

**Report to:** Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2013

**Lead Member / Officer:** Corporate Director: Modernisation and Wellbeing

**Report Author:** Corporate Director: Modernisation and Wellbeing

**Title:** Recovery from November 2012 floods progress report

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### **1. What is the report about?**

This report updates members on progress on recovery from the November 2012 floods since the report to Council briefing in late January. It also seeks members' views on the findings of an initial debrief report on the first phase of the recovery process.

### **2. What is the reason for making this report?**

This report is part of a set of reports to Partnerships Scrutiny on flooding and the Council's approach to flood risk, preparation for and response to flooding events and support for flooded communities.

### **3. What are the Recommendations?**

For members to ask questions and comment on

- 3.1 current recovery issues
- 3.2 the findings of the Recovery Phase 1 debrief report

### **4. Report details.**

#### **Update on recovery process**

Previous reports to Council have set out in detail the work undertaken to support communities to recover from the November 2012 floods. The first of these was in December 2012, the most recent being in late January 2013.

In brief, approximately 500 properties were flooded, in St Asaph, Ruthin, Rhuddlan and Brookhouse with some properties affected in other communities as well. Approximately 40 businesses were affected.

The Corporate Recovery Group and sub-groups (see Appendix I for relevant structures) were established within a day of the flooding event, involving Council officers and partners across agencies and sectors. This Group continues to meet, currently on a monthly basis. The Health and Welfare Sub-Group and the Community Recovery Groups in St Asaph and Ruthin are also still meeting regularly to ensure support continues for affected residents and communities until all residents return

home (the vast majority are expected to have returned by May), and beyond, where necessary.

During the period until Christmas, intensive support was offered particularly to the main communities affected through extensive clean up services, temporary housing, information and advice centres, dealing with welfare issues, play sessions, specific support to individual businesses affected, provision of information to support residents to deal with the practicalities of insurance claims, clean up and dealing with builders, as well as assistance to establish Community Recovery Groups and support for their activities.

Since December, recovery work has focused on continued provision of information, including through drop-in sessions, mail shots offering specific welfare rights support, and beginning to pick up on, and respond, with partners, to the longer and more difficult “tail” of the impact of the floods- especially emotional needs, but also issues such as high reinsurance costs. Most of this work is being co-ordinated through the Community Recovery Groups, and an update on current activity is attached at Appendix 2.

A group of voluntary organisations, supported by Denbighshire Voluntary Services council, have recently made successful application to the Big Lottery Fund for funding to maintain a range of welfare services to the flooded communities. This support will be particularly valuable in helping individuals and communities deal with the longer term impacts of the flooding.

### **Debrief from the Recovery process Phase 1**

On March 13<sup>th</sup>, a formal debrief session was held of key agencies and individuals involved in the Recovery process. A similar debrief process has also been carried out on the “Response” phase of the floods.

The Recovery debrief covered Phase 1- broadly speaking up until the end of December 2012- which was the intensive period immediately after the floods. We chose to have an initial debrief on this period as the lessons to be learned are different in the immediate aftermath of a crisis than those which emerge after some months- and we have been keen not to lose the lessons from the early hours, days and weeks. Our intention would be to do a further debrief, perhaps in the middle of 2013, to capture the learning in the months that followed the immediate crisis as people made repairs to their properties and returned home.

The debrief process and report has been funded through the LRF, the North Wales Local Resilience Forum, which oversees planning for civil contingencies across the region. The initial report, to be discussed and commented on by the Corporate Recovery Group on April 12<sup>th</sup>, is attached as a confidential paper at Appendix 3. It then has to be formally adopted by the chair of the Local Resilience Forum.

Six main recommendations have been made, as follows. The context for the Recommendations is set out in the debrief report at Appendix 3: (Appendix 3 is excluded from public disclosure by virtue of paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972)

## **Procedural Guidance**

**Recommendation 1** – North Wales LRF in conjunction with Multi-Agency partners should look to raise awareness of the suite of procedural documents for various aspects of the recovery phase, ensuring that areas such as clarity of roles, chain of command, establishment of rest centres, the operation of advice centres and management of donated goods are emphasised. There may be scope to learn from the experience of others via published debrief reports.

