

Executive Summary

Introduction

Collingwood Environmental Planning (CEP) Limited was commissioned by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) in December 2015 to carry out a review of the community engagement focus of Flood Awareness Wales (FAW).

The overall aims of the review were:

1. To assess the effectiveness of NRW's approaches to date, specifically in relation to the current model of operation - development of flood plans, which are supported and maintained by local flood volunteers.
2. To provide evidence and recommendations drawing on local, national and international best practice and approaches to date, to inform future practice in increasing community flood resilience across Wales.

The FAW programme was developed by the Welsh Government and Environment Agency Wales (EAW, now NRW) in 2010 to contribute to the delivery of flood and coastal erosion risk management objectives by raising awareness and increasing the preparedness of communities. While the initial focus was very much on individual engagement, although community flood plans (CFPs) were also developed, the most recent phase (Phase 4) involved more community level engagement, including partnership work with Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs), a focus on the development of CFPs, work with flood plan leads and work with school and businesses.

A mixed methods approach was used to gather data for the review. This included an evidence review, a survey of flood plan volunteers (completed by 40% of the 89 volunteers contacted), interviews with 20 flood plan volunteers and interviews with 12 professional partners. Whilst this sample is small we are confident that it represents the range of active flood plan volunteers engaged with NRW.

The review identified a simple logic model based on the assumptions underlying FAW about the way that the programme's resources and activities would produce the intended outcomes and impacts. Collecting and analysing evidence from each of the FAW's activities made it possible to see how far these assumptions were borne out and the way in which the different activities have contributed to the programme's results.

Findings

Effectiveness of the FAW programme

The programme was found to take a targeted approach using flexible methods to suit each community, reflecting good practice engagement. Tangible outputs were achieved in terms of the development of CFPs and the associated recruitment of volunteers, with NRW exceeding its targets for 2015/2016. Flood plans were seen as 'live' documents which help to formalise networks, relationships and actions that will be carried out in the event of a flood. Partners and volunteers considered the programme successful and found the templates, expertise and support provided very useful.

Relative value of new work against maintaining previous investment

The current formulation of FAW and the targets defined for the programme suggest that setting up a CFP as an output and maintaining that plan are distinct phases of action. However, the review found that flood plan volunteers experience their work as an ongoing process and the CFP as something dynamic and evolving. The literature on building trust and networks between citizens and authorities recognises this process takes time and resources and once established needs ongoing engagement in order to endure. The volunteer networking events organised by NRW were frequently mentioned in the interviews with flood plan volunteers as valuable and informative, providing opportunities for volunteers to talk to stakeholders, clarify issues and learn from each other's experience.

Improving and increasing future effectiveness

Currently, the model of engagement with communities is NRW-led with a focus on developing CFPs. As noted above, this model is working effectively but is perceived by NRW as resource intensive. Some of the issues associated with this approach are:

- Time taken to understand communities, identify potential obstacles to engagement and communicate effectively.
- Focus on the flood plan rather than on empowering flood volunteers: where communities have well-established flood groups, they tend to be more active and have more ownership of their flood plan, with less dependence on NRW to take the lead.

Roles of NRW, other professional organisations and the public in future delivery of community engagement

Professional partners recognised the need for cross-institutional collaboration in order to access the range of tools, skills and resources required in dealing with all the resilience issues facing communities. However, there is a tension between the aspiration for greater collaboration and the roles that partner organisations are willing to take on: a number of professional interviewees saw NRW continuing to carry out similar activities as in their FAW role. Similarly, there was a call by professional partners for members of the public to be partners in the actions taken at an individual and community level to manage flood risk, but several interviewees said that NRW should continue to lead on the active engagement of communities around flooding.

Long term vision for community resilience and engagement for Wales

Over 90% of the flood plan volunteers surveyed were confident that their communities would continue to implement their flood plans in the future and most planned to continue their own involvement. Some expressed concern that lack of NRW resources could make this more difficult or even lead to flood plans being abandoned. Professional partners also expressed concerns that funding and resources may not be sufficient in the future, particularly in the context of climate-related increases in flood risk. However, changes in legislation like the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the new Environment (Wales) Act 2016 were considered to be opportunities to think about how to promote wider flood risk awareness and resilience measures.

Providing effective provision in the context of budget cuts

The review considered a number of budget cut scenarios for NRW within the existing way of working and found that any budget cut would result in some reduction in provision which would inevitably impact on key FAW activities and send an ambiguous message to both partners and communities about the priority being given to flood resilience. Rather, fundamental changes to the role of NRW in community engagement in flood risk management would be needed if budget cuts were required.

Future evaluation mechanisms to track progress against long term drivers

NRW collects data from area staff on FAW progress against targets in relation to community flood planning. There is still work to be done to ensure that the data is collected and summarised in an effective and transparent manner. While it appears important to involve volunteers in data collection, so as to be able to monitor changes in community resilience at the local level, any future plans for monitoring and evaluation should consider the potential burden on volunteers.

Conclusions and recommendations

On the basis of the evidence reviewed, the report makes a number of recommendations about the actions that might be taken going forward.

- Recommendation 1: The value of NRW's work on flood planning and engaging with communities through FAW should be recognised for its contribution to community resilience to flood risk in Wales.
- Recommendation 2: NRW to review what approaches to community flood planning communities may require depending on their resilience capacities.
- Recommendation 3: NRW to review the current "*light touch*" approach to maintenance of flood plans, in the light of the outcome of Recommendation 2. This should be developed further to identify what communities want at each stage of the CFP process. There is potential to develop the continuum further into a decision tree to assess what type and level of engagement would be most effective.
- Recommendation 4: NRW to review this assessment against targets for new work, with the potential for changing current targets for engagement with new communities and to review the resource requirements with Welsh Government as necessary.
- Recommendation 5: NRW to review how to work collaboratively at the local level with other partners to carry out engagement around a range of issues, but specifically in areas where NRW is the lead on flooding.
- Recommendation 6: NRW to get involved as appropriate with plans and engagement processes that are instigated by others (e.g. water companies or local authorities) and to consider how to work effectively in partnership when not the lead authority.
- Recommendation 7: NRW to share its expertise in engagement around flood risk with other professional partners, specifically with local authorities and to learn from others' experiences.

- Recommendation 8: NRW to review its existing practice in supporting its volunteers and to consider holding regular networking, training and learning events.
- Recommendation 9: NRW to consider how to enable sharing CFPs between adjacent at risk communities in a systematic way to facilitate learning and potentially provide 'shortcuts' for communities beginning their flood planning process.
- Recommendation 10: It would be beneficial for Welsh Government to establish a focal point for learning and sharing between NRW, local authorities, NGOs, etc. in relation to working with volunteers across all sectors – not just flooding.
- Recommendation 11: Welsh Government to revisit the Flood Support Service for Wales and the potential role of intermediaries.
- Recommendation 12: In addressing Recommendations 4 and 5 NRW to review the scenarios and the impacts discussed in relation to costs and reputational risk.
- Recommendation 13: NRW to work with internal GIS experts to develop a combined map to show the location of CFPs in relation to flood risk areas.
- Recommendation 14: NRW to develop indicators for community resilience capacities in relation to flood risk management, building on previous work in this area