

Background and Context

Following three days of exceptionally heavy rain on already saturated ground, the River Ouse overtopped the flood defences and flooded substantial parts of Lewes.

613 residential and 207 business properties were flooded, along with 16 public buildings. 1000 people were displaced. 503 vehicles were damaged or destroyed and the total cost of the flooding was given as £88 million.

How the Topic was Handled

A *Restoration Sub-Group* was appointed, working to the *Lewes Flood Recovery Co-ordinating Group*. Its Terms of Reference were “*To co-ordinate the clear-up of the affected areas, including the consideration of long-term health issues.*”

Represented on the sub-group were:

- Lewes District Council (Environmental Health, Housing Maintenance, Building Control, Design & Conservation, Waste and Recycling)
- East Sussex County Council (Transport & Environment, Trading Standards)
- East Sussex Brighton & Hove Health Authority (Public Health Consultant).

This sub-group met five times, under the chairmanship of a senior Environmental Health Officer from Lewes DC, the last time being in May 2001.

Key points arising were:

- No major structural problems, except in old buildings.
- Provision of public health advice, particularly on how to handle cleaning up flooded homes and avoiding contamination.
- Recognised from beginning that worst flooded would need at least six months to dry out.
- Removal of flood damaged fittings from historic buildings has revealed a range of deep-seated (and often uninsured) structural problems – attempts to get English Heritage and lottery grants. No lottery grant achieved, but English Heritage provided a three year package (Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme).
- 160 listed buildings affected. Many special problems arose, including the need for very long drying out periods before restoration could begin.
- Cavity wall insulation when wet often has to be completely removed.
- 500+ skips for removal of flood damaged household effects in first three weeks (120+ in Spences Lane alone), at a cost of £80,000.
- Regional epidemiologist commenced survey into health effects in July 2001 using sample of 120 flood-affected households and ‘control’ population of non-flooded households. The results, due to be published in March 2002, will show that there was a significant impact on people’s psychological health and that there were impacts upon self-reported illnesses such as earache, skin rashes and gastro-intestinal upsets.

Lessons Identified

The Restoration sub-group particularly noted the following:

- The Health Impact Survey (see below) is a national first and could have significant impact. Hitherto there has been little information available on health implications of flooding.
- Restoration of old buildings is severely hampered by funding problems.
- The Recovery Group was one of the major success stories of the flooding. Groups could have been even more productive if organisations had proffered dedicated time rather than tacking duties onto already very busy workloads.
- They regretted not having the direct involvement of the Environment Agency and the commercial sector, but found it very useful to discuss insurance issues with the Lewes D.C. Insurance Officer.

Contacts for Further Information

Further information can be obtained from:-

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Additional Documents

Review of the recovery process -
<http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/00016FE4-50D0-4AD8-99BB-BB06D7BEEF22/0/lewesflood.pdf>