## **Learning and development**

**Recommendation 2** - To complement the previous recommendation the North Wales LRF with multi-agency partners should identify a wider audience of appropriate personnel to receive training on their roles and responsibilities and publicise the existence of the suite of guidance available. Validation of this process should be achieved via exercising.

## **Establishment of Hubs**

**Recommendation 3** – The North Wales LRF in conjunction with multi-agency partners should review their arrangements for raising awareness in connection with the pre-planning, establishment and operation of advice / information centres

## **Contact lists**

**Recommendation 4** – The North Wales LRF and multi-agency partners should consider the collation of contact directories.

## **Information Management**

**Recommendation 5** – The North Wales LRF and multi-agency partners should consider what information is required, a means to capture it, a system that allows it to be processed and a method for sharing it.

## **Communications**

**Recommendation 6** – The North Wales LRF and multi-agency partners should consider the manner in which messages can best be relayed to responders and community groups, which are appropriate for the audience. The maintenance of a multi-agency media cell to continue with community contact and information provision should be explored.

Once the report and recommendations have been formally signed off, there will be a need to develop local action plans to ensure lessons are applied so we are better prepared if a similar flooding event happened again.

## **Debriefing the community/Community Recovery Groups**

The debrief on 11<sup>th</sup> March did not include representatives from the Community Recovery Groups. This was deliberate as we felt there should be a separate process. It is very clear that, through their work, they have gained experience that would be exceptionally valuable for other communities throughout the UK – for example in their operation of Mayoral funds, or the way they have communicated with affected residents (the use of City Times in St Asaph and of social media in Glasdir have been very different but effective methods of communicating.)

We do want to support them to capture these lessons but need to agree exactly when and how to do this. We also believe that we should gather feedback directly from affected residents- both their views on how the Council responded to the emergency but also on how we helped them “recover.” Again, timing is important, as many are still in the throes of returning home. In addition, we want a co-ordinated approach- we do not want to irritate residents, for example by having several questionnaires in circulation, especially when their main concerns are about getting as nearly back to normal as they can.

#### **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

Flooding impacts on virtually all corporate priorities- on vulnerable individuals, on access to good quality housing, affects economic regeneration, can disrupt children’s education and destroy essential infrastructure. Good recovery processes involve working closely with communities, supporting the Council’s aim of being a council closer to the community. They can also help mitigate the worst effects of flooding, helping residents to get as close to normal as quickly as possible.

#### **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

The total costs of the flooding event have been considerable. To date, the estimate for the initial response is £270k, which was below the threshold for support under the Emergency Financial Assistance Scheme (EFAS). This included £80k of insurance excesses on claims likely to exceed £1m – mostly in relation to council houses. There are also significant recovery phase costs, the greatest of which is the loss of income from Council Tax on empty properties. The total of the recovery phase costs is currently estimated to be £313k. This does not include costs being absorbed by services which are estimated to be around £115k. Application was made to Welsh Government under the FARE scheme for funding to assist with the costs of recovery and £158k was awarded. This is being used to contribute to funding the overall cost of the event to the council.

#### **7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.**

The impact of the floods, particularly on very old and disabled people, has been a prime consideration of the Health and Welfare Sub-Group since the floods of November 2012.

#### **8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

The Corporate Recovery Group is a multi-agency cross sector group, as are key sub-groups- especially Health and Welfare and Community Recovery Groups (which local elected members also attend). These groups have continuously led and shaped recovery work undertaken.

## **9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

See section 6.

The costs of the flooding event have been considerable. It has been agreed that all additional service costs will be funded corporately from the Council's reserves.

## **10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

It has been more difficult to get a clear view of what exactly individual residents and communities need since the New Year and this could lead to the recovery process missing key information. This risk has been mitigated through the drop-ins but especially the Community Recovery Groups, particularly as more affected residents have become involved. Data protection issues have made it difficult to share data comprehensively across agencies to identify people potentially falling through the net. Continued welfare rights take up communications and phone contacts to returning residents are mitigation measures as well as community initiatives and networks.

### **Contact Officer:**

Corporate Director: Modernisation and Well-being

Tel: 01824 706149