



BRIEFING PAPER

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Autumn and winter floods 2019-20

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Summary

In the autumn and winter of 2019-20, heavy rainfall and storms led to flooding in various parts of the UK. This led to homes being evacuated, transport disruption and loss of life. In some places, pumps were set up to reduce water levels, and in certain instances the military were called in to assist. The Environment Agency said in March 2020 that 127,000 properties had been protected by flood defences over the course of the winter.

After severe flooding in northern areas of England in November, rivers were expected to respond quickly to any future rainfall with so much water remaining in river catchments. Further flooding occurred in the south of England in December 2019, and Storms Ciara and Dennis brought substantial damage in February 2020 to areas including the Pennines and counties either side of the England/Wales border.

Estimates have put expected insurance payouts as a result of the flooding in the hundreds of millions of pounds. The Government made several announcements of support for those affected, including activating the Bellwin Scheme and the Flood Recovery Framework.

Parliament was not sitting when the November flooding began, and initial reactions to the severe weather events played out against the backdrop of the general election campaign. Some parties called on the Government to declare a “national emergency” and criticised levels of investment in flood risk management, while other commentators suggested that dredging rivers of silt would have reduced the risk. When Parliament returned, a number of statements and debates were held in relation to the floods, while issues including insurance and planning received renewed attention.

The Government currently has a six-year capital investment programme worth £2.6 billion in flood and coastal erosion risk management (FCERM), which runs from 2015 to 2021. A section of the paper outline current flood investment spending.

This paper provides an outline of the flood events in the autumn and winter of 2019-20 in the context of earlier extreme weather, and refers to some initial assessments of the impact of the flooding. It also summarises the various support measures announced by the Government, and political and stakeholder reactions. A list of suggested further reading is provided at the end of the paper.

1. The flooding as it happened

1.1 Background

The summer of 2019 saw significant rainfall, with the Met Office ranking it as the seventh wettest summer overall in the UK since 1910.¹ Further rainfall and storms in the autumn and winter of 2019/20 resulted in soils being saturated and catchments more vulnerable to further flooding.

The autumn/winter floods were not the first in the 2019 to receive national attention. Some major examples of earlier floods in 2019 are given below, although a wide range of areas experienced flooding that year.

Between 10 and 12 June, two and a half times the monthly average rainfall fell in Lincolnshire, which led to the River Steeping breaking its banks. On 30 July, 112 mm of rain fell in Yorkshire in three hours, twice the average total rainfall for July. Roads and bridges were damaged, resulting in travel disruption.² On 1 August, heavy rainfall led to the spillway of Toddbrook Reservoir in Derbyshire experiencing damage, and 1,500 people were evacuated from Whaley Bridge until the authorities could be assured there was no ongoing risk.³

In October, flooding affected counties around the West Midlands and the border between England and Wales. Properties including a care home were evacuated in Hereford as the River Wye reportedly reached record levels, and on 29 October the BBC reported that the entire English stretch of the River Severn was “covered by flood warnings” affecting Shropshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire.⁴ In November, levels in the River Witham in Lincolnshire were the highest ever recorded, while the entire month’s average rainfall in the county fell in the first two weeks.⁵

1.2 November floods

On 7 and 8 November 2019 South Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire and Derbyshire were affected by a slow-moving weather front, which remained static for 24 hours, leading to heavy rainfall. This resulted in already full rivers overtopping their banks and flooding low-lying areas.⁶ In numerous places across the North and Midlands, flooding forced the closure of railway lines and stations, while parts of

¹ Met Office, [Summer 2019 climate statistics: largely warm and wet](#), 2 September 2019

² GOV.UK, [Farming Recovery Fund 2019: Wainfleet and North Yorkshire](#) [accessed 29 November 2019]

³ [HCWS1808](#) [on Flooding over the summer and Reservoir Review], 3 September 2019

⁴ BBC News, [Midlands flood warnings in place after weekend rain](#), 28 October 2019; idem., [Flood warnings span England stretch of the River Severn](#), 29 October 2019

⁵ GOV.UK, [Environment Agency calls for communities along the River Witham to sign up for flood warnings](#), 20 November 2019

⁶ GOV.UK, [Farming Recovery Fund 2019 Extension](#) [accessed 6 January 2020]

major roads were also closed.⁷ It was reported that one person died near Matlock in Derbyshire.⁸

The Environment Agency stated on 8 November that there were six severe flood warnings in South Yorkshire with a threat to life, 75 flood warnings and 103 flood alerts (see Box 1).⁹

Subsequently, the Environment Agency stated on 11 November that river levels were starting to fall or stabilise in South Yorkshire, but the flood risk was still “significant” with the River Don experiencing high flows and further rainfall expected. The Agency summarised aspects of the immediate response:

A high-volume pump has been deployed to Fishlake to reduce water levels. In Lincolnshire, flood storage areas are being operated to protect 7,000 homes from the risk of flooding. An RAF Chinook helicopter was also deployed on Sunday 10 November to reinforce flood banks with aggregate in the Bentley lngs area of Doncaster.¹⁰

Box 1: Flood warnings

The [GOV.UK flood information service](#) for England uses three types of warnings. Brief definitions are given below.

Severe flood warnings: severe flooding; danger to life.

Flood warnings: flooding is expected; immediate action required.

Flood alerts: flooding is possible; be prepared.

People can use this service to keep up to date with the latest situation, call Floodline on 0345 988 1188 or follow [@EnvAgency](#) on Twitter.

Exceptional rainfall from 13-15 November 2019 led the River Avon to overtop flood banks and flood agricultural land in Worcestershire and Gloucestershire. River levels on the Avon at Evesham were the fifth highest since 1938 and the highest since 2012.¹¹

In an update on 14 November, the Agency stated that 38 pumps had been set up across South Yorkshire, including at eight separate locations in the Fishlake area, which had helped to reduce water levels in the village from 2 metres to 0.3 metres.¹² By 19 November, all properties in Fishlake were free of flood water, and the Environment Agency stated in relation to the overall situation:

While the flood risk is reducing across most of the country, with so much water remaining in river catchments, rivers are expected to respond quickly to any future rainfall. There may be ongoing minor river flooding impacts into tomorrow.¹³

The Met Office’s review of the year (published 23 December) stated that South Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire broke autumn rainfall records in 2019, with a wet summer meaning that rain was falling on already wet ground.¹⁴

⁷ BBC News, [Sheffield flooding: Torrential rain leaves city flooded](#), 8 November 2019

⁸ *The Independent*, [Woman killed in floods named as former High Sheriff of Derbyshire](#), 9 November 2019

⁹ GOV.UK, [Environment Agency working day and night to reduce flood impact](#), 8 November 2019

¹⁰ GOV.UK, [Environment Agency helping to keep communities safe from flooding](#), 11 November 2019

¹¹ GOV.UK, [Farming Recovery Fund 2019 Extension](#) [accessed 6 January 2020]

¹² GOV.UK, [Pumping operation continues to reduce flood water levels in Fishlake](#), 14 November 2019

¹³ GOV.UK, [Environment Agency teams help flooded communities recover](#), 19 November 2019

¹⁴ Met Office, [2019: A year in review](#), 23 December 2019

1.3 December floods

As mentioned, rivers were expected to respond quickly to any future rainfall with so much water remaining in river catchments. The UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) published its monthly hydrological summary on 13 December 2019, in which it noted that “the saturated soils and seasonal outlook for continued wet weather implies that there is a continued risk of flooding over the coming months in many parts of the UK”.¹⁵

The Met Office warned on 18 December 2019 that bands of heavy rain would push across southern parts of the UK, with flooding impacts “quite likely”.¹⁶ On 19 December, it was reported that 18 flood warnings were in place across England, mainly across the South, South West and River Severn. Hampshire, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall were among those places affected.¹⁷ The following day, it was reported that flooding had disrupted roads and trains in Kent, Surrey and Sussex.¹⁸ “Prolonged downpours” on Boxing Day subsequently led the Environment Agency to warn of flooding in 30 areas, with North Lincolnshire “particularly at risk” and pumping to reduce water levels on Curry Moor in Somerset.¹⁹

Ahead of the New Year, the Environment Agency said that weather conditions were expected to be drier and “the overall flood risk remains low”, although groundwater levels were high in parts of Dorset, Wiltshire, Hampshire and West Sussex.²⁰ In mid-January multiple flood warnings were in place across the UK as Storm Brendan made landfall.²¹

The CEH’s next monthly summary was published on 13 January 2020, and stated that the December flooding had resulted in 90 properties being flooded but “over 18,000 protected by defences across England”. Looking forward, the CEH noted that “high river flows, saturated soils, an early start to the recharge season and exceptionally high groundwater levels increase the risk of further fluvial and groundwater flooding over the coming months”.²²

1.4 Storms Ciara and Dennis

Following Storm Brendan, Storm Ciara was the third named storm of the 2019/2020 season. It swept across the whole of the UK on Sunday

¹⁵ UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, [Hydrological Summary for the United Kingdom](#), 13 December 2019, p. 1

¹⁶ Met Office, [Heavy rain ahead of Christmas week](#), 18 December 2019

¹⁷ BBC News, [Flooding shuts roads and blocks rail lines in south of England](#), 19 December 2019

¹⁸ BBC News, [Flooding brings travel disruption across south east of England](#), 20 December 2019

¹⁹ *The Guardian*, [UK weather: floods close Devon roads as groundwater levels rise](#), 27 December 2019

²⁰ GOV.UK, [Flood risk: Drier conditions expected but river levels stay high](#), updated 31 December 2019

²¹ BBC News, [UK weather: Storm Brendan brings rain and 80mph gusts](#), 14 January 2020

²² UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, [Hydrological Summary for the United Kingdom](#), 13 January, p. 1

9 February bringing heavy rain and very strong winds. According to the Met Office, the areas worst affected by flooding were across the Pennines. In West Yorkshire, properties were flooded in the Calder valley including Mytholmroyd and Hebden Bridge, which was previously severely flooded in December 2015. Flooding also affected the Yorkshire Dales and Cumbria. The average rainfall for the whole month, or more, fell in some locations, notably around Kendal and the areas worst affected by flooding in West Yorkshire.²³

The following weekend (15-16 February), Storm Dennis brought more rainfall and flooding. South Wales, Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire were worst affected by flooding and major incidents declared. The River Wye and River Severn were reported to have reached their highest-ever levels. According to the Met Office, the Environment Agency issued over 600 flood warnings and alerts including several severe flood warnings. A woman was swept away by floodwater in Worcestershire and over 1,400 homes and businesses were flooded across several counties.²⁴ In Wales, landslides led to concerns about legacy coal tips, with First Minister Mark Drakeford agreeing with the UK Government to "urgently assess the safety of tips" and ensure they are "properly inspected and monitored".²⁵

Storm Jorge subsequently impacted the UK from 28 February to 1 March. The Environment Agency reportedly said that further floods were expected in parts of the West Midlands but they would be "less extreme" than those previously seen along the Severn.²⁶ As of 6 March, the Environment Agency and Defra said that heavy rainfall was expected and renewed flooding could take place in the south east:

The Environment Agency reminds communities to check their flood risk and remain prepared ahead of expected spells of heavy rainfall this weekend and into next week. Flooding impacts are anticipated due to existing high river levels making catchments sensitive to any rainfall.

Ongoing flooding impacts are expected to affect the lower River Aire washlands in Yorkshire into next week. Localised flooding will also continue along parts of the River Severn into next week. Further minor river flooding impacts continue in the south-east today (6 March) and into tomorrow following heavy rainfall yesterday. With more rain to come, there is potential for renewed flooding in the south-east from Sunday into early next week.²⁷

The Met Office said on 2 March that February 2020 had been the wettest February on record for UK, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the second wettest (behind February 1990) for Scotland. It

²³ Met Office, [Storm Ciara](#), updated 10 February 2020

²⁴ Met Office, [Storm Dennis](#), updated 20 February 2020

²⁵ BBC News, [Flooding: Former Wales coal tips being checked amid landslide fears](#), 25 February 2020

²⁶ BBC News, [Storm Jorge: New floods 'won't be as extreme'](#), 1 March 2020

²⁷ GOV.UK, [Flood risk begins to recede but public are warned to be vigilant](#), updated 6 March 2020

had also been the fifth wettest of any calendar month in a series from 1862.²⁸

1.5 Impacts

The *Guardian* reported on 14 November that at least 1,758 properties had been flooded across Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire, citing local authorities' estimates, which exceeded an estimate of 830 properties which the newspaper quoted from the Environment Agency.²⁹ South Yorkshire's Community Foundation said on the web page for its flood disaster relief appeal that over 1,000 households had been affected.³⁰

As an example of the costs to local authorities, Derbyshire County Council estimated in December 2019 that the cost of repairing roads damaged by the flooding could be more than £20 million, higher than its annual road maintenance budget.³¹

The Association of British Insurers (ABI) estimated on 27 November that insurance payouts would reach £110 million for the damage to that date:

Initial ABI estimates show:

- So far just over 4,000 (4,039) flood claims have been received: 2250 of these relate to flooded homes and businesses; 1788 to damaged vehicles.
- Of the estimated £110 million payouts, £45 million covers damaged homes and possessions; £58 million for business property and stock, with £7.5 million relating to damaged vehicles.
- The average household flood claim is likely to be around £31,000, and £70,000 for a flooded business. This compares to the average claim across all insured risks of £2,200 under a home insurance policy and an average claim of £11,500 on a commercial policy.³²

Mohammad Khan, general insurance leader at PwC, said that the insurance industry was "much better prepared in helping affected policyholders quickly in dealing with this extreme weather" due to the number of significant flooding events since 2007. Mr Khan said that most policyholders could see "a modest increase in price" and pointed to the effect of the Flood Re reinsurance initiative.³³

On 20 February, Mr Khan was quoted as estimating insurance losses of £150-200 million for Storm Ciara, and £175-225 million for Storm

²⁸ Met Office, [Record breaking rainfall](#), 2 March 2020

²⁹ *The Guardian*, [Council leaders demand huge funding rise after floods](#), 14 November 2019

³⁰ SYCF, [South Yorkshire Flood Disaster Relief Appeal Fund](#) [accessed 2 December 2019]

³¹ Derbyshire County Council, [Floods cause £20 million damage to Derbyshire roads](#), 19 December 2019

³² ABI, [Yorkshire and Midlands flood damage payouts set to top £100 million says the ABI](#), 27 November 2019

³³ PwC, [Flooding in the North of England and the associated insurance costs: PwC comments](#), 13 November 2019

Dennis, although he cautioned that “it is still very early to assess the full impact of the severe weather”. He noted that “clearly there has been far more flood damage from Storm Dennis compared to Storm Ciara – which was mainly wind damage”.³⁴

For more information on insurance see section 4.3 below.

³⁴ *City AM*, [Storm Dennis and Storm Ciara could cost insurance industry £425m](#), 20 February 2020

2. Government support for flood-hit areas

The Government announced several support measures after the floods began. This section describes the “on-the-ground” operational response as well as various financial assistance schemes, which are in addition to existing Government funding for flood risk management (see section 4.2 below).

2.1 Operational response

November floods

The Environment Agency undertook a response on the ground, including pumping flood water as described in section 1.2 above. A news page was created on GOV.UK which was regularly updated to provide information on the response. It stated that around 22,000 properties had been protected by flood defences in England since the flooding began, including nearly 7,000 properties in Yorkshire. Environment Agency engineers were inspecting, and where necessary repairing, flood defences, while specialist teams were flying aeroplanes with LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) technology to scan and map the affected areas.³⁵

In addition, Royal Air Force Chinook helicopters were called in to assist a pumping station near Doncaster by dropping 40 tonnes of aggregate to ensure flood defences could function, and troops were deployed to South Yorkshire to assist civilian authorities.³⁶ Government departments or local authorities may call upon the armed forces for assistance in the UK for a wide-range of tasks. Ministerial approval is needed except when life is considered to be immediately at risk. More information can be found in Library briefing paper [Military Aid to the Civil Authorities](#) (CBP 08074, 18 August 2017).

Storms Ciara and Dennis

On 24 February Environment Secretary George Eustice summarised the operational response to Storms Ciara and Dennis:

We have been sharing information with the public so that people can prepare for flooding wherever they live. We have deployed over 3 miles of temporary flood barriers and 90 mobile pumps, and we have been keeping structures and rivers clear of debris. Over 1,000 Environment Agency staff per day have been deployed, with the assistance of about 80 military personnel. In Yorkshire, the military helped to deploy temporary defences in Ilkley and kept the road open between Mytholmroyd and Hebden Bridge in Calderdale. I would like to record my thanks to all the response teams, including the Environment Agency, local authorities, our emergency services and the military. They are all

³⁵ GOV.UK, [Flooding in England](#), 26 November 2019

³⁶ GOV.UK, [200 UK troops deploy to support flood relief](#), 13 November 2019

still working hard, with over 20 Government bodies, local authorities and volunteers at work across the country.³⁷

Following the storms, evacuations took place in various places, including Ironbridge (Shropshire), Bewdley (Worcestershire) and Snaith and East Cowick (East Yorkshire).³⁸

Since the start of Storm Dennis, up to 1,000 Environment Agency staff per day were mobilised on the ground to issue flood warnings, operate flood defences and temporary pumps, clear debris from rivers, inspect damaged flood defences and make repairs. Pumping was taking place on the Lower Aire and Lower Ouse, as well as at East Cowick. In the West Midlands, repairs were completed to the flood barriers deployed at Beales Corner, Bewdley and Ironbridge.³⁹

On 2 March 2020 the Environment Agency said that 127,000 properties had been protected by flood defences over the course of the winter.⁴⁰

2.2 Bellwin scheme

The Bellwin scheme is an emergency measures scheme in which local authorities dealing with the flooding can apply to have 100% of the eligible costs they incur, above a threshold, reimbursed by the government. Press releases accompanying the activation of the Bellwin scheme during the 2019/20 floods said costs could be for items including rest centres, temporary accommodation and staff overtime.

For more information see the [Library briefing paper on the Bellwin scheme](#) (CBP 643, December 2019).

On 9 November 2019, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced that it had activated the Bellwin scheme for local authorities dealing with flooding in Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.⁴¹

Following Storm Ciara, on 10 February 2020, MHCLG said that the Bellwin scheme had been activated for qualifying areas in West Yorkshire, Cumbria and Lancashire.⁴² Following Storm Dennis, the scheme was activated for areas in Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, Worcestershire and Herefordshire on 17 February 2020.⁴³

2.3 Flood Recovery Framework

The Government's Flood Recovery Framework is a package of support for the recovery efforts of local councils where households and

³⁷ HC Deb 24 Feb 2020, [c51-54](#)

³⁸ BBC News, [Ironbridge flooding: Emergency evacuation as defences 'overwhelmed'](#), 26 February 2020

³⁹ GOV.UK, [Flood risk begins to recede but public are warned to be vigilant](#), updated 2 March 2020

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ GOV.UK, [Government activates Bellwin scheme to support local communities hit by flooding](#), 9 November 2019

⁴² GOV.UK, [Jenrick activates emergency Bellwin Scheme for storm-hit areas](#), 10 February 2020

⁴³ GOV.UK, [Bellwin Scheme activated in storm-hit areas](#), 17 February 2020

businesses have been affected by the severe weather. Individuals should contact their local authority to find out about available support.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published general [guidance on the Flood Recovery Framework](#) in December 2017. This provides some information on eligibility, but also refers to the discretion of local authorities. The relevant section in the full document should be consulted for more information.

