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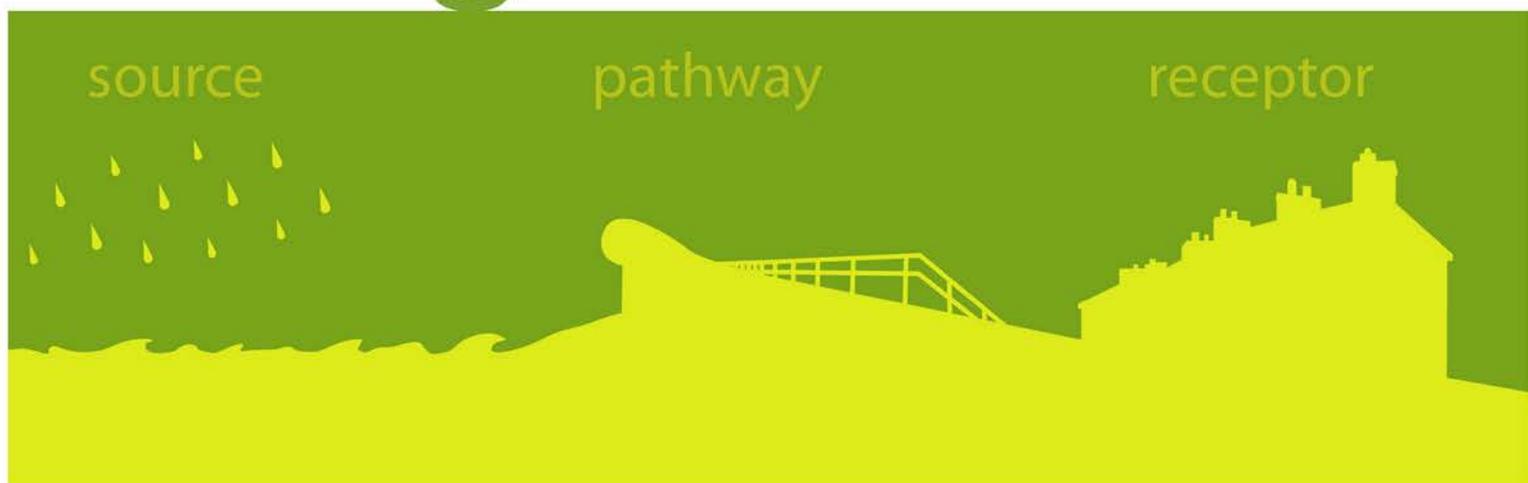


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Issues and options concerning FRCM volunteering

Report – SC120013/R4

We are the Environment Agency. We protect and improve the environment and make it a better place for people and wildlife.

We operate at the place where environmental change has its greatest impact on people's lives. We reduce the risks to people and properties from flooding; make sure there is enough water for people and wildlife; protect and improve air, land and water quality and apply the environmental standards within which industry can operate.

Acting to reduce climate change and helping people and wildlife adapt to its consequences are at the heart of all that we do.

We cannot do this alone. We work closely with a wide range of partners including government, business, local authorities, other agencies, civil society groups and the communities we serve.

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Evidence at the Environment Agency

Evidence underpins the work of the Environment Agency. It provides an up-to-date understanding of the world about us, helps us to develop tools and techniques to monitor and manage our environment as efficiently and effectively as possible. It also helps us to understand how the environment is changing and to identify what the future pressures may be.

The work of the Environment Agency's Evidence Directorate is a key ingredient in the partnership between research, guidance and operations that enables the Environment Agency to protect and restore our environment.

This report was produced by the Scientific and Evidence Services team within Evidence. The team focuses on four main areas of activity:

- **Setting the agenda**, by providing the evidence for decisions;
- **Maintaining scientific credibility**, by ensuring that our programmes and projects are fit for purpose and executed according to international standards;
- **Carrying out research**, either by contracting it out to research organisations and consultancies or by doing it ourselves;
- **Delivering information, advice, tools and techniques**, by making appropriate products available.

Miranda Kavanagh

Director of Evidence

Executive summary

The research identified a number of issues and opportunities through which the Environment Agency could better understand, evaluate and improve its engagement with flood and coastal risk management (FCRM) volunteers at both a strategic and an operational level.

Governance of FCRM volunteering

There is considerable variation in the forms of management and support provided to individual volunteers and community groups. A key strategic issue is the extent to which a more consistent approach would be possible or necessary given the need to be responsive to local conditions, capacity and needs. Arguably, consistency is less important than transparency. The disconnect of perceptions about the adequate resourcing of FCRM volunteering by Environment Agency local staff and Environment Agency managers illustrates the need for the Environment Agency to develop a consistent strategic approach to its views on FCRM volunteering.

Multi-agency partnerships with active volunteer involvement that have developed in Cornwall and elsewhere have been put forward as a model for other parts of the country. Important features that could be transferrable include:

- working with local resilience forums which are multi-agency partnerships at county or regional level to oversee community resilience and emergency planning
- forums of local agencies, town and parish councils, community groups and businesses to ensure wider local buy-in
- informal hubs in large rural settlements helping to co-ordinate communication and mobilise action among volunteers across neighbouring isolated communities

Evidence and learning

Decisions about the allocation of resources to FCRM volunteering are made on the basis of cost–benefit analyses, which fail to capture the often intangible, indirect and unseen ways in which FCRM volunteers avoid losses associated with flooding. The scope of economic analyses may need to be broadened, while qualitative and narrative evidence, including the value for money approach may need to be presented more effectively. Detailed case studies could help make a one-off case at a strategic level.

