
Sandbag Policy – Supporting Information

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Council does not have a statutory duty to provide sandbags to the public and it has generally not been our policy to do so. Householders and business owners are responsible for protecting their own property, but experience has shown that the public expects the council to help if flooding is imminent.

2. Supporting Information

- 2.1 Sandbags are often used as a first defence for flooding, but their effectiveness is questionable at best. Research by the Environment Agency suggests that at best sandbags offer only a 40 percent chance of success in keeping water out (The Pitt Review, 2007).
- 2.2 Whilst sandbags may seem inexpensive, the costs involved in filling bags, their deployment and disposal quickly adds up. During the floods in 2013/14, with help from the army, West Berkshire Council made up and placed several thousand sandbags to homes that were at risk of flooding, but the total cost of providing these ran into tens of thousands of pounds, which was later funded by the Government through the Bellwin Scheme.
- 2.3 Sandbags have numerous disadvantages. Sandbags are very heavy and moving them can be an issue for most people, including Council operatives. Sandbags are time consuming and labour intensive to make up, deliver and place. And there is often not time enough to deliver them before a flash flood.
- 2.4 Viral and bacterial infections are often present in flood water due to it mixing with foul sewage. These germs are absorbed into sandbags which make their removal and disposal problematic. Contaminated sandbags have to be removed by trained operatives wearing protective clothing and taken to a licensed tip. In all cases, sandbags can only be used once and there is a significant land fill tax incurred for their disposal, also adding to the cost.
- 2.5 There were two recommendations in The Pitt Review, 2007, that made direct reference to the use of sandbags as a flood defence measure:

ES.49 'The Review was unable to obtain any significant evidence that sandbags were particularly effective during the 2007 summer floods in providing protection to individual houses'.

Es.52 'The general provision of sandbags should be phased out in favour of better products such as kite-marked flood barriers, airbrick covers and other forms of temporary defence'.

Note: The Council makes no recommendations with regards to specific property flood defence products or suppliers, however, accredited flood protection products are widely recognised by major insurers and can result in reduced premiums.

2.6 The Council will continue to encourage people to invest in flood protection products and to make their own arrangements for sandbags in advance of a flood event by contacting local suppliers such as builder’s merchants where they can purchase them and possibly have them delivered. In addition, the Council will continue to invest in flood defence works and to maintain flood defences that have been constructed since 2007, and apply for government grants for the installation of permanent property level defences in high risk areas where civil engineering solutions are not possible.

3. Conclusion

3.1 Sandbags are no longer considered to be an effective means of dealing with floods, particularly flash floods, and therefore it is recommended that the Council will not issue sandbags to residents or businesses before or during a flood event. However, the proposed policy does provide the ability for Officers to use their discretion for exceptional circumstances or when dealing with requests from vulnerable people, as defined in the policy.

4. Consultation and Engagement

1. Civil Contingencies Manager
2. Lambourn Valley Flood Forum
3. Pang Valley Flood Forum
4. Thatcham Flood Forum
5. Parish Councils

Background Papers:

Pitt, M. 2008. *The Pitt review: learning lessons from the 2007 floods*, DEFRA

Available from: http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/pittreview/thepittreview/final_report.html

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could compromise the Council’s position | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Item is Urgent Key Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Report is to note only | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Strategic Aims and Priorities Supported:

The proposals will help achieve the following Council Strategy aim:

P&S – Protect and support those who need it

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the following Council Strategy priority:

HQL1 – Support communities to do more to help themselves

Officer details:

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Appendix B

Equality Impact Assessment - Stage One

We need to ensure that our strategies, policies, functions and services, current and proposed have given due regard to equality and diversity.

Please complete the following questions to determine whether a Stage Two, Equality Impact Assessment is required.

