



BRIEFING PAPER

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Winter floods 2015-16

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Summary

The north of England, Scotland, north Wales and parts of Northern Ireland were impacted by severe storms throughout December 2015 and January 2016. These resulted in localised flooding events throughout these areas in the lead up to and throughout the Christmas period. In total, the Government has confirmed that around 16,000 properties in England were flooded and about 20,000 properties were protected from being flooded by existing flood defences.¹

Following the flooding events a number of Government support schemes were announced, including the opening of the Bellwin Scheme for local authorities and about £200 million of additional funding to aid recovery from the flooding. The various support schemes announced are being administered through local authorities and include schemes to help households, businesses and farmers, much in line with the support schemes that were made available following the winter floods 2013-14.

In the discussion and debate during and immediately following the winter floods 2015-16, the Government has re-iterated its 6-year capital funding commitment of £2.3 billion and confirmed that flood defence maintenance spending will be protected in real terms for the duration of this Parliament. Calls have been made for the Government to revisit its spending commitments and to consider an application to the EU solidary fund to assist with flood recovery. Among the other calls made on Government are requests to review the policy on building on floodplains and requests to review flood insurance arrangements.

Flooding is a devolved matter and each administration has different systems and policies in place to manage flooding. A brief summary of the responses to the winter floods 2015-16 in each devolved administration is set out below.

¹ HC Deb 5 Jan 2016: [Col 69](#)

1. Winter floods 2015-16

1.1 Storm Desmond – 5 December 2015

In early December 2015, [Storm Desmond](#) brought severe gales to the UK and led to localised flooding in the north west of England, southern Scotland, north Wales and parts of Northern Ireland. Cumbria was the worst-hit county: more than a month's rain fell in one day (5th December) and main rivers all across Cumbria exceeded the highest levels ever recorded.

The [BBC reported](#) estimates from the Environment Agency that 5,200 homes were affected by flooding in Cumbria and Lancaster (as at 8 December); and the Government stated that 8,600 homes were protected by existing flood defences. The [BBC reported](#) two fatalities (one in Cumbria and one in Northern Ireland) related to the flooding.

Other impacts of the Storm Desmond flooding included:

- Road closures and closure of the West Coast Mainline rail route to Scotland and the Cumbrian coast rail line between Carlisle and Workington;
- About 40 schools in Cumbria were closed and appointments and routine business across NHS hospitals were cancelled;
- Lancaster University closed and cancelled teaching until Christmas after losing power across the campus; and
- Loss of power supply to many homes and businesses due to unforeseen flood damage at a substation in Lancaster.

1.2 Prime Minister statement – 7 December

During a speech delivered by the Prime Minister on 7 December, David Cameron gave the following assurances on flooding:

we should sit down again with The Environment Agency, look at the flood schemes that have been built, look at the ones that are planned, look at the level of rainfall and the level of flooding that there was and ask, what more can we do? Why didn't – why were some of these schemes overtopped? What's in the plan for the future? How does that need to change with what's happened in Cumbria? That's absolutely what should always happen after any one of these tragic flooding episodes and the government has already marshalled all of the machinery necessary to make that happen.²

1.3 Defra statement on flooding – 7 December

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss) made a statement on the impact of Storm Desmond and flooding in the north of England on 7 December which summarised

² Prime Minister's Office, [This is a Government that delivers](#), 7 December 2015 [accessed 19 January 2016]

the Government response to date.³ The main points are summarised below.

Government response to Storm Desmond

The Secretary of State stated that “the Government mobilised a full national emergency response”. This included 200 military personnel and supporting assets (including a Chinook helicopter); 50 high-volume pumps; and the Environment Agency moving people, temporary defences and pumps to the north-west.

Update on existing funding

The Secretary of State confirmed that the Government “constantly reviews investment in flood defences”. She re-iterated Government spending figures on flood defences:

On flood defence spending, over the last Parliament we spent £1.7 billion in capital spending—a real-terms increase on the £1.5 billion spent between 2005 and 2010. Our **next six-year programme is £2.3 billion**, which again represents a real-terms increase. It is the first time a Government have laid out a six-year programme so that we do not have lumpy bits of flood spending, but commit to a long-term programme that helps to protect the country better. Including the impact of climate change, that is forecast to reduce flood risk by 5% over the next six years.

