



Hereford & Worcester
Fire and Rescue Authority

Flood Scrutiny Report

Responding to the severe flooding events of 2007

May 2008





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Foreword

The floods of Summer 2007 had a huge impact on the communities of Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

It is during times such as these, with ongoing and sustained rescues, voluminous calls for assistance, and widespread areas of risk, that the preparedness and commitment of Fire and Rescue Service staff is tested to the most rigorous of standards.

It is important after any such event to stand back, and with the benefit of hindsight, scrutinise how we as an Authority performed, and to establish either improvements, or recognise good practice for the future.

This report was instigated by the Fire and Rescue Authority Committee to assess the effectiveness of the approaches taken in response to the flooding events of June and July 2007.

Andy Fry
Chair
*Best Value, Policy & Performance
Committee*



Background

1. The two months of June and July 2007 have gone on record as one of the most severe flooding events to hit the United Kingdom for many years. During this period the Service was involved in both local and national work to support rescue attempts and mitigate the impact of this severe weather.
2. At a meeting of the FRA on 13 December 2007 the Authority asked Members of the BVPP Committee to examine the Fire and Rescue Service's role and response to the flood events that occurred across the two counties in June and July 2007. The full terms of reference for this work are set out in Appendix 1.
3. The process of examination included consideration by the Committee Members of:
 - the Authority's role and responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and associated guidance;
 - the local partnership structures in place to ensure the effective discharge of the Authority's civil protection responsibilities;
 - the incident command structures and risk assessment processes in place to facilitate effective response and ensure public and responder safety;
 - a detailed timeline of the June and July events, including the Fire and Rescue Service's preparation and response activities;
 - the Authority's programme of investment in response to the identified risk of flooding in its local area via its IRMP; and
 - the personal experiences of Officers who worked at bronze, silver and gold command levels during the Summer floods.

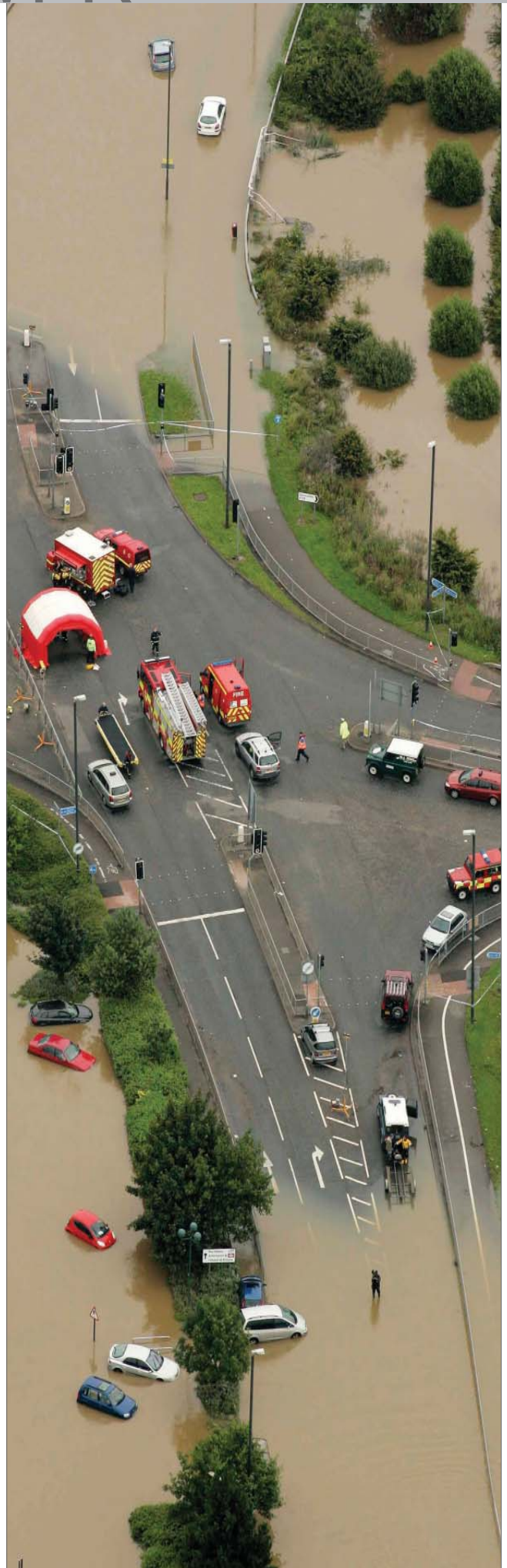
Supporting documentation included:

