

## Case Study: Scottish Flood Forum, Aberdeenshire Integrated Flood Recovery Operations

### Introduction:

In late December 2015 into early January 2016, Storm Frank (and two subsequent periods of persistent rainfall) resulted in unprecedented water levels across Scotland, in particular in Aberdeenshire where it caused widespread and large-scale flooding in multiple areas. A major incident was declared on two occasions requiring large scale multi-agency response and recovery efforts. Significant damage was caused creating high cost infrastructure impacts and long-term community impacts.

*'This was the biggest disaster event Aberdeenshire Council has had to deal with'.*



This case study aims to give a picture of some key elements of the recovery operations and identify good practice points.

### Aberdeenshire Flooding 2015/16:

Aberdeenshire Council's [Flood Recovery Plan](#) was activated with the strategic aim to:- "Work with local communities to restore Aberdeenshire to normality". The Scottish Flood Forum (SFF) was invited by the Council to work with it to ensure: -

- local communities are engaged, consulted, informed and supported at all stages of the recovery process;
- the health, wellbeing and housing needs of communities are met; and
- community needs are matched to offers of support.

The [SFF has a generic integrated recovery programme](#) in place which commits it to:

- responding quickly and professionally to the needs of those affected by a flood event, working in partnership with the local authority and other agencies; and
- understanding and identifying the effects that a major flood has, not just on the infrastructure of a community, but more importantly, on the complex human behaviours that develop in response to flooding.

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The SFF delivers these actions on the ground by providing regular and ongoing support and resources to a flooded community and the individuals within it. The importance of these measures is crucial to the journey we share with residents in returning them to a state of normalisation – or as close as possible to such a position before being flooded.

As well as supporting the return to normality, the SFF’s long-term aim is to leave communities and individuals better prepared for future flooding by *‘Bouncing Back Better’*. This involves, at the right time, supporting flooded communities to coordinate their response, raising awareness of what communities can do to help themselves, developing skills and knowledge in flood recovery and guiding flooded communities towards better flood resilience.

The SFF approach supports the principles outlined in national guidance: [Recovering From Emergencies In Scotland](#).

**Good Practice Point:** Engaging the community as equal partners in the recovery process can help to overcome problems and create joint solutions.

**SFF Aberdeenshire Community Focussed Recovery Activities:**

The SFF recovery operations covered a wide area of Aberdeenshire and stretched our limited resources in responding to hundreds of requests for support. (See annex for a summary of the type and quantity of support provided by the SFF.) As an organisation, we learnt the hard way the value in creating centres of support rather than trying to travel to all remote communities, and the importance of building in time to rest and receive support ourselves.

**SFF Support Provided.**

Protection  
 Supporting Centres  
 Non-Insured Surgeries Recovery  
 Peer Victims Access Property  
 Listening Displaced Days Themed Home  
**Support**  
 Flood Claim Emotional Drop  
 Reinstatement Drying Views Community  
 Practical Newsletters Advice  
 Resilience Insurance Complaints  
 Cards Welcome Inspections  
 Debt People Events

**Good Practice Point:** In delivering an integrated flood recovery programme on the ground, it is vital to recognise the health and wellbeing needs of the staff involved if effective support to the flooded communities is to be maintained over the medium to long term.

This should be factored into the process for all volunteers and professional staff involved in providing long term, community focussed recovery operations. It's reassuring to note that this has been recognised at the national level, with the following advice now available from [Lifelines Scotland](#) :-

*“Whether you’re a volunteer emergency responder or work with one of the blue light services, there will probably be a time when our resources will be helpful. This Lifelines website has information about how you can stay well, beat stress and boost your resilience”.*