The hon. Lady asked about the maintenance budget. We spent **£171 million last year on flood maintenance**.⁴

The Secretary of State also re-iterated the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement that flood defence maintenance spending “will be protected in real terms for the duration of this Parliament”.⁵

More information on flood defence funding can be found in Defra’s [Central Government Funding for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management in England](#) (1 December 2015).

Further analysis of levels of spending on flood defences is available on Full Fact: [The government defence on flood defences](#), (7 January 2016)

Flood insurance

The Secretary of State confirmed that a discussion with insurance companies would be hosted by the Communities and Local Government Secretary of State (Greg Clark) in the coming days to ensure that support schemes which are flexible and simple to operate are provided and to ensure that “people receive prompt payments” and can get back into their homes as soon as possible.⁶

³ Defra, [Environment Secretary’s statement on flooding](#), 7 December 2015 [accessed 19 January 2016]. Full debate is at HC Deb 7 December 2015: [Col 709](#)

⁴ HC Deb 7 December 2015: [Col 713](#)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Climate change

The Secretary of State confirmed that climate change is factored into all the modelling work that the Environment Agency does, but “in light of the extreme weather we must look at that modelling and ensure that it is fit for purposes for future decisions”.⁷

1.4 Storm Eva – 24 December

Further heavy rainfall and severe flooding occurred over Christmas 2015 as a result of [Storm Eva](#). On Boxing Day residents in West Yorkshire and Lancashire were evacuated from their homes and flooding hit Leeds, Greater Manchester and York. The following day hundreds of people were evacuated from their homes in York when the Foss barrier was raised due to flooding of its electrical controls. Flood warnings were also issued in the Scottish borders and Tayside areas, as well as areas of north-west Wales include Capel Curig.

1.5 Storm Frank – 29 December

[Storm Frank](#) followed at the end of the year (29-30 December), bringing storms and severe gales to western parts of the UK, particularly north-west Scotland. Further flooding occurred, leading to many homes being evacuated. The [BBC reported](#) that one person died as a result of these floods and thousands of homes are without power in north east, Argyll, the Borders, Highlands, Hebrides and Northern Isles

1.6 Defra statement on Flooding and the impact of Storm Eva – 5 January 2016

The Secretary of State made a statement on Flooding and the impact of Storm Eva on 5 January 2016 in which she confirmed that about 9,000 properties flooded as a result of Storm Eva which brought the total to about 16,000 properties flooded and 20,000 properties overall were protected by flood defences during December as a result of Storm Eva and Storm Desmond. She also confirmed that the Government had re-appointed Dieter Helm as Chair of the Natural Capital Committee.⁸

In a subsequent debate on the impact of Storm Eva on 6 January, Flooding Minister Rory Stewart referred to flooding as “perhaps one of the most serious crises of our generation” and drew four main conclusions:

Perhaps a hundred different arguments have been raised in the House today, but to come to a close, there seem to be four main conclusions to be drawn from this debate. The first is that in an emergency situation, we must, above all, act decisively. We must think big and we must think early. It was very important that the Environment Agency moved 85% of its assets up immediately. The Cobra meeting was held on 23 December, even when there

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ HC Deb 5 Jan 2016: [Col 69](#)

was uncertainty about the floods, to deal with an issue that would come up on Boxing day. The military deployed immediately.

The second thing to be taken from the debate is the importance of understanding and compassion. This can become a technocratic debate about numbers, but it is really about the horror that is experienced in individual households. Our ability to listen to those households will be central to our ability to go forward.

The third lesson from this debate is one of humility. We are dealing with extraordinary issues of climate and uncertainty. We are breaking records in a way that has never been seen before in this country. There needs to be a joint cross-party response that is not limited to this House, but that reaches out to the very best scientists, commentators, experts and members of the Environment Agency who are available to deal with the challenge.

Finally, this debate is about localism. It is about local knowledge. Every scheme and every response needs to respond to local knowledge. In one community it might be about dredging, in another it might be about a pump, in another community it will be about the clearing of trees and in another it will be about upland storage. We need to look at what we are doing with forestry and what we are doing with peatland restoration. We need to understand that some schemes take 25 or 50 years to succeed, but that they should be undertaken nevertheless. As the Secretary of State said, we need to start the 25-year planning now.