- i) "Learning Lessons from the 2007 Floods (An independent review by Sir Michael Pitt) The Pitt Report."
- ii) "Flooding Review Emerging Issues – A report setting out the emerging issues from the review of the operational response by Fire and Rescue Services to the wide scale flooding in England during Summer 2007" Sir Ken Knight, Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor.



The Role of HWFR

4. The Service had an extensive role, not only in securing local responses to local events, but also supporting other Services with resources. In addition, the Service hosted a national co-ordination centre supporting the worst hit areas around England.
5. In addition to this, the Service was involved in preparing and investing in the event of such activity through its IRMP, and these preparations would also be tested.
6. HWFR was actively involved throughout the flooding events across the country in June and July 2007;
 - its specialist rescue crews were mobilised through mutual aid to support colleagues during the June ('northern') event.
 - the Chief Fire Officer led the establishment of a national flood response team at the request of Communities and Local Government (CLG) at Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, to advise on the deployment of specialist rescue resources as the Summer events unfolded; and
 - the Service was engaged in significant local flood rescue activity during both the June and July events.





Summary of Activity

19 – 27 June 2007

7. The Service responded to flash flooding in the Shrawley area during the evening of Tuesday 19 June 2007. Its Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team was mobilised to a threatened building collapse at a former mill. Initial conditions hampered the rescue effort, but the team was able to lead a man to safety once the water started to recede. A helicopter was mobilised through the Aeronautical Rescue Co-ordination Centre (ARCC) to assist search and rescue operations overnight.
8. Following heavy rain in the North East of England, the Service deployed two specialist boat teams and a High Volume Pump to support rescue efforts in the Yorkshire and Humberside areas. Teams from Green Watch worked in the Sheffield area, rescuing 80 people including those trapped in a retail park, whilst the High Volume Pump supported successful efforts to save the Ulley reservoir dam from collapse.
9. The following few days saw the River Teme rising to record levels and Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service's Command Suite become operational. The Service responded to local flooding incidents at Tenbury, Bransford and Powick, whilst its Community Safety Outreach team visited homes affected by the floodwater to provide advice and support to local communities once the water started to recede.
10. On Wednesday 27 June 2007, the National Flood Support team, led by CFO Paul Hayden was established at Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service's Headquarters in response to a request from Government to the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA). The team advised on the co-ordination and deployment of water rescue resources into the north of the country and continued to operate in response to potential further heavy rainfall in the North East until Sunday 1 July 2007.



Role of the Command Room

11. The Command Room is a dedicated resource centre established at Service Headquarters during major emergencies. It provides central co-ordination of local responders to local events, led by a Duty Area Manager and a Principal Officer. This command team is also responsible for facilitating the discharge of the Authority's duties under the Civil Contingencies Act, and provides a valuable focus for all activities at strategic and tactical level.

Role of the National Flood Support Team

12. Headed by CFO Paul Hayden, led by Area Manager Paul Amos, with assistance from Officers from other Services and representatives from the Environment Agency and the Met Office. Responsible for providing the strategic intelligence and co-ordinating special rescue assets for deployment into the risk areas when requested by affected Fire and Rescue Services.

20 – 25 July 2007

13. The Service was already aware of the heightened risk of flooding due to the June events, reinforced by local flash flooding activity in the Tenbury Wells area on Tuesday 17 July 2007 where 9 appliances and 1 boat were mobilised, and 25 rescues were carried out.

14. On Thursday 19 July 2007 a strategic command team was established by DCFO Phillips in response to detailed severe weather warnings from the Met Office. The warning was for in excess of 100mm of rainfall over 8 hours during Friday 20 July 2007; in the event, over 125mm or 5 inches fell in that period. Preparations for the anticipated activity levels were put in place including lessons learned from the June events and implementation of local plans to support the receipt of external resources. DCFO Phillips also established the CFOA Flood Support Team in anticipation of requests for mutual aid. This team was initially staffed by Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service Officers, supplemented by external specialist advisors late on Friday.