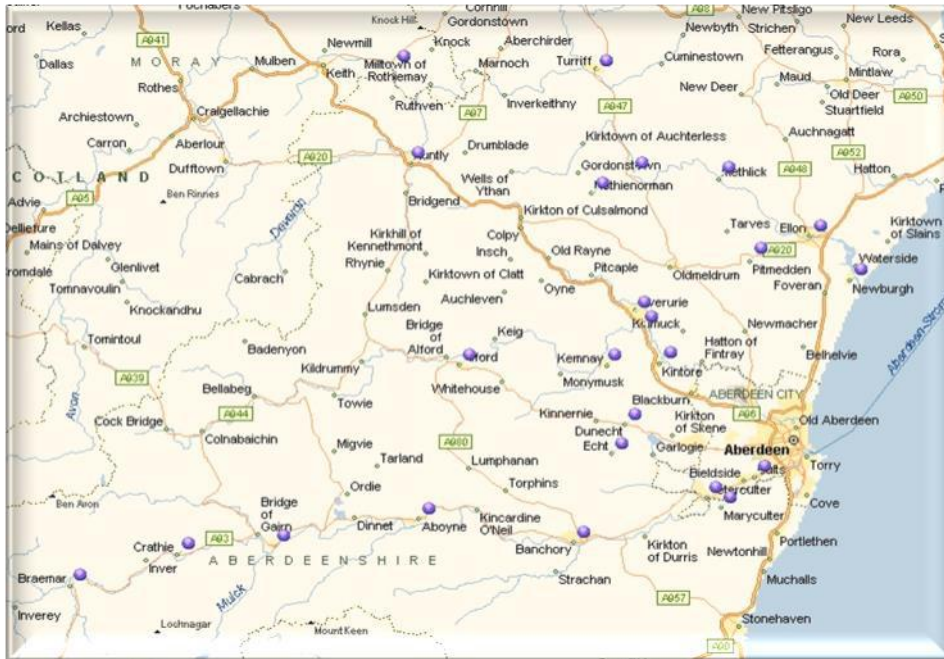
The long term nature of the flood recovery process (in some cases it can take over 12 months for those affected to return to their homes) involves many issues including; identifying and supporting non-insured householders; overseeing the stripping & drying out process; supporting insurance claims and loss adjuster visits; and advising on reinstatement and property resistance & resilience. Beyond remedying the physical impact of being flooded, of equal and perhaps greater importance is the psychological and emotional impact on householders. A key part of our role is therefore the provision of one-to-one support to victims of flooding through being there to listen, offer counselling and sign post to other services.

The SFF 2016 Ballater 2016 Flood Health Survey revealed that about one third of those flooded were identified as the particularly vulnerable. These were people with complex social needs, no insurance, already disadvantaged and whose life situations became significantly aggravated by being flooded. These vulnerable people need to be identified and supported early in the recovery and post-recovery period to enable support to be tailored to their needs.

**Good Practice Point:** During the initial stages of the recovery process, identify and prioritise those householders deemed most vulnerable to the impacts of flooding.

**Good Practice Point:** Consider the availability of industrial quality dehumidifiers and fans as part of the recovery process for large scale flooding.

Key: ● Dispersed & Remote SFF Flood Recovery Operations



**Good Practice Point:** During a large-scale flooding incident it's vital to have a system of triage in place to prioritise the support needs of flooded people.

### Long term impacts of the flooding:

The long-term nature of flood recovery cannot be underestimated and the following quote from a Ballater flood victim highlights this point.

*“Ballater isn't back to normal, it's not going to be back normal for a couple of years, in actual fact I would say the whole community is suffering from post-traumatic stress to be quite frank”.<sup>1</sup>*

The recently published [CREW report](#) commissioned by the Scottish Government investigated the long term impacts of the 2015/16 flooding. It contains useful lessons, key findings, and recommendations for those impacted by flooding and those supporting them. This includes valuable insights on mental health impacts and the lived experience of temporary accommodation, property reinstatement, property level protection, emergency flood grants, insurance, resilience development, health services and community development.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.crew.ac.uk/publication/impacts-flooding>

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During the SFF's Aberdeenshire flood recovery operations many people reported problems with the building reinstatement process. These included property stripping, drying out problems and poor standards of work carried out. Householders can now access detailed information on recovery of flood damaged buildings from the [Property Care Association](#) and research findings from the [Construction Industry Research and Information Association](#). In addition, the public can seek dedicated support from the [Scottish Flood Forum](#) on all the stages of recovery and on how to make their properties and communities more resilient to flooding.