Whatever our other disagreements, this country has responded very well to the emergency nature of the floods. There has been a good emergency response in Scotland, a good emergency response in Wales, a good emergency response in Northern Ireland and, I believe, a good emergency response in England. The only way in which we can go forward is with the utmost seriousness—seriousness about science, seriousness about evidence and seriousness about the formulas we use to allocate the funding in a way that is fair to the entire United Kingdom. If we get that determination correct, I believe that we can move forward with the humility and attention to local detail that will allow us to deal with perhaps one of the most serious crises of our generation.⁹

⁹ HC Deb 6 Jan 2016: [Col 395-398](#)

2. Support schemes announced

2.1 Bellwin Scheme

Communities Secretary Greg Clark MP confirmed that support for local authorities affected by the floods would be available through the Bellwin Scheme in a [press release](#) on 8 December. This was extended to those affected by Storm Eva on 29 December.¹⁰

Authorities can claim 100% of eligible costs under the Bellwin Scheme when they have spent more than 0.2% of their calculated annual revenue budgets on works. Eligible authorities now include: councils; police authorities; fire and rescue authorities; and National Park authorities.

Further information, including the types of expenditure that are eligible for reimbursement, is available in the [Library Briefing Paper on the Bellwin Scheme](#).

2.2 Additional funding announced

Overall about **£200 million additional investment** has been announced to aid recovery from the winter flooding 2015-16.

A breakdown of the main funding announcements is as follows:

- [9 December](#): £51 million for those affected by Storm Desmond flooding in Cumbria and Lancashire. The Government press release confirms that this takes total Government support pledged to **over £60 million**. Of this, nearly £40 million will go into the Community Recovery Scheme and the Farming Recovery Fund and £10 million will be invested through the Environment Agency to repair the damaged flood defences in Cumbria and Lancashire;
- [27 December](#): **£40 million** for Highways England to assist with the repair of roads and bridges in Cumbria and Lancashire affected by Storm Desmond;
- [29 December](#): **£50 million** for those affected by Storm Eva, including £6 million for businesses affected (confirmed on 1 January), to be administered via the Community Recovery Scheme and the Farming Recovery Fund;
- [3 January](#): **£40 million** to repair and improve flood defences following Storm Eva. Of this, £10 million will be reserved to improve the Foss Barrier protecting York, which was overwhelmed at the height of Storm Eva. The other £30 million will be spent repairing defences on the Wharfe, Calder, Aire, Ouse and Derwent. It will include repairs to pumping and barriers and clearing blockages in rivers.

¹⁰ DCLG Press release, [£50 million more immediate support for homes and businesses affected by floods](#), 29 December 2015 [accessed 19 January 2016]

- Any funding raised by charities for flood-hit communities will also be matched, **up to £2 million** by the Government, with £1 million already paid to the Cumbria Community Foundation for Storm Desmond.
- [10 January](#): Ministerial Flood Recovery Envoy for Yorkshire, Robert Goodwill announced an additional **£3.3 million** of funding for North Yorkshire County Council to repair and restore Tadcaster Bridge in North Yorkshire (£3m) and the construction of a temporary footbridge to serve the community while work is ongoing (£300,000).
- [17 January](#): Robert Goodwill announced an additional **£5.5 million** of funding to enable Calderdale Council to rebuild Elland Bridge in Calderdale, West Yorkshire (£5 million) and to build a temporary footbridge in the interim (£500,000).

Where applicable, the Government will apply the Barnett formula to this funding to determine how much the Devolved Administrations will receive and it is up to them as to how this money is spent (see section 4 below). Full details of these breakdowns have not yet been announced.

Support for households and businesses

The **Community Recovery Scheme**: The fund is worth about £100 million and will be administered by local authorities. It will provide local authorities with:

- over **£500 for each household** affected;
- **grants of up to £5000** to help households protect their homes from future flood damage; and
- funding equivalent to **£2500** to help each business affected; and fund the Farming Recovery Fund (see below).

Flood affected communities will not face Council Tax or business rate bills for the homes and businesses they have been displaced from.¹¹

Charities match funding

The Government has pledged to match funds raised any registered charities which are currently raising money for flood relief to benefit affected areas, up to £2 million. Match funding is available for [Storm Desmond](#) (£1 million following £1 million already paid to the Cumbria Community Foundation) and [Storm Eva](#) (up to £2 million). The deadline for applications is 5 February 2016.