Name of policy, strategy or function:	Sandbag Policy
Version and release date of item (if applicable):	Version 1
Owner of item being assessed:	Stuart Clark
Name of assessor:	
Date of assessment:	

Is this a:		Is this:	
Policy	Yes	New or proposed	Yes
Strategy	No	Already exists and is being reviewed	No
Function	No	Is changing	No
Service	No		

1. What are the main aims, objectives and intended outcomes of the policy, strategy function or service and who is likely to benefit from it?	
Aims:	To clarify the Council's position regarding the supply of sandbags during a flood event.
Objectives:	To provide guidance to Officers managing an emergency response to flooding
Outcomes:	The Policy provides transparency regarding the supply of sandbags, and permits Officer to use their discretion when dealing with exceptional circumstances or vulnerable people.
Benefits:	The Policy will help prevent any confusion or inconsistencies when dealing with requests for sandbags, and aims to encourage individuals to make their own arrangements for flood defences

<p>2. Note which groups may be affected by the policy, strategy, function or service. Consider how they may be affected, whether it is positively or negatively and what sources of information have been used to determine this.</p> <p>(Please demonstrate consideration of all strands – Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex and Sexual Orientation.)</p>		
Group Affected	What might be the effect?	Information to support this
Vulnerable people	The policy provides a degree of comfort to vulnerable people who are unable to protect their properties.	
Further Comments relating to the item:		

3. Result	
Are there any aspects of the policy, strategy, function or service, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could contribute to inequality?	No
Please provide an explanation for your answer:	
Will the policy, strategy, function or service have an adverse impact upon the lives of people, including employees and service users?	No
Please provide an explanation for your answer:	

If your answers to question 2 have identified potential adverse impacts and you have answered ‘yes’ to either of the sections at question 3, or you are unsure about the impact, then you should carry out a Stage 2 Equality Impact Assessment.

If a Stage Two Equality Impact Assessment is required, before proceeding you should discuss the scope of the Assessment with service managers in your area. You will also need to refer to the Equality Impact Assessment guidance and Stage Two template.

4. Identify next steps as appropriate:	
Stage Two required	No
Owner of Stage Two assessment:	
Timescale for Stage Two assessment:	
Stage Two not required:	

Name: **Stuart Clark**

Date: **03/11/2016**

Please now forward this completed form to Rachel Craggs, the Principal Policy Officer (Equality and Diversity) for publication on the WBC website.

Appendix C

West Berkshire Council Sandbag Policy

This document sets out West Berkshire Council's policy regarding the supply of sandbags during an emergency flood event.

Householders and business owners are responsible for protecting their own property. **West Berkshire Council does not have a statutory duty to provide sandbags** nor is it our policy to do so. However, the Council does have permissive powers in relation to flood defence and maintains a limited supply of sandbags for use to primarily protect vulnerable residents (*residents who as a result of age, disability or illness are unable to take protective actions to safeguard themselves or their property*). During a severe flood event, we will not be able to meet every request for sandbags, however we will handle all enquiries sympathetically but in strict accordance with the following priorities:

1. To prevent loss of life or serious injury (supply and placement, subject to health and safety considerations)
2. To maintain access for emergency services (supply and placement)
3. To protect vital facilities within the community e.g. care homes, schools, surgeries (supply only)
4. To protect Council buildings (supply and placement)
5. To safeguard vulnerable individuals (supply and placement)
6. To support local partners (supply only and recharge costs)

The council will consider providing help to residents who are in imminent danger of flooding where resources allow. However, we will not supply sandbags as a precautionary measure based on forecasts. Requests from commercial premises owners will only be considered in very exceptional circumstances and a charge will be made for any assistance that is given.

Where sandbags are provided the following conditions apply:

1. No guarantee can be given that sandbags will be delivered within a specific timescale.
2. The council will not accept responsibility for the quality or effectiveness of sandbags provided by the council.
3. All requests for sandbags will be assessed in terms of the health and safety of the crews making deliveries and the availability of personnel to produce sandbags.
4. Members of the public will not be allowed to collect sandbags from the council's depot.
5. We will supply sandbags free of charge on a needs basis. However, once issued the sandbags are deemed to become the property of the householder or receiving organization. West Berkshire Council will not accept responsibility for the collection and disposal of sandbags although exceptions will be considered where householders are elderly or disabled.
6. Sandbags will not be provided to protect gardens, garages or other outbuildings

The Council will encourage people to make their own enquiries for sandbags in advance of a flood event by contacting local suppliers such as builders merchants where they can purchase them or possibly have them delivered.

The Council will continue to support and encourage householders and businesses to develop flood action plans to prepare in advance of flood emergencies and flood warnings.