

Agenda Item IMD1

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION REFERENCE IMD: 2016/ 21

TITLE	Wokingham Borough Council Sandbag Policy
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Executive Member Environment, Angus Ross Executive Member Resident Services, Pauline Jorgensen
DATE AND TIME	21 July 2016 at 6.45pm
WARD	All wards
DIRECTOR	Director of Environment, Heather Thwaites
REPORT TO BE PUBLISHED ON	Wednesday 13 July 2016
VENUE	FF11

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The policy will provide the Council and the residents of Wokingham with a clear understanding of the circumstances in which the Council will deliver sandbags. It will also encourage residents to take a self-help approach towards flood resilience.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive Councillor for the Environment is asked to:

1. Consider the Sandbag Policy as set out in Appendix 1.
2. Agree for Wokingham Borough Council to adopt the Sandbag Policy.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

During the prolonged and sustained rainfall events of the winter 2013/14 the Council received numerous requests from members of the public to provide sandbags to aid residents. The public has a general expectation that in a period of likely flooding, Local Authorities will make sandbags available. This is not the case. Members of the public have a responsibility to protect their own properties. If their property is in a known flood plain or they consider they are at risk of flooding, then they should purchase sandbags in advance from local building suppliers.

This policy details the circumstances in which the Council will deliver sandbags before or during extreme rainfall events for emergency flood prevention purposes. The policy also provides clear guidance to residents of the conditions that will apply when the Council is providing sandbags.

It should be noted that each flooding event will present a new and different challenge and so it is essential the council has flexible policies in place which can be adapted to circumstances when called upon.

BACKGROUND

1. There is a broad expectation in the mind of the general public that, in a period of likely flooding, the local council will deliver sandbags to properties that have requested them.
2. Currently, Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) does not have an official sandbag policy although the Council's contract with the Highways contractor states that the following materials will be available for emergency use within the required response time 24 hours per day, 7 days per week:
 - a) 400 No. rot proof sandbags (full of building sand)
 - b) 1000 No. rot proof sandbags (empty)
3. In previous flooding events WBC has typically delivered around 15 sandbags to each property. Based on this figure, WBC will only be able to provide sandbags to approximately 90 homes.
4. In previous major flooding events across the borough, the Council has delivered, and in some cases, disposed of, sandbags to any resident who have requested them.
5. The response to flooding during the winter of 2013/14 was coordinated by the Highways and Transport Department and the Community Resilience Team. The Council received requests from approximately 170 properties for the provision of sandbags during the prolonged rainfall events over the winter of 2013/14.
6. Requests ranged from 5 to 100 sandbags per property. WBC's stocks at the time were not enough to cover the amount of sandbags required. Therefore, in order to deal with this, WBC had to collect thousands of empty sandbags from the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead's depot and officers and volunteers had to fill the sandbags themselves.
7. Local Council policies on the provision of sandbags vary across the Country and many Councils do not provide sandbags for private properties on the basis that it is the responsibility of property owners to protect their property. Some Councils restrict the number of sandbags provided for each property while others do not provide sandbags for commercial or business properties.
8. Wokingham Borough Council wants to ensure clarity and consistency in the process of giving sandbag assistance in the event of a flooding emergency and have therefore produced a sandbag policy that, once agreed, will be published on the Council's website.

PROPOSED POLICY

9. Wokingham Borough Council's proposed policy emphasises that primary responsibility for protecting property from the risk of flooding lies with the property owner and it encourages property owners to plan their own arrangements for sandbags. The policy makes it clear that there is no statutory requirement from the council to provide sandbags but in exceptional circumstances, the council will deploy sandbags using a prioritisation system.
10. The prioritisation system puts the prevention of loss of life or serious injury at the top and protection of residential property much lower.
11. The policy explains that both the Highways team, in their normal duties, and officers in the Emergency Operations Centre will authorise the deployment of sandbags as they 'risk assess' it to be appropriate within the priorities listed.
12. Certain conditions are made clear within the policy. For example, Wokingham

Borough Council is not responsible for the quality or effectiveness of the sandbags or for the collection and disposal of sandbags.