Support for farmers

Farming Recovery Fund (part of the Community Recovery Scheme): grants **between £500 to £20,000** are available to farmers across Cumbria, Northumberland, Lancashire and Yorkshire who have been affected by flooding to help restore damaged agricultural land.

¹¹ DCLG press release, [Help with Council Tax and business rates for flood-hit communities](#), 8 December 2015 [accessed 19 January 2016]

To help those affected Natural England are temporarily lifted all the requirements that normally apply to Environmental Stewardship agreements and protected sites.¹²

The Rural Payments Agency also announced that it would not carry out inspections in the flooded areas and would make use of any flexibility in cross compliance and animal movement rules for affected farmers.¹³

2.3 How can people apply for funding?

Following the announcements of funding support for local communities, each relevant local authority is running its own assistance scheme and should be contacted directly to find out more information for local areas.

The **Floodline Service on 0345 988 1188** is also available to help people affected by the recent floods.

The relevant [guidance for households, businesses or farmers](#) should be read before using this service.

2.4 Review plans announced

The following national and local Cumbrian review plans were announced by the Secretary of State for Environment on 13 December:¹⁴

- a **National Flood Resilience Review** is taking place to better protect the country from future flooding and increasingly extreme weather events. The review will be published in summer 2016 and will be led by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Oliver Letwin. It will include input from Defra, DECC, DCLG, HMT, the Chief Executive of the Environment Agency and the Government's Chief Scientist.
- A new **Cumbrian Floods Partnership group** has also been formed to consider what improvements to flood defences in the region may be needed, look at upstream options for slowing key rivers to reduce the intensity of water flows at peak times and build stronger links between local residents, community groups and flood defence planning." The Group will publish a **Cumbria Action Plan** in summer 2016.

2.5 Flooding envoys

Flooding Minister Rory Stewart was appointed as Flooding Envoy for Cumbria, Lancashire and Northumberland to oversee the response in those areas.

¹² Defra press release, [Farming flood damage support announced](#), 9 December 2015 (announced by Natural England on 7 December) [accessed 19 January 2016]

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Defra, [A country more flood resilient](#), 13 December 2015 [accessed 19 January 2016]

Transport Minister Robert Goodwill was appointed by the Prime Minister as Flooding Envoy for Yorkshire to oversee the response in the county.

3. Commentary and debate during the floods

3.1 Labour

In the debate following the Storm Desmond flooding, Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Kerry McCarthy MP) flagged that while capital funding has been announced up to 2021, resource funding has only been announced for one year (2015/16):

I know that capital expenditure has been announced and is protected, but DEFRA has said that it cannot tell us about the resource funding for flood defence maintenance from 2016-17 to 2019-20 until next summer. I should be grateful if she elaborated on that and gave us a bit more information.

Will the Secretary of State heed the warnings from experts that we need year-on-year investment in flood defences to meet the increased threat of flooding?¹⁵

Kerry McCarthy also called on the Secretary of State to secure assurances that insurance companies will pay policy holders “promptly and in full” and for reassurances for people who fear their insurance premiums will increase even more.

Angela Smith MP asked for reassurance that the protected flood maintenance budget has adequate funding to start with and that the Environment Agency is adequately funded to discharge its role in relation to flood prevention and flood response. The Secretary of State responded that:

The budget is effective for the level of our plans at the moment.¹⁶

In the subsequent debate on Flooding on 6 January 2016, Kerry McCarthy criticised the Government for failing to prioritise flood prevention:

we cannot keep relying on emergency responses and on communities going above and beyond to help each other. There is a worrying air of complacency about the Government. Ministers have failed to prioritise flood prevention, despite the national security risk assessment citing flood risk as a tier 1 priority. We would not ignore experts’ warnings on terrorism or cyber-attacks, so why have the Government repeatedly disregarded expert advice on flooding?