During the 2019-20 floods, the Flood Recovery Framework was activated on 12 November following a COBRA (Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms A) meeting chaired by Prime Minister Boris Johnson.⁴⁴ It was again triggered on 18 February 2020, to apply to district or unitary authorities that had 25 or more flooded households as a result of Storms Ciara and Dennis.⁴⁵

On both occasions, the Framework included the following measures:

- A **Community Recovery Grant** from MHCLG to local councils, equivalent to £500 per eligible household, to help communities with their immediate recovery.
- The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) would provide funding for a **Business Recovery Grant**, providing up to £2,500 per eligible small and medium-sized business which had suffered severe impacts from the floods that cannot be recovered from insurance.
- Households and businesses which had been significantly affected by the flooding would be eligible for **100% relief on their council tax and business rates** for at least 3 months.

The Government stated that the measure would mean a homeowner in a Band D property in Doncaster could see a saving of over £400 over 3 months.⁴⁶

- A national **Flood Recovery Taskforce** was established to provide individual areas with bespoke support and guidance.⁴⁷

The first meeting on 14 November was attended by Ministers and representatives from local councils and some Local Resilience Forums. Recovery Liaison Officers were also deployed to the most intensely affected local authorities to work closely with councils and Local Resilience Forums.⁴⁸

Following the February activation of the Framework, the Government said that the Taskforce brought together environment, businesses and transport ministers.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ GOV.UK, [Government announces further support for those affected by flooding](#), 12 November 2019

⁴⁵ GOV.UK,

⁴⁶ GOV.UK, [Government announces business rates and council tax relief following severe flooding](#), 15 November 2019

⁴⁷ GOV.UK, [Government announces further support for those affected by flooding](#), 12 November 2019

⁴⁸ GOV.UK, [Government announces business rates and council tax relief following severe flooding](#), 15 November 2019

⁴⁹ GOV.UK, [Major package of support for storm-hit areas](#), 18 February 2020

With regard to the tax/rate relief, Derbyshire Dales District Council on 11 December provided the following information about eligibility (although it noted that it was at that point awaiting further details from the Government on how the measures would be rolled out):

Eligibility is restricted to residents who were unable to return to their primary residence as a result of flood water entering the building or where flood water, in the opinion of the local authority, made their property unliveable for any period of time.

In the case of businesses, eligibility depends on whether the property was directly impacted by the floods in terms of flood damage, equipment, and/or stock; or the business could not function due to lack of access to premises, equipment and/or stock as a result of the floods, and no alternatives were available.

The rateable value of the business needs to be less than £10 million.⁵⁰

Other measures under the Framework

The 2017 guidance from MHCLG specifies the Community and Business Recovery Grants, and the Council Tax and Business Rate relief schemes, as the “core package” of the Flood Recovery Framework. With regard to “non-core schemes” the document states:

Wider recovery support may also be made available alongside the core package above. This will be decided at the time of the event, and could include for example more sector specific support, funding towards infrastructure repairs, and/or property level resilience (PLR) schemes to improve resilience to future flooding. Separate guidance will be provided by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) setting out the framework for a PLR scheme.⁵¹

During a Westminster Hall debate on the flooding in South Yorkshire (held on 30 January 2020), Defra Minister Rebecca Pow said that “the flood recovery package includes six grants”: these were the four schemes described in the guidance, plus the Farming Recovery Fund and the Property Flood Resilience Scheme.⁵² The next two sections provide more detail on these schemes.

2.4 Property Flood Resilience Scheme

Defra announced on 19 November 2019 that homes and businesses seriously affected by the flooding would be eligible for grants of up to £5,000 to help pay for a range of property improvements against future flooding. The grants were to be made available through local authorities from the end of November onwards.⁵³ During the Westminster Hall debate on flooding in South Yorkshire (30 January), Defra Minister

⁵⁰ Derbyshire Dales District Council, [Business rates and council tax relief following floods](#), 11 December 2019

⁵¹ DCLG, Flood recovery framework: guidance for local authorities in England, December 2017, paras 2.1-2.3

⁵² HC Deb 30 Jan 2020, [c395-6WH](#)

⁵³ GOV.UK, [Government announces grants to help protect properties from flooding](#), 19 November 2019

Rebecca Pow said that eligible local authorities would be those with more than 25 houses affected.⁵⁴

Bassetlaw District Council (in Nottinghamshire) has published [guidance from Defra for local authorities](#) which provides more detailed information on the November 2019 scheme. Properties must have been severely damaged by a flood event between 8 November and 18 November 2019 to be eligible. All local authority claims for grants they have issued must be submitted to Defra by 26 February 2021.⁵⁵ The Council itself provides [information for applicants](#).

Subsequently, on 18 February, further resilience grants were announced as the Flood Recovery Framework was activated following Storms Ciara and Dennis.⁵⁶ These measures would apply to those affected in district or unitary authorities that have 25 or more flooded households as a result of Storms Ciara and Dennis.

Box 2 includes more information on property-level resilience measures.

Box 2: What is property-level flood resilience?

Property-level resilience measures, such as installing flood doors or raising electrics above ground level, are intended to enable properties to become more protected from flooding in future. A lack of uptake and consumer confidence in these measures has been highlighted in the past.

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan (January 2018) included an action to support the development of a voluntary code of practice on property-level flood resilience by the construction and insurance sector, to encourage consumers and businesses to make properties more flood resilient.⁵⁷ In February 2020, a new [industry-led code of practice](#) was launched, funded by Aviva and the UK and devolved governments, with guidance to be published later in 2020.⁵⁸

In July 2019, a [five-year review](#) of the Flood Re insurance scheme also included recommendations that the scheme offer lower premiums on policies where property level flood resilience measures have been installed, and permit payment of claims which include a limited amount of resilient and/or resistant repair beyond the flood-related loss (known as "Build Back Better").⁵⁹

For more information on measures to improve the flood resistance and resilience of properties, see the website of the [National Flood Forum](#), a charity supporting those at risk of flooding.

Accessing support

There has been criticism of the resilience grant scheme for being restricted to flooding in certain areas and during a particular date range.⁶⁰ This was also raised in the Westminster Hall debate on 30 January.⁶¹ Subsequently there was local press coverage of concerns that

⁵⁴ HC Deb 30 Jan 2020, [c396WH](#)

⁵⁵ Defra, [Property Flood Resilience Recovery Support Scheme \[2019\]: Local Authority Guidance](#), November 2019

⁵⁶ GOV.UK, [Major package of support for storm-hit areas](#), 18 February 2020

⁵⁷ HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018, pp 51-55

⁵⁸ Chartered Insurance Institute, [Property flood resilience code of practice](#), 11 February 2020

⁵⁹ Flood Re, [Regulation 27: The Quinquennial Review](#), July 2019, pp 10-11

⁶⁰ For example *The Guardian*, [Hundreds miss out on flood grants due to 'obscene postcode lottery'](#), 30 January 2020

⁶¹ HC Deb 30 Jan 2020, [c391WH](#)

areas in North Yorkshire still recovering from flooding in July 2019 would not be eligible for flood resilience grants.⁶²

Following his statement to the House on 24 February, Environment Secretary George Eustice was asked by Holly Lynch MP (Labour, Halifax) if grants would be available to those who had previously claimed following the flooding in 2015. Mr Eustice replied:

We will, during the course of this week, be issuing local authorities with more detailed guidance on the flood resilience fund. Our view at the moment is not to give it to people who have already claimed it, since they have already invested to make their homes more resilient.⁶³

2.5 Farming Recovery Fund

The Government announced on 13 November that the [Farming Recovery Fund](#) would be extended to support farmers affected by the flooding in Yorkshire and the Midlands. Under this scheme, farmers and land managers who have suffered uninsurable damage to their property are able to apply for grants of between £500 and £25,000 to cover repair costs, for example for clearing debris or recovering damaged land.⁶⁴ The Fund opened for applications in South Yorkshire, Gloucestershire and the Midlands on 6 January 2020, with a total of £2 million being made available.⁶⁵ Environment Secretary George Eustice said on 24 February that “we will consider the need to extend the farming recovery fund once we have all the necessary data” given the impacts of Storms Ciara and Dennis.⁶⁶ He also said:

We do have a farming flood recovery fund, but we have not activated it yet because it generally supports the recovery of lost grassland or damaged hedgerows and walls in the aftermath of an event. However, we are looking closely at whether we could put in place derogations to assist farmers should they be unable to get their crops in the ground.⁶⁷

The Farming Recovery Fund had previously been made available in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire following the flooding in summer 2019. The two announcements brought the total level of support available under the Farming Recovery Fund to £4 million.⁶⁸

GOV.UK guidance explains the basis for the scheme and how it operates:

The Farming Recovery Fund provides assistance to farmers whose agricultural land has been damaged by flooding and declared a natural disaster by the Government. The Fund provides financial assistance up to 100%, with a minimum grant level of £500 and a maximum grant level of £25,000.