In recovering from a flood, skills such as project management and negotiation can be a real asset, highlighting the complex nature of flood recovery. However, these skills are not available to all, thereby adding to the struggle many people face in managing the consequences. This has been called [the Recovery Gap](#) - a term used to define what happens to people during a long recovery processes as they engage with builders and insurers, many people need support to navigate this period.

**Good Practice Point:** Consider how communities and individuals can exchange knowledge and experience as part of the recovery process so they can share knowledge, skills, and experience.

## Community Resilience

As part of the recovery to resilience process the SFF supported the establishment of a number of new community resilience groups across Aberdeenshire. This is part of the SFF approach that seeks to leave communities better equipped after a flooding incident than before.

The following community groups are still in operation across the Council area working to prevent and reduce the risk of flooding, represent their communities, and develop community resilience actions to help them to plan, prepare, respond and recover from flooding.

[Kemhill Park Flood Group](#): Hillhaven Flood Prevention Group: [Stonehaven Flood Action Group](#): [Ballater Community Resilience Group](#): [Gairloch Resilience Group](#):

[Kintore Resilience Group](#): [Milton Meadows Resilience Group](#): North Esk Community Resilience Group: [Ellon Community Resilience Group](#): Meadows Flood Action Group: Peterculter Resilience Group.

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### **Key Lessons Learnt:**

- Consider the availability of industrial quality dehumidifiers and fans as part of the recovery process for large scale flooding.
- Engaging the community as equal partners in the recovery process can help to overcome problems and create joint solutions.
- Meeting the health and wellbeing needs of those responding as part of an integrated flood recovery programme is vital to ensuring that staff can continue to support flooded communities effectively.
- Consider how the most vulnerable victims of flooding can be identified and prioritised during the initial stages of a recovery plan.
- During a large-scale flooding incident, It's vital to have a system of triage in place that works to prioritise support needs.
- Consider how communities can exchange knowledge and experience as part of the recovery process so they can share knowledge, skills and experience that sows the seeds of future resilience to flooding.

**Note:** - Local Authority records show that following the widespread flooding there were **1803** applications for Scottish Government grants to support those impacted by flooding, of which **1331** were from Ballater.

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### **Acknowledgements:**

The SFF would like to thank all the volunteers and community groups who supported our flood recovery operations making this case study possible. Our sincere thanks to Aberdeenshire Council Flooding Team for providing useful comments and suggestions to create this case study.

### **References:**

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Preparing Scotland, Recovering from emergencies, 2017.

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M. Currie, L. Philip & G. Dowds (2020). Long-term impacts of flooding following the winter 2015/16 flooding in North East Scotland: Summary Report. CRW2016\_02. Scotland's Centre of Expertise for Waters (CREW).

Deeming, Hugh and Whittle, Rebecca and Medd, William (2011) *Recommendations for changes in UK National Recovery Guidance (NRG) and associated guidance from the perspective of Lancaster University's Hull Flood Studies*. Lancaster University.

**Annex:**

**Table 1: SFF Key Support - Figures: January 2016 – March 2018**

<b>SFF Support Provided</b>	<b>Number</b>
Recovery Support Surgeries	<b>382</b>
People Directly Supported	<b>3,645</b>
Household Visits	<b>1,528</b>
Home Flood Protection Exhibitions	<b>82</b>
Home Flood Protection Surveys	<b>757</b>
MSP Enquires	<b>5</b>
Recovery Help Line Enquiries	<b>530</b>
Non-Insured Support	<b>118</b>

**Table 2: Properties Impacted By Flooding<sup>i</sup>**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Residential</b>	<b>Businesses</b>
Ballater	307	60
Aboyne	20	10
Deeside – excl above	35	14
Kintore	36	1
Kemnay	47	0
Inverurie / Port Elphinstone	94	14
Ellon	64	3
Newburgh	6	0
Prenmay / Auchleven	12	0
Maryculter	3	0
Rothie Norman	3	0
Fyvie	3	1
Pitmedden	4	1
Alford	9	0
Other individual properties	43	12
<b>Totals</b>	<b>686</b>	<b>116</b>

<sup>i</sup> Data based on SFF Aberdeenshire flood recovery records

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