

Last winter's floods across the north of England saw the wettest month ever recorded in the UK, with exceptional amounts of rainfall and record river flows flooding around 17,000 homes and businesses. Our flood defences protected 12,500 properties during Storm Desmond and 10,900 during Storms Eva and Frank.

Since then we have carried out our own internal review and delivered a 'winter readiness' Major Incident Ready action plan to ensure we are better placed to fight future floods.

Our plan for winter readiness has involved increasing the number of trained staff we have available to help in flood emergencies. As of 1 October we have 6512 trained and ready staff with a further 734 in training. We have extended our arrangements with contractors and the military to respond and recover from flood emergencies more quickly. We have established better ways of gathering live information from satellites and drones to get this information into the hands of the decision makers quicker, this will enable better decision making.

This means we now have better resilience and capability both nationally and locally, which was tested during our incident exercise, Exercise Certus, in October. Over 1000 players in 20 locations played their part in this major coastal exercise. We tested a number of new procedures within our Winter Ready plan including our live deployment plans which involved live deployment to site.

As part of Major Incident Ready we have simplified and improved our command and control for responding to major incidents. Our new Concept of Operations sets out the line of accountability and command from the Chief Executive Officer through to the National Duty Manager to the Area Duty Manager. This allows for a more consistent and effective response structure and approach, locally and nationally.

We have produced 5 flood based Major Incident Plans (MIP's) and 1 Control of Major Accident Hazard (COMAH) plan. These are internal strategic documents to help our Duty Managers make more informed decisions around flood risk or environmental risk, looking at severity. They will help us to scale up our response using a decision based matrix and use our 'Think big, act early, be visible' approach.

We are helping communities to be better prepared for flooding. We are supporting communities by providing additional flood resilience equipment where needed, and helping them make community flood plans. We have identified what additional temporary assets are needed to increase resilience, and purchased or hired these assets for winter 2016/17. These include 40km of temporary flood barrier, 250 pumps, 500,000 sandbags and 4 Incident Command vehicles. All of this equipment is stored securely in 7 strategically located depots across the country, the closest for Kent being Rye. We have written around 100 temporary defence deployment plans and have also set up Incident Management Contracts and developed Incident Management Plans with our Water & Environment Management (WEM) Framework Contractors to ensure they can better support us in incident response and recovery.

We have also been making changes to our flood modelling and forecasting capability. We have developed a number of new flood forecasting products for our own operational planning and preparedness. They ensure the organisation is ready for the next major incident by enabling duty officers to look further ahead and plan proactively using our 30 day flood outlook.

We are also working with phone providers to access and automatically add mobile phone customers to our flood warning service - since January 2016, we have added over 200,000 customers. This will let us expand our reach of the Flood Warning service and allow more people to receive these messages and allow them to take action.