⁶² For example *Yorkshire Post*, [Devastated North Yorkshire communities won't get new flooding support from Government](#), 20 February 2020

⁶³ HC Deb 24 Feb 2020, [c57](#)

⁶⁴ GOV.UK, [Government announces support for flood-hit farmers](#), 13 November 2019

⁶⁵ GOV.UK, [£2 million fund opens for flood-affected farmers](#), 6 January 2020

⁶⁶ HC Deb 24 Feb 2020, [c52](#)

⁶⁷ HC Deb 24 Feb 2020, [c65-66](#)

⁶⁸ GOV.UK, [£2 million fund opens for flood-affected farmers](#), 6 January 2020

Financial assistance is made available within the scope of Article 30 and the general conditions of the Agricultural Block Exemption Regulation (EU) 702/2014, with assistance being provided to cover non-insurable items and activities such as re-cultivation, reseeded, reinstating field boundaries and removing debris from agricultural land.

The scheme has an application process where farmers who are based in the relevant geographical area and meet the required eligibility criteria, provide photographs and maps to show the impact of the event on their agricultural land. The Rural Payments Agency, on behalf of DEFRA, administers the scheme, assesses the applications for eligibility and issues agreements. Once the work is complete, the Rural Payments Agency processes claims for payment and checks supporting evidence to ensure the work has been completed in line with scheme requirements. A number of site inspections are undertaken to verify the works.⁶⁹

To apply for funding from the Farming Recovery fund, or for further information, see the [handbook and application form](#) on GOV.UK.

2.6 Welsh Government

Flooding is a devolved matter. After Storms Ciara and Dennis, First Minister Mark Drakeford announced on 18 February 2020 that up to £10 million would be made available for an emergency flood relief scheme to support householders, businesses, local authorities and urgent infrastructure repairs. The First Minister also held an emergency summit bringing together frontline services, councils and business leaders to assess the extent of the damage and coordinate the response.⁷⁰

In a subsequent statement, Environment Minister Lesley Griffiths said that households affected by flooding would be able to claim £500 each with a further payment of £500 available to those without flooding insurance. She also said that urgent works to assets, including defences and culverts, will be 100 per cent funded by the Welsh Government. On the issue of coal tips being affected by landslides, the Minister said that the Welsh Government was working with the UK Government and others including the Coal Authority, Natural Resources Wales and local authorities “to ensure we have a full picture about the current checks and monitoring systems in place”.⁷¹

The Welsh Government also announced on 4 March 2020 that the funding includes grants of up to £2,500 to support businesses recovering from the floods, “specifically small to medium sized enterprises”.⁷²

⁶⁹ GOV.UK, [Farming Recovery Fund 2019: Handbook and application form](#) [accessed 6 January 2020]

⁷⁰ Welsh Government, [First Minister establishes emergency funding relief scheme](#), 18 February 2020

⁷¹ National Assembly for Wales, [25 February 2020](#)

⁷² Welsh Government, [£2.5 million Welsh Government support for businesses hit by flooding](#), 4 March 2020

The Welsh Government has a [web page](#) providing contact details for local authorities who can help with applications for financial assistance.

On 2 March, Wales Secretary Simon Hart said in response to a PQ:

My Department and others are determined to ensure that all of those affected by flooding are supported in the best way possible. Flood response in Wales is a devolved matter. The UK Government will look seriously at any request from the Welsh Government for additional support and assistance for flood relief, including additional finances.⁷³

⁷³ [PQ 20517](#) [on Floods: Wales]

3. Reactions to the flooding

3.1 Political comment

Parliament was not sitting when the serious flooding began on 8 November, having been dissolved two days previously as a result of the [Early Parliamentary General Election Act 2019](#).⁷⁴ The initial reactions to the severe weather events therefore played out against the backdrop of the general election campaign.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson visited Matlock in Derbyshire on 9 November. He was reported as saying that serious flooding was increasing “perhaps because of building, almost certainly because of climate change”, but that the recent flooding was “not looking like something we need to escalate to the level of a national emergency”.⁷⁵ On 12 November, following a COBR meeting at which support measures were agreed, the Prime Minister said:

The recent flooding has had a devastating effect on people and businesses, and it’s essential that our communities have the support they need to recover. [...]

I want to express my deep gratitude to the emergency services, Armed Forces, Environment Agency and local authorities across the country who have responded to the flooding with distinction.⁷⁶

Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, on 11 November, sent a letter to the Prime Minister asking him to “hold a COBRA meeting and take personal charge of the government’s response to the devastating flooding we have seen over the past few days”. Mr Corbyn also called on the Government to ensure “every resource is being utilised to aid those that need it and protect against future potential floods” and “that the insurance industry fulfils its responsibilities”.⁷⁷

Regarding Mr Johnson’s comments about the floods not being a “national emergency”, Mr Corbyn said:

With dozens of flood warnings still in place, I have to disagree with your assessment from the weekend that this is not a ‘national emergency.’ If this had happened in Surrey, not Yorkshire or the East Midlands, it seems far more likely that a national emergency would have been declared. Every year we don’t act means higher flood waters, more homes ruined and more lives at risk due to climate change.⁷⁸

The Labour press release stated that the Environment Agency had experienced reductions in workforce and staff pay since 2013.⁷⁹ A [BBC](#)

⁷⁴ Parliament.uk, [Dissolution of Parliament](#), 6 November 2019

⁷⁵ *The Independent*, [Boris Johnson says major flooding in North is ‘not a national emergency’](#), 9 November 2019

⁷⁶ GOV.UK, [Government announces further support for those affected by flooding](#), 12 November 2019

⁷⁷ Labour Party, [Jeremy Corbyn urges Boris Johnson to declare a national emergency and hold a COBRA meeting on floods](#), 11 November 2019

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

[Reality Check](#) looked into these claims, and found that Environment Agency staff numbers in September 2019 were “well below” the January 2013 figure.⁸⁰

Then Liberal Democrat leader Jo Swinson visited Stainforth, South Yorkshire, in November 2019 and was quoted as saying:

It is wrong that it seems to be just down to the local communities, important though this work is; this is clearly a national emergency and the government should be declaring it as such.⁸¹

During Prime Minister’s Questions on 25 February 2020, following Storms Ciara and Dennis, Jeremy Corbyn asked the Prime Minister if he would visit flood-hit areas. The Prime Minister responded:

I am very proud of the response that the Government have mounted over the past few days. We convened the national flood response centre on 14 February. Since the flooding began, there has been a constant stream of ministerial activity led by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and for Housing, Communities and Local Government. No one should underestimate the anguish that flooding causes, and of course it is an absolute shock to the households that are affected, but it is thanks to the measures that this Government have put in place that 200,000 households have been protected from flooding.⁸²

Manifestos

This section summarises some commitments relating to flood risk management in manifestos for the December 2019 general election.

The Conservative Party manifesto for the December 2019 general election committed “£4 billion in new funding over the coming years” for “new flood defences”, as part of a £100 billion investment in infrastructure. This would be included in “our first Budget”, which will “prioritise the environment”.⁸³

The Labour Party manifesto for the December 2019 general election pledged an extra £5.6 billion in funding to improve the standard of defences and respond to increased flood risk, “prioritising areas at risk in North West England, Yorkshire and the East Midlands that have been neglected by Conservative investments”.⁸⁴

The Liberal Democrat manifesto stated that the party would:

Establish a £5 billion fund for flood prevention and climate adaptation over the course of the parliament to improve flood defences, and introduce high standards for flood resilience for buildings and infrastructure in flood risk areas.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ BBC News, [General election 2019: Have flood and fire services been cut by the Conservatives?](#), 2 December 2019

⁸¹ BBC News, [England flooding: Labour and Lib Dems criticise response](#), 12 November 2019

⁸² HC Deb 25 Feb 2020, [c310](#)

⁸³ Conservative Party, [Get Brexit Done. Unleash Britain’s Potential: The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2019](#), pp 27, 55

⁸⁴ Labour Party, [It’s Time for Real Change: The Labour Party Manifesto 2019](#), p. 23

⁸⁵ Liberal Democrats, [Manifesto 2019](#) [accessed 2 December 2019]

The Green Party manifesto included the following policies on flood risk management:

Deploy environmentally friendly flood management measures to protect communities from flooding. These measures, which include tree planting and soil restoration in upland catchment areas to tackle excess water at source, are cheaper and more effective than the traditional approach of simply covering river banks in concrete. We will change the planning system to prevent building on floodplains, to further reduce the flooding risk communities face.⁸⁶

3.2 Parliamentary

There were several debates and statements on the subject of flooding in the months following the general election. A [Westminster Hall debate on flooding in South Yorkshire](#) was held on 30 January 2020, with Defra Minister Rebecca Pow responding.⁸⁷ The then Environment Secretary Theresa Villiers [made a statement](#) in the House of Commons on 10 February on the flooding following Storm Ciara.⁸⁸

New Environment Secretary George Eustice subsequently made a [statement on 24 February](#) in which he provided an update on flooding caused by the two storms. Mr Eustice highlighted the Government's manifesto commitment to "a further £4 billion in new funding for flood defences over the next five years", as well as the review of household flood insurance cover and the potential of nature-based solutions to flood risk management. For further information on funding see section 4.2 below.

In response to Mr Eustice's statement, Shadow Environment Secretary Luke Pollard said the Government had not shown "national leadership" and questioned why a COBRA meeting had not been convened and the Prime Minister had not visited flood-hit areas. Mr Pollard also asked about support for communities in Wales. Overall Labour called for "a proper plan for flooding" to "match the scale of the crisis, with proper funding", as well as "a proper investigation into these floods".

During the ensuing questions, Members also raised issues including insurance, funding for local authorities, development in flood risk areas support for the Welsh Government and approaches to managing flooding in specific places.⁸⁹

Subsequently, on 4 March, an Opposition Day debate on flooding was held in the House of Commons. Labour called on the Government to establish an independent review into the recent floods, looking at the response, funding for flood defences, insurance aspects and climate impacts.

