

SOUTH YORKSHIRE POLICE AUTHORITY

DATE: 22 FEBRUARY 2008

REPORT OF THE CHIEF CONSTABLE

LESSONS LEARNED BY SOUTH YORKSHIRE POLICE DURING THE FLOODING OF 2007

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1. This report seeks to highlight those lessons learnt by South Yorkshire Police during their response to the extensive flooding that occurred throughout South Yorkshire in June 2007. The report also seeks to update members on the implications for addressing such lessons.
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2 Recommendations

- 2.1. **Members are recommended to note the contents of this report and comment on any issues arising.**
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3 Background Information

- 3.1 June 2007 was the wettest June suffered by the Yorkshire area since 1882. In South Yorkshire, there were two spells of exceptionally heavy rainfall - on 13 and 14 June, a total of 118mm of rain was recorded at Weston Park Museum in Sheffield; and on 24 and 25 June, a total of 88mm was recorded.
- 3.2 The rainfall on 13 and 14 June resulted in localised flooding on 15 and 16 June, leading to the evacuation of a number of properties. However no major rivers overtopped and events were dealt with by local Silver-level commanders. Some idea of the scale of the problem can be gauged by the fact that Friday 15 June 2007 was the busiest day in the history of South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue. However, ten days later this was surpassed.
- 3.3 The ground had been saturated by the rains of early June. Reservoirs and rivers were full. Although this is not unusual for rivers, it is, at this time of year, unusual for reservoirs to be full. On Sunday 24 June, the Meteorological Office and the Environment Agency started issuing warnings relating to a threat of heavy rain and possible flooding in South Yorkshire. At around 7.00am on Monday 25 June, the first flooding incidents were reported to the emergency services and local authorities.
- 3.4 Severe flooding was observed in Barnsley and Sheffield during the morning and some evacuation of flooded properties commenced. Other flooding of properties in Rotherham and Doncaster was also reported. At this time, flooding was primarily from surface run-off water with which drainage systems were unable to cope.

- 3.5 During the afternoon of Monday 25 June the Chief Constable directed that a Gold Control be established and T/ACC Broadbent deployed to Atlas Court to Command the incident. The River Don overtopped in central Sheffield and flooding, on a scale not seen since the 1864 Dale Dyke Dam burst, affected the area from Kelham Island downstream to Meadowhall and into Rotherham town centre. Other watercourses were also much higher than normal. Unfortunately at this time two people lost their lives. A major factory fire was triggered in the Meadowhall area by flood waters impinging on a hot furnace and an electricity sub-station in north Sheffield was flooded resulting in widespread loss of power supplies and the imposition of rota power cuts, to facilitate reconnection.
- 3.6 Late on the evening of Monday 25 June, it was observed that the dam at Ulley Reservoir, owned by Rotherham MBC and operated as a leisure facility, was in danger of collapse with a consequent threat to critical infrastructure including electricity and gas power supplies and a sewage works. A major pumping operation was put in place to reduce the water level and emergency civil engineering works undertaken to reinforce the dam wall and reduce the threat from the spillway. Precautionary evacuations and road closures, including that of part of the M1 motorway, were carried out.
- 3.7 On Tuesday 26 June, areas along the River Rother at Catcliffe started flooding. Later, considerable flooding started occurring further down the Don at Sprotbrough and Bentley and in the areas where the Ea Beck and River Went join the Don. A threat was identified to power supplies at a substation at Thorpe Marsh and efforts made to reinforce flood defences accordingly. These were successful.
- 3.8 Floodwater then collected in the Toll Bar area, which is below both normal river level and mean sea level and normally drained by pumping stations. Due to the difficulties of draining this area, the area remained flooded for some two weeks.
- 3.9 Overall, some 4,000 domestic properties and some 1,600 businesses were flooded, according to Government figures. (It should be noted however that precise numbers of flooded properties are very difficult to determine with certainty.) For the first time since it opened, Meadowhall was closed other than for Christmas Day or Easter Sunday. The M1 motorway was shut for three days. The pumping operations involved the largest ever deployment of the Fire and Rescue Services' High Volume Pumps.

4 Lessons Learned

- 4.1. A full post incident debrief process was facilitated by the National police improvement Agency in which all agencies involved in the incident participated. This was undertaken in conjunction with the South Yorkshire Local Resilience Forum (LRF). This process identified the lessons to be learned for all agencies involved in the incident and the LRF has published the findings in a comprehensive report. A debrief has also taken place at the national level to learn the lessons from other parts of the country where flooding occurred. This paper seeks to highlight the main lessons learned from the flooding incident for South Yorkshire Police.
- 4.2. Although the floods that affected South Yorkshire in 2007 were perhaps the largest and most widespread destructive event since the Second World War,

the emergency services, co-ordinated and led by South Yorkshire Police, were able to respond in a thoroughly professional and effective manner. Although tragically two people lost their lives during the flooding the effective response of the emergency services ensured that there was not further loss of life and that the impact of the flooding was minimised, although it is accepted that there was widespread damage to the infrastructure within the county and to property. Clearly South Yorkshire Police were able to command and co-ordinate an effective response to such a major incident.

- 4.3. The long standing police command structure of Gold, Silver and Bronze commands was shown to be effective. However this particular major incident involved the partners and agencies (utility companies) that were not as familiar with the command structure as some of our other emergency service and local authority partners. It demonstrated a need to have a wider involvement in exercises to rehearse the response future incidents. It was acknowledged that due to scale of the incident that some of our local authority partners were having to use staff that were not well versed in working within the Bronze, Silver, Gold structure. South Yorkshire Police will take the lead in organising further training regarding this command structure for all organisations likely to be involved in responding to a major incident within the county.
- 4.4. Gold Control was based at Atlas Court. Given the number of agencies required at Gold Control there were insufficient accommodation, parking and IT facilities. There was also some concern that Gold control was located on the flood plain of the River Don, however, it may be argued that as the Gold control remained operational during such a catastrophic flood it would be unlikely to flood in the future. A site for a multi agency Gold control for future incidents has been identified at the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Training College at Beaver Hill.
- 4.5. Those agencies designated as Category 2 responders under the Civil Contingencies Act (utility companies) had little knowledge or experience of working with the other emergency services in such a major incident. In turn, Police Commanders had only a limited understanding of the key river and drainage systems throughout the county and key points on the National Grid. There is clearly a requirement for better liaison between the emergency services and Category 2 responders.

5 Summary

- South Yorkshire Police has the capability and capacity to command and coordinate the response to such a major incident.
- Future training for such major incidents requires a wider participation for all agencies that may be involved in responding.
- A multi-agency Gold Control with the capacity to accommodate all responding agencies needs to be established.
- Better liaison is required between all emergency services and category 2 responders.

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