

Cabinet

3 December 2020



Title	Sandbag Distribution Policy
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report Author	Sandy Muirhead and Applied Resilience
Cabinet Member	Councillor Robert Noble
Confidential	No
Corporate Priority	This item is not in the current list of Corporate Priorities but still requires a Cabinet decision
Recommendations	Cabinet/Committee is asked to: To adopt the Sandbag Distribution Policy as detailed in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 Sandbag distribution Plan
Reason for Recommendation	To provide a clear and achievable strategy for supporting the local community in relation to sandbags in a flood event. .

1. Key issues

- 1.1 This explains the main criteria upon which the decision is to be based. Spelthorne Borough Council (SBC) maintains a stock of filled sandbags as well as sand and unfilled bags and has during previous flooding events distributed these based on operational judgment. During a serious flood event further sand and empty bags are ordered and filled by the depot crew at best possible speed, with staff being diverted from other front-line services to do so. SBC has attempted to deliver sandbags to properties thought to be at risk of flooding or where requests have been received by residents identifying themselves to be vulnerable, or in some cases where they are known to be vulnerable (or both).

Due to the numbers of properties within the Borough at flood risk (20,086 within the 1 in 1000 year outline), along with the number of requests received (including by residents not at risk of flooding) it is not possible to provide enough sandbags or assist in a uniform way in their deployment. There is no current clear strategic objective behind this strategy and there is no evidence of direct benefits in terms of protecting properties from flooding, mitigating the impact of flood water (for example by filtering flood water of pollution) or of good will generated.

During the flooding of 2014, the military assisted with the deployment of sandbags, focusing on those who were vulnerable. Intelligence on this was obtained via the SLRF vulnerable people data however multi-agency coordination issues during the response meant that liaison between the borough and military was not effective. Multi agency co-ordination has since greatly improved taking on board the lessons learnt.

1.2 There are several concerns identified with the current approach taken by SBC:

- (a) Distribution diverts significant resource away from front line services, services that could otherwise be diverted to another useful emergency response related tasks.
- (b) Distribution presents significant risks to SBC staff in terms of operating within a flood zone, manual handling, and potential violence towards staff.
- (c) The scale of properties either at risk or requesting sandbags means that not enough sandbags can be delivered to meet resident expectations though sandbags have limited use in protecting properties..
- (d) Sandbags cannot be placed easily for the resident though previously have been placed at residents' direction.
- (e) Properties at risk of flooding and requesting sandbags have received them but had led to staff being in flooded areas with possible risks to them.
- (f) There are costs associated with purchasing sand and bags and their distribution (although these costs are often claimed back through the Government's Bellwin scheme).

1.3 As part of the learning from the 2013/ 14 flooding, SBC's emergency planning function reconsidered the options available to support flood response and the provision of sandbags effectively and efficiently. This was completed in consultation with community groups in Surrey. The possible solutions proposed are detailed in Section 2 below.

2. Options analysis and proposal

2.1 Detail the pros and cons of the options available and which one is being proposed. Include the risk assessment. The options available to support the community with the provision of sandbags are limited. SBC could:

- (a) *Continue to distribute under the current reactive arrangements* without a clear strategic objective.
 - i) Pros: This would allow the council to fulfil the needs identified by residents.
 - ii) Cons: Demand will inevitably exceed the available supply and staff required to distribute as detailed in 1.2 above.
- (b) *Distribute to areas considered to be the most at risk of flooding* where it is viable and safe to do so.

- i) Pros: This will provide support to the most exposed residents.
 - ii) Cons: Compared to the community demand for sandbags, this would only cover a small number of properties.
- (c) In addition to option b, *support the distribution of sandbags by community-based groups*. SBC would provide locations, sandbags and the required equipment, logistics and health and safety guidance for the community groups or volunteers to fill and distribute sandbags for residents requiring them.
 - i) Pros: This approach frees up SBC staff to ensure that critical services are maintained and the emergency response is sustained internally. This promotes community empowerment, collective responsibility, and wider engagement in local community resilience. Larger numbers of residents will have access to sandbags. Community groups in Surrey have expressed interest in this idea during consultations.
 - ii) Cons: This approach is dependent on the local community providing support for running the centres. Volunteers may have concerns that they are not fully covered under the Council's insurance policy
 - iii) Cons: The Council will come under criticism for not doing enough for residents.
- (d) *Not provide sandbags* as there is no statutory duty on the Council to do so.
 - i) Pros: This will provide clarity on the Council's position and allow SBC resources to be entirely dedicated to other areas of the flood response.
 - ii) Cons: The Council will come under criticism for not doing enough for residents, particularly given the local flood risk and other authorities in Surrey providing their residents with sandbags.

Proposal: Option C is considered to be the most viable option and SBC have developed a Community Sandbag Distribution Centre Plan which is currently in draft form but will be finalised once agreed.

3. Financial implications

- 3.1 To set up the distribution centres, a number of resources would need to be purchased including sand tippers, sandbags, and hoppers. Assessment in detail is required of costs but a proportion of costs in the event of a flood could be claimed back via the Bellwin scheme.

4. Other considerations

- 4.1 The policy may result in a change to the way in which vulnerable people in the borough are supported as the onus is on residents to access their own sandbags. This risk is mitigated by promoting community members to support each other and collect sandbags for vulnerable members in their community. Where vulnerable people do not have networks in place to rely on support in this way, the Community Sandbag Distribution Centre Plan details the

process for customer services to manage requests and if viable, consider requesting an evacuation for the resident.

5. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

- 5.1 Sandbags in themselves will not mitigate climate change but we have to recognise that with climate change we may see more extreme weather events including flooding. If the River Thames scheme, as proposed, goes ahead that will help mitigate flooding and provide opportunities for improving biodiversity and leisure activities when built in 24/25

6. Timetable for implementation

- 6.1 Provided the policy is approved, resourcing the centres can begin immediately with a view to centres being activated in flood events. In the event of a flood this will require resource from the Depot to set them up and ongoing support to ensure sand and bag supplies etc are maintained.

Background papers:

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Spelthorne Borough Council's Sandbag Policy

Appendix 2 Spelthorne Borough Council Community Sandbag Distribution Centre (CSDC) Operation Plan