

Flood Risk Community Information Note

Starting a Community Resilience Group

The SFF regularly produces information notes for communities at flood risk, on flooding and related issues. The SFF is committed to improving communities understanding of the risks and consequences of flooding in their area and works to ensure communities are effectively and appropriately supported to recover and to become more resilient to flooding.

This information note is written for people in flood risk communities who are interested in the idea of forming a community resilience group.

Turning ideas into action:

The SFF have helped many community resilience groups to set up throughout Scotland working closely with flood risk communities and responsible authorities. The SFF can provide a wide range of independent support to start, sustain and develop community resilience groups in flood risk areas with practical support advice and information.

Why start a community resilience group?

The SFF uses the term community resilience group but recognises that it is for each flood risk community to define and identify itself as a community body.

There are many different reasons and the experience of SFF shows that there are many benefits to setting up a group such as:

- Engage local people and encourage local involvement
- Co-ordinate community action in the event of a flood
- Increase community resilience
- Offer support and be supported by those who are also affected by flooding.
- Be part of a wider community development initiative
- To give accurate advice and information to local residents
- To have a voice that can communicate directly with responsible authorities
- Build links and work with responsible authorities
- To inspire, encourage and motivate your local community.

What is a community resilience group?

Community resilience groups come in all shapes and sizes that suit their local circumstances and can broadly be split into two categories.

Informal: A group of interested residents working in their community to prevent or reduce flood risks or increase resilience normally with no structure, aims committee but can be sub group of existing community body.

Formal: An elected group of interested residents working in their community to prevent or reduce flood risks or increase resilience normally with structure, aims committee and constitution and can be a sub group of an existing community body.

They are usually made up of local people acting in a voluntary capacity to promote and represent the interests of a particular flood risk community. The strength of any community flood resilience group lies in the involvement of local people in the activities of the group.

How to start your group?

Most community groups start with just a handful of people who are keen to do something about flooding. It is quite easy to get started.

Find people by:

- Talking to neighbours as they may share your concerns and be willing to help;
- Putting up notices locally to see if other residents are also interested in setting up a group.
- Hold a public meeting to find out wider community views and ask for volunteers.

Small planning meeting:

Arrange a small planning meeting to discuss what it is that you want to tackle, and how to get help.

Decide:

- What you want to achieve
- What you want to do
- How to do it
- How long you think it should take
- Allocate tasks
- Share responsibility
- Operate democratically
- Find out who can give you help and support

Community hostility and political engagement

Because flooding is such a traumatic event, hostility may have built up both within the community and towards responsible authorities. This can be an opportunity to harness negative energy and transform it into positive community action. The priority is to establish a group and plan of action which will serve the flood risk community. It is important to stress to members that establishing good working relationships with responsible authorities is always the best approach and a joint meeting is most productive when time is given to listen and understand different organisations' points of view. The SFF is able to mediate as an honest broker in difficult situations; just get in touch for further information.

Public meeting:

If you started as a small group, then arrange a public meeting to test wider support for your ideas. If you miss out this stage you run the risk of assuming that your first small planning meeting actually represents everyone's views. The public meeting can also formally launch the community resilience group and elect a steering group. At the meeting agree a date for a further meeting to discuss priorities and decide how to get things moving. Most groups delegate responsibility for this work to the group of people who form the steering group.

Remember that if you are going to apply for funding or raise monies it is usually necessary to adopt a constitution and open a bank account.

Constitutions:

It is not necessary to adopt a constitution to be identified as a legitimate community body but it does help and can have many benefits. It's better to take your time and get it right and do remember, constitutions are not set in stone and can be changed to reflect external changes. You will probably need more than one meeting to discuss, agree and propose a constitution to the community and any other stakeholders.

The main points of any constitution are:

- Name of group
- Aims of group
- Membership
- Committee structure
- Roles and responsibilities
- Financial arrangements
- Annual general meetings
- What happens if changes need to be made
- What happens if it wishes to dissolve
- How the group will be run
- Internal arrangements for meetings.