The Committee on Climate Change gave flood adaptation a double-red warning and urged the Government to develop a strategy to protect the increasing number of homes that are at risk of flooding—sound advice that the Government inexplicably

¹⁵ HC Deb, 7 December 2015: [Col 712](#)

¹⁶ HC Deb, 7 December 2015: [Col 717](#)

rejected. People who have been forced out of their homes need to know why.¹⁷

3.2 Scottish National Party

Following Storm Desmond, Ian Blackford MP spoke on behalf of the SNP and called for the Government to do more to protect the environment – in particular to revisit the support that is being removed for offshore wind – and to do more to help poorer countries with the impact of climate change.¹⁸

In a later debate, Stuart Blair Donaldson MP urged the Government to make an application to the EU solidarity fund, stressing that the “money will still be useful seven months down the road”.¹⁹

3.3 Liberal Democrats

Following Storm Desmond, Tom Brake MP asked whether the Government intends to apply to the EU solidarity fund to help rebuild the communities devastated by floods once the immediate emergency has been dealt with.

See below for more information on the EU Solidarity Fund.

Following Storm Eva, Tim Farron MP pressed the Government on the costs of infrastructure loss and whole-system flood prevention measures:

The cost to Cumbria of infrastructure loss will be £500 million. Will the Government commit to fund every penny of that to make sure we get back on our feet? Will she commit to whole-system flood prevention measures, including the restoration of the River Kent flood defence scheme, which is currently shelved?²⁰

3.4 Select Committee scrutiny

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee held an oral evidence session on the winter floods 2015-16 on 11 January 2016, taking evidence from representatives from the flood hit communities in Cumbria and from the Environment Agency.²¹

The Chief Executive of the Environment Agency (Sir James Bevan) made the following comments about the challenges faced:

We face a very big challenge now in dealing with flooding in an era of more extreme weather, and the way to deal with big challenges is to deal with them together. I very much want to see the agency, under my leadership, ensure that we work in partnership with local communities, businesses, farmers and local

¹⁷ HC Deb, 6 January 2016: [Col 349](#)

¹⁸ HC Deb, 7 December 2015, [Col 714](#)

¹⁹ HC Deb, 6 January 2016, [Col 386](#)

²⁰ HC Deb, 5 Jan 2016, [Col 78](#)

²¹ Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee, [Oral evidence: Winter floods 2015-16](#), HC 666, Monday 11 January 2016

councils, because the best way to deal with a big problem is to deal with them together.²²

He also explained that the Environment Agency's role is about managing risk not preventing floods:

...we do need to be clear that there is no such thing as 100% protection against flood for everybody. We are in the territory of managing risk not preventing floods. I do not think we have yet managed to convey that message sufficiently. That is another task for me and the whole of the agency. Just because we cannot prevent all floods, it does not mean we should not try to lower the risk to the lowest possible level. One of the ways to do that is what we do in terms of building flood defences, warning and informing communities when they are at risk. Another part of the solution is for local communities, like the ones who were interviewed here this afternoon and others around the country, to take ownership of their own flood risk and work with us and the other actors on the local scene to manage that risk.²³

In relation to the effectiveness of the existing flood defences, the Chairman of the Environment Agency (Sir Philip Dilley) explained:

The story in many places is that the defences we had were tested beyond their design. Quite often, they were overtopped. They did not fail. They stayed there; they protected properties against flooding that would have occurred had they not been there; and, most importantly, they gave a lot more time to people to rescue precious possessions and get out. They undoubtedly saved lives.²⁴

On 11 January 2016, Sir Philip Dilley resigned from his post as Chairman of the Environment Agency.²⁵

3.5 Economic impact

A number of estimates have been made of the overall economic impact of the winter floods 2015-16.

On 11 December 2015, PwC's UK general insurance leader estimated that the floods caused by Storm Desmond would cost the economy "upwards of £500 million, with insurers facing costs between £250 million and £325 million."²⁶

On 28 December, KPMG confirmed an initial total cost estimate of £5 billion to £5.8 billion.²⁷ This was broken down into the following estimates:

²² [Oral evidence: Winter floods 2015-16](#), HC 666, Monday 11 January 2016, Q41

²³ *Ibid.*, Q57

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Q44

²⁵ Defra, [Environment Agency Chairman resigns](#), 11 January 2016 [accessed 20 January 2016]

²⁶ PwC, [Cost of climate change: Flooding and future risks for insurers](#), 11 December 2015 [accessed 21 January 2016]

²⁷ KPMG, [Flooding economic impact will breach £5bn](#), 28 December 2015 [accessed 21 January 2016]

- Insured losses £1-£1.5bn
- Under insurance (limits on insurance policies being inadequate for covering full loss) £1 bn
- Local authority and infrastructure costs £0.5bn-0.75bn
- Business loss funding gap £50m-£100m
- Flood defence repair and replacement £2bn
- Change to insurance industry business model £0.5bn