Environment Secretary George Eustice in response highlighted previous reviews of various aspects of flood risk management.⁹⁰ For more

⁸⁶ Green Party of England and Wales, [If Not Now, When? Manifesto 2019](#), pp 23-4 [accessed 14 January 2020]

⁸⁷ HC Deb 30 Jan 2020, [c385-400WH](#)

⁸⁸ HC Deb 10 Feb 2020, [c595-606](#)

⁸⁹ HC Deb 24 Feb 2020, [c51-67](#)

⁹⁰ HC Deb 4 Mar 2020, [c845-902](#)

information on earlier reviews see the Library paper on [Flood risk management and funding](#) (CBP 7514, November 2017).

The House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee also announced an inquiry into flooding on 4 March. The inquiry will consider the level of Government investment, the involvement of affected communities in decision making and how natural flood management measures can be integrated into the Government's approach, as well as the response to the recent floods.⁹¹

3.3 Other reactions

Local government

Sheffield City Region Mayor Dan Jarvis wrote to the Prime Minister on 12 November saying that the flooding was “having a devastating impact on people, businesses and communities” and he was “particularly concerned about the ongoing situation in Doncaster”. Mr Jarvis welcomed the support announced on 12 November but said:

However, given the scale of damage in some of the most deprived parts of the country, it is concerning that this assistance was not forthcoming sooner.⁹²

Mr Jarvis called for “significant additional financial support” to be made available in the short term, and for the Environment Agency to review “the type and scale of flood defences required for the River Don”. He also called for an “emergency summit” to be jointly convened by the Government and himself “in the next two weeks”, bringing together relevant local and national authorities to discuss the resilience of the region to future flooding.⁹³ In December, Mr Jarvis reportedly called on the Government to establish a “Cobra for the north” and said that the Prime Minister had privately agreed to help convene a dedicated emergency response group.⁹⁴

On 14 November, it was reported that Labour council leaders in Doncaster, Rotherham, Sheffield, Barnsley, Bassetlaw and Kirklees had written to MHCLG Secretary Robert Jenrick calling for long-term funding:

Five more years of cuts to council budgets will make dealing with major incidents like this increasingly difficult. Councils need massive increases in day-to-day funding rather than just one-off funding commitments. It is vital that you commit to reversing these cuts as Labour has, and provide the funding we will need to help our communities recover in the long term.⁹⁵

The council leaders also asked for more time to complete works reimbursable under the Bellwin scheme, stating that local authorities

⁹¹ Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, [Government's approach to managing flood risk inquiry launched](#), 4 March 2020

⁹² [Tweet from @DanJarvisMP](#), 14 November 2019

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ *The Guardian*, [Boris Johnson urged to overhaul flood defence funding or risk 'catastrophe'](#), 23 December 2019

⁹⁵ *The Guardian*, [Council leaders demand huge funding rise after floods](#), 14 November 2019

were simultaneously preparing for an “unexpected general election at an unusual time of year”.⁹⁶ The Labour leaders of Bassetlaw and Barnsley councils were also quoted by the *Guardian* in December 2019 as warning that similar damage from flooding would reoccur if further action was not taken by the Government.⁹⁷

On 17 February 2020, the *Yorkshire Evening Post* reported that Environment Secretary George Eustice had said following a visit to York that “I think it is right” to hold a summit bringing him together with council leaders, MPs and stakeholders including the Environment Agency.⁹⁸ Mr Eustice subsequently told the House on 24 February that the summit would take place “within the next two months”.⁹⁹

Community organisations

South Yorkshire’s Community Foundation (SYCF), a registered charity, launched an emergency flood disaster relief appeal to provide urgent support to those affected by the flooding. SYCF said that a similar appeal had been established in response to the serious flooding in 2007.¹⁰⁰ BBC Radio Sheffield was the official media partner.¹⁰¹

SYCF says on its information page for the appeal:

With over 1,000 households affected we are at this stage giving blanket payments of £200 to everyone who applies. This ensures that we will be able to help as many people as possible as fairly as possible. Following on from these payments we will be moving into a second stage of funding which will support those who have been hit hardest with further larger amounts of funding (Dependent on how much money is raised through the appeal).¹⁰²

The appeal had raised over £500,000 by 27 December, when MHCLG Secretary Robert Jenrick announced that the Government would match the funds raised up to the value of £1 million, with a further £300,000 of match funding for other eligible areas where a flooding framework had been activated.¹⁰³ Members from the area raised concerns about match funding for SYCF during the Westminster Hall debate on flooding in South Yorkshire (30 January).¹⁰⁴

Other flood relief appeals raised by community foundations included the [Wainfleet Flood Appeal](#) and the [Derbyshire Flood Relief Appeal](#).

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ *The Guardian*, [Boris Johnson urged to overhaul flood defence funding or risk ‘catastrophe’](#), 23 December 2019

⁹⁸ *Yorkshire Evening Post*, [New Environment Secretary to call top level summit to tackle Yorkshire flooding woes](#), 17 February 2020

⁹⁹ HC Deb 24 Feb 2020, [c61](#)

¹⁰⁰ SYCF, [Emergency Flood Disaster Relief Appeal launches to support victims of flooding across South Yorkshire](#), November 2019

¹⁰¹ JustGiving, [South Yorkshire Flood Disaster Relief Appeal](#) [accessed 2 December 2019]

¹⁰² SYCF, [South Yorkshire Flood Disaster Relief Appeal Fund](#) [accessed 2 December 2019]

¹⁰³ GOV.UK, [£1 million funding boost for South Yorkshire flood charity](#), 27 December 2019

¹⁰⁴ HC Deb 30 Jan 2020, [c385-400WH](#)

Farming groups

The National Farmers' Union (NFU) called on the Environment Agency to work with farming communities, and other stakeholders such as Internal Drainage Boards and the Coal Authority, in South Yorkshire to "find and implement practical solutions for the whole drainage system". NFU Council representative for the West Riding of Yorkshire said:

There is a lot of anger in this area that yet again our crops from potatoes to sugar beet and maize are under water for a prolonged period. We are very frustrated that the lessons from 2007 do not appear to have been learned.

Thanks to the NFU's work to bring Environment Agency chair Emma Howard Boyd to the area today to see the impact, I have been able to express this anger and frustration and appeal to her to work more closely with farmers on the ground to devise and deliver effective solutions. This must be an urgent priority.¹⁰⁵

NFU Vice President Stuart Roberts said he had set out the organisation's position during a visit to the Nottinghamshire/Lincolnshire border by the then Environment Secretary Theresa Villiers:

It was a great opportunity to speak directly to Theresa Villiers and for us to lay out exactly what any future government needs to do to stop this devastating flooding from happening.

We told her the need for immediate action to plug a gaping hole in the bank of Barlings Eau in Lincolnshire, which has turned thousands of acres of farmland into a six feet deep lake, and the importance of getting pumps to the area to clear the overflowing water.

We also highlighted the importance of Defra recognising the vital role farmers play by allowing floodwater to be stored on farmland to keep it away from towns and cities, as well as the need for a big, bold and ambitious plan on how we invest in the country's water management and prioritising maintenance in rural areas.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ NFU, [NFU President visits flooded farm with Environment Agency chair](#), 20 November 2019

¹⁰⁶ NFU, [NFU highlights severe impact of flooding during Secretary of State farm visit](#), 15 November 2019

4. Issues raised

This section provides information about some particular issues that received attention during the 2019-20 floods. Further information on many of these subjects is available in the Library briefing paper on [Flood risk management and funding](#) (CBP 7514, November 2017).

4.1 Government emergency response

There was substantial commentary following the 2019-20 floods about the adequacy of the Government's high-level response.¹⁰⁷ The Government's emergency committee COBRA met on 12 November 2019 following the flooding the preceding weekend, but as of 2 March 2020 no COBRA meeting had been publicly announced in response to the flooding caused by Storms Ciara and Dennis.

Defra's [Flood rescue concept of operations](#) (updated November 2019) sets out the processes for managing and maintaining flood rescue capability and the national coordination of flood rescue assets in England. With regard to escalation the document states:

Depending on the scale of the event, the government response can be escalated as required, initially managed within Defra through its Emergency Operations Centre. For significant flood events, the National Flood Response Centre may be opened, with all relevant government departments and agencies working from the same location. More severe incidents can be further escalated with central coordination, within COBR, by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat.¹⁰⁸

Environment Secretary George Eustice said in a statement to the House on 24 February that the National Flood Response Centre, also hosted by the Cabinet Office, had been "stood up" on 14 February, in anticipation of Storm Dennis. Mr Eustice described the National Flood Response Centre as "a similar mechanism to Cobra, but dedicated to flood response, engaging all the relevant authorities necessary to address a flood incident". He said that this was the reason COBRA had not met.¹⁰⁹

Some of the political commentary also centred on calls for a "national emergency" to be declared in response to the flooding.¹¹⁰ On 16 February, as Storm Dennis was in progress, Environment Secretary George Eustice was quoted as saying "it's not a national emergency yet but it is certainly a local emergency in many of those areas affected".¹¹¹ Box 3 provides further information on the concept of a national emergency.