Summary of Activity *CONTINUED*

15. Friday 20 – Monday 23 July 2007 saw the Service respond effectively to extreme levels of activity, supported by significant additional resources from across the country. Key areas of activity included Sedgeberrow, Evesham, Pershore, Droitwich, Tenbury Wells, Bromyard, Worcester, Upton upon Severn and Hampton Bishop. Crews responded to stranded motorists, residential and nursing homes, a school, several caravan parks, hotels and many people trapped in their homes by rapidly rising floodwater. Fire Control was overwhelmed with calls for assistance, with Services from across the country taking calls on our behalf. The High Volume Pump successfully ensured the maintenance of electricity supplies to Worcester City, pumping away water which threatened the City's critical secondary supply at Blackpole, following failure of the main supply due to the effects of flooding. It was also mobilised to support the Environment Agency in giving access to the Hampton Bishop area on Monday 23 July 2007 where it pumped out 70,000 tonnes of water.
16. An emergency was declared on the evening of Friday 20 July 2007 and a multi-agency group (Strategic Co-ordination Group – Strategic Managers of category 1 and category 2 emergency response agencies led by West Mercia Constabulary) was established at West Mercia Police Headquarters, Hindlip, to lead the rescue and recovery effort.
17. Movement across the Service area was severely restricted as many roads and bridges were closed including the M5, M50 and major routes to the west of Worcester City. Over the course of the weekend 1185 people were recorded as rescued by the Fire and Rescue Service using all HWFRS pumping appliances. Additional assistance was provided by 7 helicopters, 9 other Fire and Rescue Services, the Severn Area Rescue Association, the RNLI and the Army.
18. As part of a tour of the worst affected areas, Government Ministers John Healey MP and Hillary Benn MP visited DCFO Phillips and Fire and Rescue staff at HWFRA Headquarters on Sunday 22 July, seeking to gain insight into the issues facing the Service, offering whatever assistance might make a difference to the rescue efforts and thanking staff for the Service's rescue efforts under such extreme circumstances.



The Authority's Preparations

Authority IRMP Investment to Date

19. As part of the very first IRMP 2004/05 and in response to major flooding in 1998 and 2000, the Authority committed to providing a comprehensive water rescue service. The main aim of the water rescue strategy was to reduce the risk to front-line staff and the community from the dangers presented by the flooding and water related events.

20. Since that time the Authority has invested over £200,000 in equipment and training as well as engaging in partnerships to deliver water safety messages to schools throughout the two counties.

21. All front-line and emergency response staff have now received water awareness training. Each pumping appliance now has the equipment to carry out rescues from the water's edge and all personnel, including Officers have access to lifejackets.

22. In addition, the Authority has 3 specialist water rescue teams at Hereford, Worcester and Evesham, supported by the rope rescue team at Malvern and the USAR team at Droitwich. The Authority's response to major flood events is strengthened through a groundbreaking agreement, led by the Service, which co-ordinates the response to incidents of all blue light agencies and voluntary rescue teams such as Severn Area Rescue Association (SARA) and Mercia Inshore Search and Rescue (MISAR).

23. Despite the fact that rescue from open water is not a statutory function of the Fire and Rescue Service, the Authority has recognised that the communities in the two Counties look to the Service at such times and have now fully embedded this crucial element within its IRMP.