3.6 EU Solidarity Fund

A number of calls have been made for the Government to apply to the EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF) for assistance with the winter floods 2015-16. The [EU Solidarity Fund](#) was set up to provide financial assistance to EU countries struck by major natural disasters. It can provide financial aid if total direct damage caused by a disaster exceeds €3 billion (at 2011 prices) or 0.6 % of the country's gross national income, whichever is lower. Although major disasters are the main focus, help is also available for more limited regional disasters, for which the eligibility threshold is 1.5 % of the region's gross domestic product.

When the 2007 floods hit, the UK was granted EUR 162.3 million from the fund.²⁸ However, due to the way the UK's EU budget rebate is calculated, the net value to the UK of any receipts from the EUSF is considerably lower than the gross payment. In 2007, the Commission agreed to pay £110m to assist with flood recovery, but the net value of this to the UK was only £31m.

Further detail is provided in a Written Statement made by John Healey, then Minister for Local Government, on 8 May 2008.²⁹

A [PQ](#) (20403) was answered on this topic by the Floods Minister Rory Stewart on 5 January 2016 as follows:

We will consider all forms of support for those affected by the recent floods.

However, the EU Solidarity Fund would not compensate for private losses. It would take several months to receive the majority of the funds and only provides for a fraction of the total costs of assessed damage. The Government is not ruling this out, but we need to act quickly and our immediate priority is to deal with the urgent needs of those affected.

This is why the Government has opened the Bellwin scheme for Local Authorities affected by floods, with 100% of eligible costs to be met by the Government.

On top of this, the Government is providing nearly £200 million of additional aid to support those affected by the floods in England.

²⁸ [EU Solidarity Fund Interventions since 2002](#), last updated 10 July 2015 [accessed 19 January 2016]

²⁹ HC Deb 6 May 2008 [Col 18WS](#)

On 14 January 2016, Lord Gardiner of Kimble (spokesman for Defra in the Lords) provided the following response to the question of whether the Government will be applying to the EUSF for assistance:

The noble Baroness, Lady Parminter, asked about the EU Solidarity Fund and I will write more fully to her on that. However, the UK taxpayer would still pay for the majority of the funds received, because we would pay more into the EU budget and it would reduce our rebate. We feel that we needed to act quickly; the support packages we have already announced are designed to deal with the urgent needs of those affected.³⁰

3.7 Building on flood plains

A number of calls have also been made on the Government to review the policy on where houses are built in the future, in particular whether they can be built in flood plains. In response to such a call during a debate, the Secretary of State stated:

The Communities Secretary is here and I am sure he will take those points on board. The national planning policy framework makes it very clear that inappropriate development on floodplains should be avoided, but ultimately this is a decision for local people to make, as is the case throughout the planning system.³¹

A PQ ([HL4739](#)) on this topic was answered on 7 January 2016 and stated that 99% of proposed new housing had planning outcomes in line with Environment Agency advice:

This Government takes flood prevention extremely seriously and we are investing £2.3 billion in flood defences over the next six years, as well as protecting flood maintenance spending in real terms over this Parliament. We have put in place strong safeguards to stop inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding, and are delivering the homes this country needs by taking forward plans to build homes on suitable brownfield land.

The Environment Agency provides advice on whether or not to grant permission, with latest figures showing 99% of proposed new homes had planning outcomes in line with their advice, but final decisions rest with local authorities. The Department does not collect figures for the numbers of homes for which planning permission for building on a flood plain has been granted.

The Government's [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) and the accompanying [Technical Guidance to the National Planning Policy Framework](#) set tests and thresholds to protect property from flooding which all local planning authorities (LPAs) are expected to follow. Where these tests/thresholds are not met, new development should not be allowed. The NPPF specifically [states](#) that:

³⁰ HL Deb 14 January 2016: [Col 452](#)

³¹ HC Deb 5 Jan 2016: [Col 78](#)

Inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk, but where development is necessary, making it safe without increasing flood risk elsewhere.