¹⁰⁷ For example *The Guardian*, [PM's refusal to call Cobra meeting 'hampering' storm recovery](#), 18 February 2020

¹⁰⁸ Defra, [Flood rescue concept of operations](#), November 2019, p. 7

¹⁰⁹ HC Deb 24 Feb 2020, [c51-54](#)

¹¹⁰ For example BBC News, [England flooding: Labour and Lib Dems criticise response](#), 12 November 2019, and *The Independent*, [Boris Johnson says major flooding in North is 'not a national emergency'](#), 9 November 2019

¹¹¹ *The Independent*, [Storm Dennis: Hundreds evacuated and over a thousand homes flooded as heavy rain and wind batter UK](#), 16 February 2020

Box 3: Declaring a “national emergency”

The statutory framework for planning for and dealing with civil contingencies derives from the [Civil Contingencies Act 2004, Section 1](#) of the 2004 Act sets out the meaning of “emergency” but the Act does not define or speak in terms of a “national emergency”.

Under Part 2 of the 2004 Act, the Government has the power to make emergency regulations, as outlined in the Act’s [Explanatory Notes](#). The [Civil Contingencies Act 2004 \(Contingency Planning\) Regulations 2005](#) (as amended) add further detail to the emergency planning regime.

The [Commons Library briefing on Brexit: contingency planning and powers](#) (CBP 08488, 21 March 2019) examines these various civil contingencies powers.

4.2 Funding

Cost-benefit analysis

Following the floods, some attention was focussed on the Environment Agency’s method of assessing the costs and benefits of capital schemes. For example, the *Sunday Times* reported on 23 February 2020 that “the formula is criticised for favouring the southeast because it is based on property values”, and said that an “internal agency report” was proposing to factor mental health impacts into future calculations.¹¹²

The Defra press office responded to this report, setting out the cost-benefit approach and noting the involvement of local decision making and consideration of deprived areas:

Funding is based on the economic damages avoided and the number of households that will benefit. A higher rate of funding is paid for homes in deprived areas, while taking account of local choices and priorities. The programme is built up of flood and coastal erosion schemes developed and promoted by local authorities, internal drainage boards and the Environment Agency in collaboration with communities. Regional Flood and Coastal Committees play a key role in bringing these schemes together, making local choices and agreeing the final programmes in their areas.¹¹³

The response also noted that the Environment Agency’s new national flood and coastal erosion risk management strategy would “look at the total impacts of flooding on individuals and communities – including the impacts on mental health as well as structural damage to property and infrastructure, regardless of their location across the country”. The [current strategy](#) dates from 2011. The Agency [consulted on a draft of the updated strategy](#) in 2019, with the final version due to be published in spring 2020.

The independent fact checking charity Full Fact had [produced an article](#) on claims following the November floods that flood defence spending is regionally unbalanced. It found that there is insufficient data to answer

¹¹² *The Sunday Times*, [Flood defence money diverted from south over fears for northern residents’ health](#), 23 February 2020 [subscription required]

¹¹³ Defra in the media, [Sunday Times article on flood defence spending formula](#), 23 February 2020

the question.¹¹⁴ The *Sunday Times* article also reported that the current “cost-benefit formula” requires each £1 spent to prevent £8 worth of potential damage.¹¹⁵ Environment Secretary George Eustice told the House on 24 February:

There is not a specific 1:8 requirement for flooding schemes—it is just that, overall, that is the average return on flood schemes. When we assess where we are going to direct capital, it is predominantly based on the flood risk of a given area and the number of homes that a particular scheme will protect.¹¹⁶

How much is spent on flood defences (as of September 2019)?

The Government currently has a six-year capital investment programme in flood and coastal erosion risk management (FCERM), which runs from 2015 to 2021.

For background information on funding for FCERM, see the Library briefing paper on [Flood risk management and funding](#) (CBP 7514, November 2017). This section provides some recent updates since that paper was published.

At the end of June 2013, Defra committed to investing £2.3 billion in capital funding for flood defences covering the period 2015/16 to 2020/21. With subsequent funding announcements, and as of September 2019, the capital investment programme totals £2.6 billion over the period 2015-21.¹¹⁷

Based on the latest data available, this table shows a breakdown of the capital expenditure in real terms to 2018/19 and budgets for 2019/20 and 2020/21.¹¹⁸ It should be noted that comparisons of spending in individual years should be made with caution, as FCERM expenditure is driven by both planned expenditure and responses to particular extreme weather events (see Box 4 for funding trends).

FCERM capital spend £ million 2019/20 prices

2015/16	436
2016/17	472
2017/18	420
2018/19	462
2019/20	501
2020/21	461

The allocation of resource funding (also known as revenue) is generally for a one-year period, in line with Government policy. Resource spending includes (amongst other things) routine maintenance of defences; collecting evidence; administrative costs; and depreciation costs. For 2018/19, the resource spend recorded by the Environment Agency was £304.8 million. For 2019/20 the budget is £262.9 million.¹¹⁹ The September 2019 publication of Defra’s FCERM statistics

¹¹⁴ Full Fact, [We don't know if there's a north/south divide in flood defence spending because the data was taken offline](#), 15 November 2019

¹¹⁵ *The Sunday Times*, [Flood defence money diverted from south over fears for northern residents' health](#), 23 February 2020

¹¹⁶ HC Deb 24 Feb 2020, [c59-60](#)

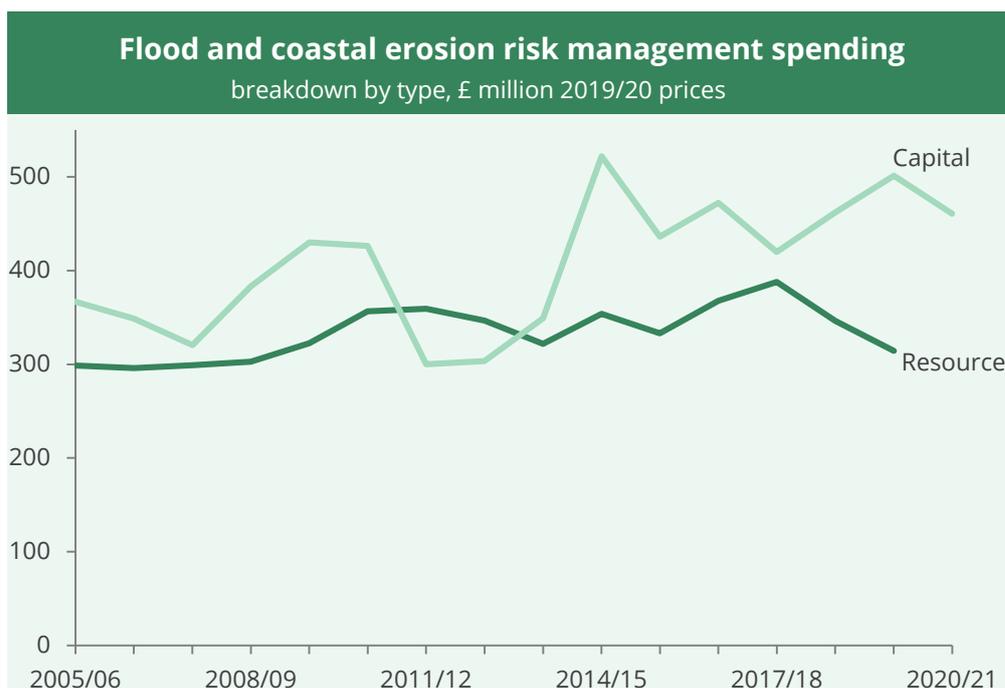
¹¹⁷ [PO 3245](#), Floods: Rural Areas [21 January 2020]

¹¹⁸ See Appendix for underlying figures and sources.

¹¹⁹ Defra, *Central Government Funding for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk management in England*, 1 September 2017, p. 4 [now archived, accessed 20 November 2017] and Defra, *Central Government Funding for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk*

included no resource budget figure for 2020/21, and stated that resource budgets “for work such as planning and incident management” in that year would be confirmed “once the allocation process following the 2019 Spending Round has been concluded”.¹²⁰

The following chart shows a breakdown between resource and capital expenditure (at 2019/20 prices) from 2005/06 to 2018/19 and the Government’s projected budgets up to 2020/21. As noted above, comparisons of spending in individual years should be made with caution, as they can be impacted by individual events or projects.



Box 4: Funding trends

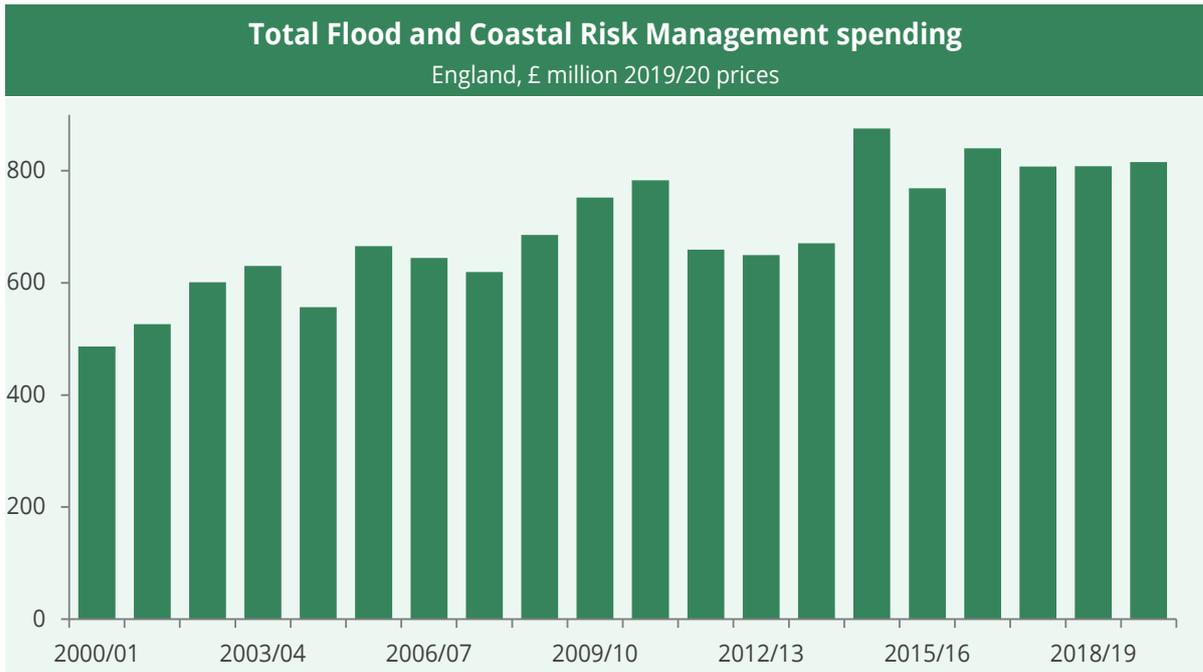
Year on year spending: Flood spending fluctuates year on year with recent peaks in total expenditure occurring in 2010/11 (£783 million in 2019/20 prices), 2014/15 (£876 million in 2019/20 prices), and 2016/17 (£840 million in 2019/20 prices). However, comparisons of spending in individual years should be made with caution as FCERM expenditure is driven by both planned expenditure and responses to particular extreme weather events.