13. The policy emphasises the need for people to make their own enquiries for sandbags in advance of a flood event by contacting local suppliers.
14. Once the policy has been adopted, officers will publicise it through various media channels and via the Town and Parish Councils in order to ensure that people are aware of this. Officers will also be available to advise residents on any queries they might have in relation to the policy.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15. It is hoped that this policy will see an overall reduction in Wokingham Borough Council's resources required and specifically a reduction in resources needed at the time of a flooding event; having made it clear to the public that there is no statutory requirement for WBC to provide sandbags.
16. Labour and distribution resources will still continue to be supplied by Wokingham Borough Councils officers and contractor and delivered according to the prioritisation system, as detailed in the policy.
17. In the short term the Council may still receive the same number of telephone queries, during a flood event, which will need to be answered both during office hours and out-of-office hours, but this could be reduced further by better communication of the new Policy to residents.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	n/a	n/a	n/a

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

n/a

Cross-Council Implications

n/a

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Director – Finance and Resources	No comments
Monitoring Officer	No comments
Leader of the Council	No comments

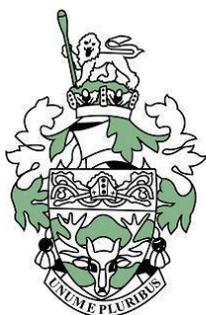
CONCLUSION

18. The document details Wokingham Borough Council's policy with regards to the deployment of sandbags during a flooding event. If adopted, it will provide residents with a clear understanding of when the Council will provide sandbags and the conditions associated with sandbag deployment.

19. Not only will this policy eventually reduce the pressure on the Council to provide sandbags to all residents requesting them, but it will encourage residents to be proactive and protect themselves against flooding.

List of Background Papers
The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 Wokingham Borough Council Flood Response Plan

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Date 23/06/2016	Version No. 1



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Sandbag Policy

This document details Wokingham Borough Council's Policy with regards to the deployment of sandbags to prevent or contain primarily fluvial flooding, but also to reduce the impact of pluvial flooding. WBC recognises that the primary responsibility for protecting property from the risk of flooding rests with the property owner. It is aware of the considerable efforts the Environment Agency makes to notify property owners in flood risk areas of the risks they face and encourages property owners to plan their own arrangements to protect themselves and their properties. There is no statutory requirement for the council to provide sandbags although there is a broad expectation in the mind of the general public that, in a period of likely flooding, the local council will make sandbags available. This Policy identifies that the council is not able to act to all requests for sandbags during a flood event but does identify its priorities.

1. Deployment of sandbags

1.1. The deployment of sandbags will be decided with the following priorities in mind:

- a. maintaining access for the emergency services,
- b. protecting vital facilities and assets within the community,
- c. protecting the most vulnerable,
- d. protection of WBC business property where deemed appropriate,
- e. protection of residential property.

1.2. The decision to deploy sandbags will be made by:

- a) Highways Teams in their normal course of duties will deploy them as they see a need within the priorities above or at the request of the emergency services.
- b) Emergency Response Team Duty Officers or the Emergency Planning Officers in the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) will authorise work orders for the deployments as they risk assess to be appropriate within the priorities above.

1.3. Where sandbags are provided the following conditions apply:

- No guarantee can be given that sandbags will be delivered within a specific timescale.
- The council will not accept responsibility for the quality or effectiveness of sandbags provided by the council.
- All requests for sandbags will be assessed in terms of the health and safety of the crews making deliveries and the availability of personnel to produce and deliver sandbags.

- Members of the public will not be allowed to collect sandbags from the council's depot.
- WBC will supply sandbags free of charge on a needs basis. However, once issued the sandbags are deemed to become the property and responsibility of the householder or receiving organisation. WBC will not accept responsibility for the collection and disposal of sandbags after an event although exceptions will be considered where householders are disabled.
- Where sandbags are provided, WBC will not accept liability for the positioning of them or any subsequent repositioning.
- Sandbags will not be provided to protect any buildings or land other than residential properties.

1.4. The council will encourage people to make their own enquiries for sandbags in advance of a flood event by contacting local suppliers such as builders' merchants where they can purchase them and/or possibly have them delivered. The council will continue to support and encourage householders and businesses to develop flood action plans to prepare in advance of flood emergencies and flood warnings.

2. WBC Sandbag Storage Locations

2.1. WBC will maintain a stock of sandbags which will be stored by its Highways contractor (So no change if contractor changes location). The contract between Wokingham Borough Council and its Highways contractor states that:

The following materials will be available for emergency use within the required response time 24 hours per day, 7 days per week:

- (a) 400 No. Rotproof Sandbags (full of building sand)
- (b) 1000 No. Rotproof Sandbags (empty)

3. Contact details

Calls for sandbags should be made to Customer Services on 0118 974 6000 in day time hours or 0800 212 111 out of hours, who will then pass the request to the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC).

4. Definitions

Fluvial flooding occurs when the capacity of a river (designated as Main River) is exceeded or the channel becomes blocked, causing water to spill onto the floodplain.

Pluvial flooding occurs when high intensity rainfalls cause runoff which flows over the surface of the ground and accumulates in low lying area.