. Carlisle City Council provided premises and line management and computer equipment. Cumbria County Council provided administrative resource. Churches Together funded a permanent project co-ordinator and provided volunteer staff. Specialist advice was provided by appropriate partner organisations, both public sector and voluntary

Lessons Identified

- Wide range and extent of welfare issues is easily underestimated.
- Time over which support is required is protracted.
- Should look to fund a centre for a sustained period from the outset.
- Impacts on responding agencies own staff are significant. If not flooded themselves, had relatives and friends who were.
- Case management database needs to be adequately resourced.
- Continuity of key staff important.
- Needs sustained support from agencies that provide specialist advice.
- Accessible location vital.

Contacts for Further Information

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