Spending over ‘Parliamentary’ terms: FCERM expenditure has increased in real terms in each Parliament or five-year period, since 2000/01. Spending under the Coalition Government (2010/11-2014/15) was higher than spending under the previous Labour Government (2005/06-2009/10) but it was originally set to decrease. It was higher due to the additional funding provided by the Government in response to the winter floods 2013/14. Spending in 2015/16-2019/20 is set to be higher again.

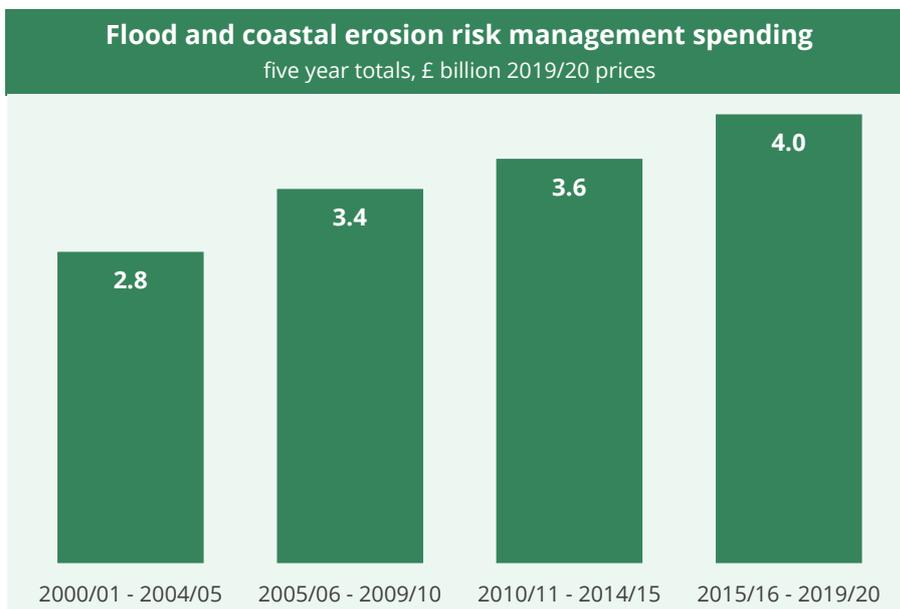
Total central Government funding for flood and coastal erosion risk management since 2000/01 is shown in the chart below (budgets for 2019/20).

management in England, 1 September 2016, p. 4 [now archived, accessed 11 October 2016]

¹²⁰ Defra, [Central Government Funding for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management in England](#), September 2019, p. 4



The next chart shows total expenditure on FCERM in five-year periods since 2000/01. This shows that FCERM expenditure has increased in real terms in each five-year period since 2000/01 and is set to increase in 2015/16-2019/20.



The Appendix to this paper (section 6) contains a breakdown of central Government flood and coastal erosion risk management spending by source and year.

How does central Government flood risk funding work?

Most of the Government’s FCERM funding is provided to the Environment Agency (EA) as Grant-in-Aid. The Environment Agency spends some of this directly, but also passes on money to risk management authorities for local schemes. The Environment Agency

has said that it prioritises FCERM investment where the risk is highest and where it will offer the greatest benefits for people and property.¹²¹

Another source of funding is raised through the partnership funding approach, under which local communities raise funding towards a scheme and either channel it through the Environment Agency or use it directly on FCERM projects, with central Government also contributing.¹²²

For more information on sources of funding see Defra's publication on [Central Government Funding for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management in England](#) (updated September 2019). The EA's [programme of flood and coastal erosion risk management schemes](#) show details of individual schemes and the funding they have received.

How much funding will be needed in future?

The current six-year capital investment programme runs until 2021.

The Government's [National Adaptation Programme](#) (July 2018) included an action to "review current funding arrangements ahead of determining funding needs beyond 2021, seeking to attract more non-public sector investment".¹²³ The same month, the [National Infrastructure Assessment](#) recommended that the Government should put in place, by the end of 2019, a rolling 6-year funding programme to "enable efficient planning and delivery of projects and address the risks from all sources of flooding".¹²⁴

In May 2019, the Environment Agency (EA) set out its revised [long-term investment scenarios for FCERM](#). These determine the economic optimum level of investment in the face of climate change, a growing population and the deterioration of flood assets. The EA calculated that the economic optimum investment is a long-term annual average of "over £1 billion" (the exact figure depending on policy choices) over 50 years. This was higher than the 2014 long-term investment scenarios, which put the baseline level at £860 million.¹²⁵

In its 2019 progress report to Parliament, the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) stated that a higher level of investment in line with the EA's 2019 scenarios should be addressed in the post-2021 FCERM funding arrangement review.¹²⁶

In its evidence to the EFRA Committee's coastal flooding and adaptation to climate change inquiry (May 2019), the Environment Agency said it was seeking a settlement of "6 years plus" for both capital and resource

¹²¹ Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, [Written Evidence submitted by the Environment Agency \(FCC0007\)](#), 14 May 2019

¹²² Defra, [Central Government Funding for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management in England](#), September 2019

¹²³ Defra, [The National Adaptation Programme and the Third Strategy for Climate Adaptation Reporting: Making the country resilient to a changing climate](#), July 2018, annex 2, p. 28

¹²⁴ National Infrastructure Commission, [National Infrastructure Assessment](#), July 2018, p. 92

¹²⁵ GOV.UK, [Long-term investment scenarios \(LTIS\) 2019](#), 8 May 2019

¹²⁶ Committee on Climate Change, [Progress in preparing for climate change 2019 Report to Parliament](#), July 2019, pp 106-7

funding. The EA also highlighted “opportunities to achieve greater value for money from the investment available” by benefitting the environment, stimulating sustainable growth and accelerating regeneration.¹²⁷

In a February 2020 speech, Environment Agency chief executive Sir James Bevan said that the Government’s £4 billion commitment would be “the biggest single investment ever”. He reiterated that “at least £1bn a year for the next 50 years” would be needed to build and maintain traditional hard flooding and coastal change infrastructure, but also said “much more than that” would be required for investment in resilient infrastructure and measures such as natural flood management. Sir James noted that “much” of this investment could come from non-Government sources.¹²⁸

On 7 March 2020 it was reported that in the Budget on 11 March flood funding would be increased to £5.2 billion over five years from 2021.¹²⁹

4.3 Insurance

The challenges of providing affordable household flood insurance cover have been recognised for some time, and were raised again following the 2019-20 floods.

Following a series of significant flood events (notably in summer 2007), householders at risk of flooding were finding it increasingly difficult to obtain affordable cover and a market failure was identified. Since 2016, the Flood Re scheme has been aimed at addressing this issue, allowing insurance companies to pool the potential costs of the higher risk to many properties by paying a special levy. The scheme excludes commercial properties including small businesses, and buildings constructed since 2009, to dissuade development in at-risk areas.

The Government announced on 27 December that it would “investigate the extent to which those affected by flooding did not have sufficient insurance cover”, with further details to be published in the new year.¹³⁰ Matters that may be covered in the review were discussed during the Environment Secretary’s [statement to the House of Commons](#) on 24 February, and the [corresponding statement in the Lords](#) the following day. Defra Minister Lord Goldsmith said in the Lords that part of the review would “look at what answers will need to be provided by government in relation to businesses”.¹³¹

In February 2020, there was some media attention given to an article published by the liberal conservative think tank Bright Blue, looking at

¹²⁷ Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, [Written Evidence submitted by the Environment Agency \(FCC0007\)](#), 14 May 2019

¹²⁸ GOV.UK, [Defusing the 'Weather Bomb': The Future of Flood Defence](#), 25 February 2020

¹²⁹ BBC News, [Floods: Budget will double spending on defences, says Treasury](#), 7 March 2020

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ HL Deb 25 Feb 2020, [c134](#)

reviewed areas where household flood insurance might still be a problem.¹³² The author stated:

There is no legal requirement to provide flood risk information to homebuyers, although the Law Society publishes guidance on good practice in informing clients of flood risk during conveyancing.

We should consider that the 2009 cut-off, rather than reducing exposure, may have simply left unwary homebuyers, to use an inappropriate expression, 'high and dry'. As they are not covered by Flood Re, concentrations of post-2008 properties in high flood risk areas, such as new estates, are naturally some of the most vulnerable in the country to becoming 'insurance blackspots'.¹³³

The Association of British Insurers (ABI) issued a response to the Bright Blue article, arguing that extending the scheme to post-2009 properties was "the wrong answer" and "would mean all homeowners paying the cost for poor development and building on unprotected flood plains".¹³⁴

For further information see the Library briefing paper on [Household flood insurance: Flood Re](#) (CBP 8751, December 2019) and an Insight on [Affordable insurance for flood-risk properties: Flood Re](#) (January 2020).