Committee Findings

24. The Service has taken a leading role in the success of the flood rescue efforts not just locally, but at a national level. The two counties directly experienced the added value of the newly established National Flood Support Team (NFST) through the significant contribution to the local rescue efforts made in July by highly skilled specialist teams, identified through the NFST who came to the Service's assistance.
25. The benefits to local communities of the Authority's ongoing investment programme in water safety and flood rescue have been clearly evidenced in the Summer's flood response.
26. The Service's leading role in warning and informing the public, particularly during the early stages of the July emergency, has been identified by the Committee and recognised in the LRF Strategic Review report. This approach will be further strengthened in the future through improved partnership working arrangements and the presentation of a multi-agency approach to key messages.
27. Communications and intelligence sharing across partners immediately prior to an emergency would benefit from some improvement. This lesson has been learned as evidenced by the recent flood events during January 2008 where inter-agency communications and intelligence was significantly improved.
28. Evidence of the commitment of all the Service's staff, particularly during the extreme floods in July, is remarkable. Both front-line and support staff worked long hours in difficult conditions to ensure the safety of the communities we serve.
29. As part of its normal process the Service has led a comprehensive debrief programme to consider the 2007 flooding activity. Feedback from staff has been detailed and extensive, and a high quality analysis of this has rightly taken time to complete. An ongoing programme to address issues raised is now underway; progress has been made in those areas where solutions could be put in place relatively immediately. More complex areas to address are being included for delivery in the Service plans for 2008/09.
30. These include:
 - improved flood management procedures;
 - improved major emergency management procedures;
 - contributing to further development of inter-agency response to major flooding at strategic and tactical level; and
 - completion of the specialist water rescue project as part of the water safety strategy.

31. The Committee recognises that national clarity regarding statutory responsibility and future funding arrangements relating to water rescue will be critical in determining the Authority's ability to respond effectively to the lessons learned from the Summer floods of 2007.
32. The Committee particularly recognises the issues that were raised regarding the need for further investment in training and equipment. An initial budget has been identified, but remains unfunded within the current financial plans agreed by the Authority. Detailed plans are being developed in response to debrief comments relating to these aspects of the Service's current provision but the ability to deliver will be dependent on sufficient funding being made available.
33. The Service has been an active contributor to local partnership debriefs, including the Local Resilience Forum. Much positive feedback has been received from many of our partners and local communities on the extensive rescue efforts led by the Service. The Local Resilience forum review describes the Fire and Rescue Service's rescue effort as 'excellent'.
34. The Summer floods provided the first real test of the Local Resilience Forum's (LRF) emergency response plans, including the effectiveness of its multi-agency Strategic Co-ordinating Group. The LRF debrief process identified equipment and communications improvements which are already being addressed through the LRF.
35. The Committee has identified that lessons learned by the Service from the June event were applied to its response during the July event to good effect. These included strengthened partnership communication at silver level from an early stage, changes to the Service's call batching process and use of Officers, and strengthened public warning and informing activity.
36. The Committee identified areas where further information and prevention work may be of benefit with regard to mitigation of future risks – particular sectors highlighted as benefiting from further work included caravan parks, residential and nursing homes. It is suggested that this is progressed through existing partnership structures including the LRF, and LSPs.



Conclusion

37. During the Summer of 2007 Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service played a key role in the successful water rescue efforts both in the two Counties and across the UK.



The resources invested by the Authority and the efforts of all staff resulted in the successful resolution of an exceptionally testing series of events.

38. The Service worked well with partners throughout the emergency and has undergone a rigorous scrutiny of its response to both the June and July events.

A number of areas for improvement have been identified, some of which have already been addressed. Others have required more detailed consideration and development plans are being drawn up to address these over the coming 12 months.

However, the Service's ability to respond effectively to its detailed debrief process is dependent on the resolution of some issues at a national level including those relating to statutory responsibility and future funding provision.



Appendix 1

Flood Scrutiny – Terms of Reference

To examine the Fire and Rescue Authority's contribution to flooding events that impacted communities in Herefordshire and Worcestershire in June and July 2007.

In particular to explore:

- The emergency response made by Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service.
- The contribution made by the specialist rescue teams provided through local investment decisions made by the Authority.
- The effectiveness of local multi-agency pre-planning through the Local Resilience Forum.
- The effectiveness of the multi-agency response and joint working between Local Resilience Forum members.
- The effectiveness of regional and national support and mutual aid during the response phase.
- The effectiveness of multi-agency working arrangements and communication with the public during the recovery phase

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Bengali

যদি আপনার ম্পংরাজি কথা বলতে/বুঝতে সাহায্যের প্রয়োজন হয় তবে কৃপা করে যোগাযোগ করুন। *Ethnic Access Link: Tel: (01905) 25121*

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