You can view the SFF basic and advanced constitution templates on our website and we can provide further development support on request.

How will the group operate?

There is no set way of organising a community resilience group but there are ways of working that are more common and useful than others. Try to make sure that the group or committee represents all the people in your community. If your group does have a committee members should be nominated and elected because they are committed to the aims of the group and have the time and interest to devote to the committee.

Working Together:

In order to work effectively together, you need to be clear who is responsible for what. Some jobs can be taken by one person or can be shared.

The purpose of a group or committee meeting is usually to:

- To decide what action to take
- To come to a decision which is acceptable to the group
- To benefit from the ideas, skills, knowledge, and opinions of all members
- To conduct business efficiently in accordance with the constitution if applicable.

Keeping everyone involved:

Every community resilience group has to work hard at keeping people involved. If your organisation is to be strong you must make constant efforts to keep your membership informed and to get wider involvement.

Committee members:

A committee member may not have any special title or task, but their presence on a committee is just as important as that of the office bearers.

Some duties of the ordinary committee members include attending meetings, supporting the group, take actions on, vote on issues, discourage domination, support and encourage quieter members, respect group decisions, make suggestions and support the Chairperson.

The SFF can provide further information for office bearers and training on advanced committee skills on request.

Planning For Action:

Your group may want to consider an action plan that will help the group to identify issues you are seeking to influence, monitor progress and who is responsible for reporting at each meeting. In addition, your group may want to consider developing a community resilience

plan that will detail the actions a group can take in an emergency incident such as flooding. These plans support your community to prepare, respond and recover from an emergency such as flooding. The SFF can provide further advice on group action planning and community resilience plans on request.

Group relationships and skills:

It's important to remember that people volunteer their own time to get involved with a group and their investment should be valued and the group should draw on everyone's skills and knowledge. Make use of these by encouraging everyone in the group to contribute and by thinking about the link between skills, tasks and group positions. The quieter people on a group can contribute a great deal with the right facilitation and leadership. Everyone has something to contribute to a community resilience group.

Using existing networks

It's always useful to think about existing networks in your community that may have an interest in flooding or community resilience and how any new group would link to these groups. This could be anything from a community council, neighbourhood watch scheme, tenants and residents association or a local charity or development trust. Have a think about whether it makes sense to contact members from other groups or to see whether your interests coincide with other groups. A community resilience group can be part of an existing group such as a sub group of a community council or other community body or exist as an independent community organisation.

Useful Tips

- Set dates for regular meetings several months in advance – reduces the chance of double booking yourself
- Find out the public holiday dates in order that you can arrange meetings around them to avoid the need for last minute cancellations
- Be aware of the school holidays – you may need to arrange childcare at these times or avoid meetings if this will restrict involvement
- Be aware of the social / meeting calendar of the community. Avoid having meetings that clash with big local events or when members may be involved with other groups/ committees
- Make sure that your wider membership knows who you are and how to contact you your group
- Make sure you publicise the successes of your community resilience group.

Other Community Flood Resilience Groups:

You may find it useful to consider the following examples of web based communications from community flood resilience groups.

Stonehaven Flood Action Group:

Website:

<http://www.stonehavenfloodaction.org/>

Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/StonehavenFloodActionGroup>

Edzell Flood Group:

Website:

<https://sites.google.com/site/edzellfloodgroupinfo/the-flood-group>

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/EdzelFloodIssue/>

<http://www.readyscotland.org/my-community/local-plans-and-good-practice/edzell-flood-group-and-action-plan/>

Conclusions:

Community resilience groups can help you to prevent, prepare, respond and recover from flooding and other emergencies. They are managed and controlled by local people who have the greatest experience and passion to get involved as they have directly experienced the negative impacts of flooding to people, properties and communities.

Above all create a Community Resilience Group that supports and helps your community to prepare, respond and recover from flooding and build good relationships with the responsible authorities.