4.4 Planning

The question of new development in high flood risk areas was again raised following the 2019/20 floods. Analysis by Greenpeace and the *Guardian* reported in February 2020 found that local authorities impacted by the floods were planning to build 11,410 properties in areas at risk.¹³⁵

A spokesperson from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government said "our planning policy is clear that housing should be located in the areas at least risk of flooding", and that "where development in a risk area is absolutely necessary, sufficient measures should be taken to make sure homes are safe, resilient and protected from flooding".¹³⁶

The Government's [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) provides the framework against which Local Plans are drawn up and applications for planning permission are determined. It was first published in 2012 and, following a consultation, was revised and updated in July 2018 with some further minor amendment in February 2019. Consultants JBA Consulting produced an assessment of what the revised NPPF would

¹³² For example *The Guardian*, [Flood insurance cover does not protect thousands of new homes](#), 21 February 2020

¹³³ Bright Blue, [Helen Jackson: High and dry?: Preventing tomorrow's "flood ghettos"](#), 21 February 2020

¹³⁴ ABI, [ABI responds to Bright Blue's analysis entitled High and dry: Preventing tomorrow's 'flood ghettos'](#), 21 February 2020

¹³⁵ Unearthed, [Councils hit by storms plan for thousands of new homes in flood-prone areas](#), 23 February 2020

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

mean for flood risk and planning in July 2018, suggesting that it mostly entailed “a change in emphasis”.¹³⁷

The Commons Library briefing on [Planning and flood risk](#) (CBP 7517, February 2016) provides background information about Government planning policy on flood risk and development, although it precedes the updates to the NPPF.

4.5 Dredging rivers

Some commentary suggested that dredging rivers of silt would have reduced flood risk.¹³⁸ The *Times* quoted an Environment Agency spokesperson as saying, in relation to the November floods, that dredging the River Don would not have helped as the river system is close to sea level, and additional water in the river due to dredging would have drained slowly because of the low gradient.¹³⁹

The Environment Agency said in June 2019 that its hydrologists run routine modelling of rivers and that:

Dredging is an important part of our maintenance programme. We consider each location carefully and do it where we know it will make a difference.¹⁴⁰

The Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management (CIWEM) produced a report on [floods and dredging](#) in 2014. It concluded that:

dredging can play an important role in flood risk management in some cases, but is not a standalone solution. It should be considered in the context of a range of tools and the origins of different sources of flood water, and comes with significant risks that must be understood at a local and catchment scale.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ JBA Consulting, [The revised National Planning Policy Framework and its implications for FRAs and SFRAs](#), 31 July 2018

¹³⁸ For example, see *The Times*, [Farmers blame flooding devastation on failure to dredge rivers](#) (13 November 2019), and *Farmers Weekly*, [Flood-hit farmers in spat with George Monbiot about dredging](#) (15 November 2019)

¹³⁹ *The Times*, [Farmers blame flooding devastation on failure to dredge rivers](#), 13 November 2019

¹⁴⁰ Environment Agency blog, [Flood response at Wainfleet in Lincolnshire](#), 18 June 2019

¹⁴¹ CIWEM, [Floods and Dredging – a reality check](#), February 2014, p. 4

5. Further reading

5.1 Library papers

- The Library paper on [Planning and flood risk](#) (CBP 7517, February 2016) provides background information about Government planning policy on flood risk and development. The Government updated the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) in 2018 and 2019.
- Previous Library papers on specific flooding events include those on the [Winter floods 2013-14](#) and [Winter floods 2015-16](#).
- For more information on flood insurance and the Flood Re scheme, see the Library briefing paper on [Household flood insurance: Flood Re](#) (CBP 8751, December 2019) and an Insight on [Affordable insurance for flood-risk properties: Flood Re](#) (January 2020).
- For background information on funding for FCERM, see the Library briefing paper on [Flood risk management and funding](#) (CBP 7514, November 2017).

5.2 Government information

- GOV.UK has a [webpage on the November floods](#) which was updated several times throughout November. This page provides information on the Government response and the number of properties protected.
- Another GOV.UK page provides updated (as of 2 March) information on [flood risk following the February storms](#).
- The Welsh Government has a [web page](#) providing contact details for local authorities who can help with applications for financial assistance.
- The Environment Agency published a blog post on 23 December 2019 on [groundwater flooding](#).
- The then Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Theresa Villiers made a [written statement](#) in September 2019 on flooding over the summer and the Whaley Bridge evacuation.

5.3 Other

- BBC News [published an explainer](#) on 12 November looking at possible causes and exacerbating factors of flooding along the River Don.
- The UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) produced a [preliminary analysis of the severity of the November floods](#) in terms of rainfall and river flows and the role of climate change (22 November 2019). Further information was provided in CEH's monthly [hydrological summary for the UK](#) (13 December 2019).

5.4 Press material

Below is a selection of press articles highlighting various issues relating to the autumn/winter floods.

BBC News Online

Flooding: Storm Dennis is 'a taste of things to come' for Wales

1 March 2020

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-51631480>

BBC News Online

Storm Jorge: Flood-hit towns battle wettest February on record

1 March 2020

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51686979>

BBC News Online

Ironbridge flooding: Barriers repaired before Storm Jorge hits

28 February 2020

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-shropshire-51671116>

Guardian

Flooding crisis is under control, minister tells struggling farmers

26 February 2020

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/feb/26/we-have-flooding-crisis-under-control-minister-tells-struggling-farmers>

New Statesman

How floods divided Britain

25 February 2020

<https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/environment/2020/02/storm-ciara-dennis-ellen-francis-how-floods-divided-britain-anger>

Wales Online

Flood victims can now claim up to £1,000 from the Welsh Government

24 February 2020

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/flooding-wales-storm-dennis-compensation-17805289>

Yorkshire Post

Devastated North Yorkshire communities won't get new flooding support from Government

20 February 2020

<https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/politics/devastated-north-yorkshire-communities-wont-get-new-flooding-support-government-1884938>

BBC News Online

Coastal floods warning in UK as sea levels rise

14 February 2020

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-51283716>

Farmers' Weekly

Storm Ciara wreaks flooding chaos across farms

10 February 2020

<https://www.fwi.co.uk/news/weather/storm-ciara-wreaks-flooding-chaos-across-farms>

Business Green

Flood risk and insurance cost fears highlighted for 1.8 million UK residents

5 February 2020

<https://www.businessgreen.com/news/4010093/flood-risk-insurance-cost-fears-highlighted-million-uk-residents>

BBC News Online

South Yorkshire flooding: Government cash for relief appeal

27 December 2019

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-50924076>

BBC News Online

Flooding shuts roads and blocks rail lines in south of England

19 December 2019

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-50841975>

BBC News Online

South Yorkshire floods: 'Substantial support' for victims

29 November 2019

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-50599815>

Guardian

Flooding caused by poor management and floodplain building, say experts

12 November 2019

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/nov/12/flooding-caused-by-poor-management-and-floodplain-building>

6. Appendix – Annual Spending

Expenditure on flood and coastal erosion risk management in England (as of September 2019)								
	Core Defra Retained			DCLG	Environment Agency		Total	
	Resource	Resource – Paid to LLFAs	Capital	Resource – Paid to LLFAs	Resource	Capital	Cash	2019/20 prices
2000/01	..	..	..	..	..	..	334.1	486.5
2001/02	..	..	..	..	..	..	366.1	526.6
2002/03	..	..	..	..	..	..	427.8	601.3
2003/04	..	..	..	..	..	..	457.5	630.4
2004/05	..	..	..	..	..	..	415.4	556.6
2005/06	0.1	-	63.5	-	228.3	216.8	508.7	665.4
2006/07	-	-	67.2	-	232.6	207.0	506.9	644.8
2007/08	1.1	-	39.3	-	240.2	219.2	499.8	619.3
2008/09	0.9	-	1.1	-	249.6	316.0	567.6	685.8
2009/10	11.2	-	1.8	-	260.0	360.1	633.1	752.5
2010/11	13.6	-	4.9	-	291.6	360.0	670.1	783.1
2011/12	3.4	21.0	-	-	287.8	260.7	572.9	659.4
2012/13	3.2	36.0	-	-	268.0	269.1	576.3	650.0
2013/14	4.3	15.0	-	21.0	250.6	315.3	606.2	670.7
2014/15	6.0	15.0	11.6	20.7	282.6	466.7	802.6	875.8
2015/16	2.6	10.0	12.4	20.6	274.5	390.7	710.8	769.0
2016/17	2.4	-	(0.1)	31.1	314.6	446.9	794.9	840.1
2017/18	2.5	-	0.8	32.4	338.2	403.1	777.0	807.6
2018/19	2.3	-	-	32.3	304.8	453.0	792.4	808.2
Budgets								
2019/20	18.3	-	-	33.0	262.9	501.2	815.4	815.4
2020/21	tbc	-	-	tbc	tbc	469.0	tbc	tbc

Notes: Prior to 2005-06 flood risk management was primarily funded through local authority grants with DEFRA part-funding only capital improvement projects and some national initiatives.
Resource budget for 2020/21 has not yet been confirmed.

Sources: 2000/01 to 2004/05: HC Deb, 14 Sept 2011, c1160W
2005/06 onwards: DEFRA, Central Government Funding for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management in England, 2019
HMT, GDP deflators: October 2019

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