The Environment Agency is a consultee to the LPA on all non-minor planning applications within Flood Zones 2 and 3 and also for anything greater than 1ha in Flood Zone 1. In addition to this it is a consultee for sites that are less than 1ha in Flood Zone 1, and are located in an area identified as having critical drainage problems. It is also a statutory consultee for applications for prior approval for some change of use. All planning applications for Flood Zones 2 and 3 development should be accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) prepared by the applicant. The Environment Agency produces [guidance](#) about what sorts of factors should be considered in a FRA for different sizes of development in these zones. For planning purposes the Environment Agency (EA) produces a [Flood Map for Planning \(from Rivers and the Sea\)](#).

For further commentary and assessment on this topic, the Committee on Climate Change Adaptation Sub-Committee published its [Progress in preparing for climate change 2015 Report](#) to Parliament in June 2015, in which it assessed the progress being made on the actions and policies in the national adaptation plan and elsewhere to address identified climate risks. One of these is to avoid inappropriate development in flood risk areas.

3.8 Dredging on farmland

Proposed changes have recently been announced to the rules relating to dredging on farmland. On 6 January, the Secretary of State, Elizabeth Truss, made a speech at the Oxford Farming Conference in which she announced proposed changes to the rules relating to dredging on farmland:

Subject to parliamentary approval, we will also allow farmers across the country to maintain ditches up to 1.5km long from April, so they can dredge and clear debris and manage the land to stop it getting waterlogged. This follows the successful pilots we started two years ago. We will also soon announce proposals to give internal drainage boards and other groups more power to maintain local watercourses.

Our reforms will also help farmers by getting rid of unnecessary red tape. It will become simpler to apply for permits. We will cut thousands more inspections with the Single Farm Inspection Task Force.³²

³² Defra, [Environment Minister addresses the Oxford Farming Conference](#), 6 January 2016 [accessed 21 January 2016]

A PQ ([21154](#)) answered by Rory Stewart on 13 January 2016 confirms that this exemption is due to be part of the new Environmental Permitting Regulations for flood risk activities planned for April 2016.

4. Devolved administrations

Flooding is a devolved matter and each administration has different systems and policies in place to manage flooding. A brief summary of the responses to the winter floods 2015-16 in each devolved administration is set out below.

4.1 Scotland

The [Scottish Environmental Protection Agency](#) (SEPA) is the flood warning authority in Scotland which provides [live flooding information](#) and advice on how to prepare for and cope with the impacts of flooding.

A number of flood warnings were put in place in southern Scotland over the course of impacts of Storm Desmond. About 600 homes in the Borders town of Hawick were evacuated over the weekend after the River Teviot burst its banks and the Nith flooded in Dumfries. Storm Frank

On 7 December, the Bellwin Scheme was triggered in Scotland to fund emergency repair work as a result of Storm Desmond.³³ It was extended on 30 December 2015 as a result of Storm Frank.³⁴

On 23 December, Environment Minister Dr Aileen McLeod confirmed that the [Scottish Government's draft budget for 2016-17](#) maintains provision for funding flood protection schemes.³⁵

Deputy First Minister John Swinney announced in the Scottish Draft Budget 2016-17 an **additional £3.94 million** for the local authority areas affected most by recent flooding in Hawick, Newcastleton, Dumfries, Alyth and other localities to help with recovery and to help households and businesses access the support they need. This was received by the Scottish Government as a result of the Barnett Formula from the UK Government. Of this, Scottish Border Council will receive £1.94m as it suffered the most severe impacts from Storm Desmond, while Perth and Kinross will receive £1.2m in recognition of the impact both of Storm Desmond and the extensive scale of the significant damage suffered in Alyth earlier this year, Dumfries and Galloway will receive £700k, with Stirling Council receiving £60k and South Lanarkshire Council £40k.³⁶

On 9 January 2016, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced additional funding of **£12 million** to help areas affected by severe weather across Scotland. This includes £5.8 million for households and businesses affected by the flooding; capital funding of up to £5 million will also be

³³ Scottish Government, [DFM triggers Bellwin Scheme](#), 7 December 2015 [accessed 21 January 2016]

³⁴ Scottish Government, [DFM triggers Bellwin Scheme](#), 30 December 2015 [accessed 21 January 2016]

³⁵ Scottish Government, [Climate change flood risk](#), 23 December 2015 [accessed 21 January 2016]

³⁶ Ibid.

made available to Local Authorities to replace infrastructure severely damaged by flood waters – including support for the reinstatement of the A93 between Ballater and Braemar; and an Agricultural Floodbank Restoration Grant Scheme of up to £1 million.³⁷

On 12 January 2016, the Scottish Government called for the UK Government to access the EU Solidarity Fund.³⁸

More information on flooding in Scotland is available in the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) Briefing on [Flooding Frequently Asked Questions](#).

