

Topic

Economic and Business Recovery

Incident / Exercise

Incident: Cumbria Floods November 2009

Background and Context

Between Wednesday 18 November and Friday 20 November 2009, up to 372mm of rain fell on Cumbria. In the 24 hours ending 00:45 on Friday the 20th, 314mm of rain fell on Seathwaite. This is a record daily rainfall for the UK. The rainfall earlier in the week ensured that the ground was saturated in many areas. Flooding occurred in five out of the six Boroughs, the only one escaping being Barrow. The effect on properties was concentrated in Allerdale and South Lakeland with the most significant infrastructure damage occurring in Allerdale.

- One person lost their life
- 2,239 properties affected.
- 250 farms affected
- 25 bridges closed (for over 6 weeks)
- Significant highway road infrastructure damage
- Port of Workington closed (entrance to port obstructed by debris washed downstream)
- 40 out of 300 waste water treatment works affected Economic impact on surrounding areas caused by infrastructure issues
- 3,057 businesses affected
- 80% of businesses in Cockermouth affected by flooding
- Estimated costs of £2m per week to public and private sectors and the Communities caused by increased travel time
- 461 additional pupils requiring school transport
- Lake District National Park had 319 separate reports of damage to the rights of way network.

How the Topic was Handled

Recovery planning began early whilst the response was still on going. This allowed key partners to get together and set up sub working groups on Welfare, Business, Environment, Communications, Finance and Infrastructure, in line with the Recovery Plan, to prepare for the recovery phase and quickly respond once the emergency was over. Community recovery groups were also established. The following case study relates to one year on after the floods to place in context the size; scale and duration of the recovery work.

Business support and grants

Business Link Northwest advisers and the Cumbria Chamber of Commerce have provided support to flood affected businesses throughout the last year to guide them through the complex recovery process.

The Business Recovery Grant Scheme established by Cumbria Chamber of Commerce and Cumbria County Council, which utilises Northwest Development Agency (NWDA) funding, has helped a total of 214 businesses and approved offers of £1,081,000 to small and medium sized businesses. So far claims totalling just under £670,000 have been paid out and the deadline for claims extended to 31 December 2010 to allow businesses to spread the spend to suit their needs. Activities helped by the grants include trialling TV advertising for the first time, telemarketing, introducing online trading and search engine optimisation, training, architect and design work, accountancy support, and support with planning applications.

In addition, as at January 2011, all debris cases where grant payments were involved (grants of £6,800 were made available through the Rural Development Programme for England) had been resolved.

All businesses in Keswick and Workington are now back in their original locations, with the exception of the Ravensfield residential care home in Keswick, where a decision was taken to permanently close the unoccupied home due to the ongoing flood risk and the fact the home did not meet modern standards in terms of the infrastructure and building layout.

Cockermouth business recovery

The appointment of a flood recovery co-ordinator for Cockermouth by Allerdale Borough Council has reaped dividends in terms of driving forward the recovery of the retail centre of the town. When the flood recovery co-ordinator was appointed in January 2010, 78 of the 225 flood-damaged businesses in Cockermouth were trading from their original locations (34 were trading but had relocated and 59 had not started their recovery as they were awaiting instruction from their insurers. Now 185 businesses are trading from their original locations (6 are trading from new locations and just 4 are still awaiting instruction – the other 30 are still progressing with recovery work).

Many retail businesses have used the floods as an opportunity to upgrade their premises and have reopened in more attractive premises than before the floods. Allerdale Borough Council made £50,000 available through its Cockermouth Shopfront Heritage Grant Scheme to help flooded shop owners in Cockermouth to improve their business's appearance and attract more visitors to the town. A further £50,000 was match funded through an anonymous private donor and now £97,750 has been allocated through this scheme. A total of 26 applications have been received, of which 19 have been approved. Four schemes have been completed and 11 are currently underway.

Tourism

It is now much clearer how one of the linchpins of the Cumbrian economy, tourism, has been affected. Initially, the affect was devastating; with an estimated £15.4 million cost to the industry with over £2.5 million purely on lost and cancelled bookings. Research conducted with the tourism industry at the time and in the following months, confirmed that confidence about the year ahead was particularly low and almost 80 % of businesses believed that the weather had damaged trade with an average loss of 16% in annual turnover. Tourism trade overall in the UK was down throughout this period but the picture in Cumbria was much worse than experienced elsewhere with occupancy levels down around 7% on the same period in 2008. However, the picture did start to pick up in the spring and occupancy figures from February to July were higher than the same period in 2008 and online bookings have been on the increase throughout 2010. Cumbria Tourism's website www.golakes.co.uk/ has already had a record year, taking over £2.7 million worth of bookings on behalf of the county's tourism industry (a 16% increase on last year), which also reflects the public shift of an increased internet usage. All in all, tourism businesses are resilient and have bounced back from the effect of the floods and, despite it being a challenging year, visitor numbers have remained stable and we are cautiously optimistic for 2011.

A Cumbria Tourism PR campaign, 'Wish You Were Here', was launched in Spring 2010 where well-loved faces were asked to send postcards saying why they love Cumbria in a bid to encourage people to come and follow in their footsteps. More than 100 handwritten postcards were received from celebrities including Dame Judi Dench and Sir Patrick Stewart and the postcards formed a free public exhibition that toured the county throughout the summer months. The full exhibition was at the Rheged Centre in Penrith until the end of 2010 and on 15 November 2010, a limited edition book of the postcards was launched, complete with a foreword from HRH The Prince of Wales, with all proceeds being split between the rescue organisations involved in flood recovery and the Cumbria Flood Recovery Fund.

One year on and Cockermouth is back to business as usual -many businesses had actually managed to reopen within six months, including Jennings Brewery and Wordsworth House. The Trout Hotel reopened in August 2010 and Percy House Gallery was one of the last to reopen in mid-December 2010. There is a strong sense of community spirit in the Western Lake District and many events still managed to go ahead as planned including the bi-annual Georgian Fair in May 2010 and the first ever Cockermouth Food Festival – Taste Cumbria - in September 2010, which attracted over 17,000 visitors to the town.

Lessons Identified

Key lessons were the need to resource the recovery group with project management and administration support. The first Recovery Coordination meeting was held on 21 November 2009 and it was clear more time in recovery training is required. The transition from day to day business mode into immediate action and response was challenging for some of the Senior Managers. This could have been made easier by more focus on training and exercising in recovery.

The business community shared lessons learnt from previous emergencies including flooding. The Business Group, comprising representatives from local businesses, Chamber of Commerce, Cumbria Tourism, local authorities, North West Development Agency etc was vital in establishing effective support mechanisms to affected businesses. The appointment of a dedicated Flood Recovery Officer for Cockermouth Town Centre has been very effective in accelerating business recovery in the town.

Contacts for Further Information

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