

Scrutiny questions response: Ian Fegan, Head of Communications

1. Briefly outline your role and responsibilities for either flood risk management or emergency planning in Wolverhampton?

As the head of communications, I'm responsible for the communications team which supports and advises directors and cabinet members before, during and after major incidents and civil emergencies. This helps the council to meet its statutory responsibilities to warn and inform as set out under the Civil Contingencies Act (2004).

We work closely with the resilience team who provide the council with an 'early warning' system based on their expertise and relationships with local, regional and national partners. We also support this by regularly monitoring social media and media monitoring.

We also worked closely with emergency planning colleagues to develop the city council's emergency communications plan. Three years ago we implemented and have maintained an on-call communications officer rota for out-of-hours emergency support to duty directors/managers.

In the event of an incident/emergency, we work closely with partners to ensure a consistent and coordinated response.

2. What action did your organisation take in preparation for the weather forecast of heavy rainfall on Sunday 27 May 2018?

In terms of the communication team function, we were aware from local and national media reports of the risk of heavy rain and the potential for localised flooding in some areas. However, we were not made aware of any specific risk within the city.

This may have been due to the nature of this particular incident of surface water flooding as they are very often difficult to predict and to identify precise locations in advance. In circumstances where this intelligence exists, or where command and control mechanisms work during an incident, the communications team can play an important role in warning, informing and reassuring.

Indeed, members of the team have worked on such events/incidents during and outside of office hours to support this:

- September 2017, St Joseph's Court Tower Block flooding
- December 2017, Fri 8 – Fri 15. Severe wintery weather. During the first weekend, the on-call officers social media posts reached 345,000 and 60,000 residents engaged with our posts (liked, shared, commented, clicked through)
- March 2018, Severe wintery weather.
- June / July 2018, Heatwave

3. What are your views of the effectiveness of current flood risk management and emergency response co-ordination with other partner organisations before during and after the flooding event on Sunday 27 May 2018?

There could perhaps have been better information sharing and better partnership command and control. However, the nature of this specific incident of surface water flooding might have made that more challenging.

4. What were the challenges to your service in helping to prevent surface water and sewer flooding in known high-risk areas in Wolverhampton?

This role is specifically carried out by colleagues from our city environment team. Our role would have been to warn and inform before, during or after such flooding incidents.

5. What changes, if any, would like to see flood risk management or emergency response plans in the future?

Considering the specific issues I'm aware of, I would recommend the following:

1. More robust system in the duty team of contacting the duty director or duty manager
2. Review duty team capacity to coordinate internal resources given demand faced over that weekend (is there an opportunity to consider closer working with partners this)
3. Plans need to be tested more regularly with both desk-top and live training
4. Building on 4 – this needs to be done in a multi-agency environment to build relationships, understanding and awareness of respective roles