4.2 Wales

[Natural Resources Wales](#) is the flood warning authority which provides latest information and advice on flooding across Wales.

On 5 January, the First Minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones, pledged £2.3 million to support communities in Wales at risk of flooding.³⁹ This is in addition to £1 million that has been made available to local authorities for immediate repairs.⁴⁰ He stated:

The additional £2.3 million investment I'm announcing today builds on the £1 million we made available last week to local authorities for immediate repairs and maintenance to ensure homes and properties remain resilient.

It's important to remember that since 2011 we've committed almost £300m, including European funding, to managing flood risk and an additional £150m will be invested in coastal risk management from 2018.⁴¹

4.3 Northern Ireland

Flooding is a devolved matter and the latest flooding information and advice for Northern Ireland can be found on [nidirect government services website](#).

Storm Desmond caused flooding in Northern Ireland, in particular in Counties Tyrone and Fermanagh. The [BBC reported](#) that the largest rainfall totals were recorded in Fermanagh - Derrylin had 117.8mm which is just under five inches and more than half of this fell in a 24-hour period.

³⁷ Scottish Government, [Financial help for flooded communities](#), 9 January 2016 [accessed 21 January 2016]

³⁸ Scottish Government, [Call for Euro flood aid](#), 12 January 2016 [accessed 21 January 2016]

³⁹ ITV news, [First Minister pledges £2.3 million for flood protection across Wales](#), 5 January 2016 [accessed 20 January 2016]

⁴⁰ South Wales Evening Post, [Welsh Government announces extra £1 million for 'immediate' flood repairs](#), 29 December 2015 [accessed 20 January 2016]

⁴¹ Ibid.

Following the Storm Desmond flooding, Stormont's Environment Minister Mark H Durkan activated emergency payments of £1,000 for householders affected by heavy rainfall and flooding. He stated:

Following recent incidents of flooding, individual householders who have suffered severe inconvenience can claim £1,000 payment from their local council, as an offer of practical assistance. The payment is meant to ensure that homes are made habitable as quickly as possible. It is not a compensation payment.⁴²

⁴² Northern Ireland Executive, [Emergency payment scheme in place – Durkan](#), 30 December 2015 [accessed 20 January 2016]

5. Further reading

5.1 Parliamentary material

- For further background information, please refer to the Library Briefing Paper on [Flood defence spending in England](#).
- For further background information on the Bellwin Scheme, please refer to the [Library Briefing Paper on the Bellwin Scheme](#).
- A summary of the Government's response to the winter floods 2013/14 is available in the Library Briefing Paper on [Winter Floods 2013/14](#).
- The Committee of Public Accounts Report on [Strategic Flood Risk Management](#).
- The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee's Report on the [Winter Floods 2013-14](#); and the subsequent [Government Response](#).
- An [Opposition Day Debate on Climate Change and Flooding](#) was held on 15 December 2015. The [Library Debate Pack](#) provides further background information.
- The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Elizabeth Truss, made a further [statement on Flooding and the impact of Storm Eva](#) on 5 January 2016.
- A further [Opposition Day Debate on Flooding](#) was held on 6 January 2016.
- A Westminster Hall Debate on [Support for Local Authorities following Storm Eva](#) was held on 20 January 2016.

5.2 Reports on flooding

- Dieter Helm, [Flood defence: time for a radical rethink](#), 5 January 2016
- UK Water Partnership, [Droughts and floods: towards a more holistic approach](#), July 2015
- National Audit Office, [Strategic Flood Risk Management](#) November 2014

- CIWEM, [*Floods and Dredging – a reality check*](#), February 2014

5.3 Further reading on flood insurance

More background information on Flood Re is available in the [Library Briefing Paper on Flood insurance](#).

The Association of British Insurers has published a leaflet [*Responding to Major Floods*](#) (January 2015) which sets out what homeowners can expect from their insurance company when their home has been flooded.

Flood Re is expected to be operational from April 2016. Defra has published a [short guide to Flood Re](#).

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