There is also a need for clear and consistent data to be kept on numbers of volunteers, contact details and roles, and how they are managed (directly or through another agency) to monitor the overall status of FCRM volunteering. More detailed assessment of profiles, activities, motivations, outputs and outcomes of volunteers every few years would help the Environment Agency identify what is working, and what roles it and its partners should play in different locations.

Better sharing of lessons and good practice on the use of volunteers is needed to improve organisational learning within the Environment Agency. Face-to-face seminars or meetings take time and resources, but are effective when they allow sharing of ideas between staff working with similar types of flood event or community. While training is provided within the Environment Agency on issues around engagement, there may be a need for training designed specifically to help staff engage with FCRM volunteers. Corporate volunteers from outside the Environment Agency or from other parts of the Environment Agency could be encouraged to volunteer for a couple of days on FCRM. Similarly, the Environment Agency could benefit from secondment of staff to agencies

that manage volunteers to learn how it is done. A volunteering champion might provide an opportunity to raise the profile of FCRM volunteering within the organisation. There are also the potential to learn lessons from other environmental or volunteering agencies.

Volunteer management

The research showed that potential volunteers are more likely to sign up if there is a clear pathway to involvement. Having a single clear route into Environment Agency information on volunteering would make it easier for those who are interested.

There is a lack of clarity about the expected roles of flood wardens – before, during and after flood events – and this should be addressed. Inspiring examples would help those flood wardens with the time, capacity and interest to extend their roles. Similarly, there is no guidance to encourage interested individuals who are not yet engaged in FCRM volunteering.

Training and guidance is provided inconsistently to FCRM volunteers with similar roles in different parts of the country. Training to a recognised standard can support volunteers in their roles, and in some cases, help them obtain insurance cover.

At present, recognition of volunteers' work is ad hoc across the country, partly due to the diversity of agencies that manage them. Public acknowledgement at meetings and newsletters would help, but the Environment Agency should consider working with its partners to thank volunteers in a more structured way, learning from agencies that have systems of rewards, including acknowledgement of long service and so on.

There is also little consistency across the country over the reimbursement of volunteers' expenses, with many flood wardens covering these costs themselves. The principle of reimbursement was also seen as a way to demonstrate to volunteers that their work is valued.

Insurance of volunteers is currently provided inconsistently by parish and town councils, local authorities or individual flood groups. Clarity is sought on what kind of insurance is needed, the activities it should cover, who should arrange it and pay for it, and who should be providing this information to volunteers.

Efforts to promote a more diverse profile of volunteers should be considered, while taking into account the possibility that rural areas have lower populations of black and minority ethnic groups.

Agreements to pool and share volunteers could be developed between the Environment Agency and dedicated volunteer organisations, either as 'working through others' or 'working in partnership'. Common objectives and procedures could be agreed to allow access teams of volunteers during severe weather events or individuals with specific skills such as use of four-wheel-drive vehicles.

Many volunteers already use Facebook and Twitter as part of their FCRM roles. Social media can be used to promote and recruit volunteers, inform others of what they are doing, and as a data gathering tool for Environment Agency staff.

The role of volunteers in the Environment Agency's maintenance efficiency programme could be enhanced.

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1 Introduction

This document describes Work Package 4 of the Environment Agency project, 'Investigating and appraising the involvement of volunteers in achieving FCRM outcomes', being carried out on its behalf by Forest Research.

The objectives of the overall research project were to:

1. Establish a common and up-to-date understanding of volunteer involvement in flood and coastal risk management (FCRM) activities. This baseline information will be used to identify FCRM activities delivered by volunteers.
2. Develop a consistent evaluation framework that enables the Environment Agency and others to consider the benefits of involving volunteers in the delivery of FCRM activities.
3. Understand why people are motivated to get involved in FCRM activities in their communities, the capabilities they need and their capacity to help deliver a range of FCRM outcomes. Using the evaluation framework developed to meet Objective 2, this analysis will include whether volunteers working on FCRM activities may be willing to help bring about other environmental outcomes.
4. Develop a strong evidence base (including case studies) that explores the effectiveness of involving others in the delivery of FCRM activities and assesses the efficiencies a range of approaches may realise. This includes whether working through other organisations would enable the Environment Agency to achieve more outcomes in communities at risk of flooding.
5. Enable the Environment Agency and other flood risk management authorities to take evidence based decisions on how and when to engage, develop and sustain volunteer participation in FCRM activities.
6. Inform the development of operational guidance that equips Environment Agency staff to target their efforts effectively and to maximise the benefits of involving volunteers in the delivery of FCRM outcomes.
7. Ensure both internal colleagues and external stakeholders are kept informed in an engaging way.

This report addresses objectives 5 and 6, drawing on data from the primary research and literature reviews conducted to provide insights into the most important issues the Environment Agency needs to consider in its future decision making on FCRM volunteering. Other reports available from this research include:

- Work Package 1 Report: FCRM volunteering baseline data and typology development.
With supporting resource spreadsheet: 'Environment Agency volunteer case studies baseline dataset – 97 examples'.
- Work Package 2 Report: Developing an FCRM evaluation framework
With two supporting resource spreadsheets: 'Environment Agency volunteer evaluation review' and 'Environment Agency evaluation framework criteria and indicators'
- Work Package 3 Report: Case study, survey, diary and interview research on FCRM volunteering
- 'Volunteers' contribution to flood resilience', Research Note by Forest Research for the Environment Agency, March 2014

2 Issues and options highlighted by the research

The research identified a number of opportunities through which the Environment Agency could better understand, evaluate and improve its engagement with FCRM volunteers at both a strategic and an operational level. Many of these points stem from the diversity in approaches to volunteer engagement seen across the country and the need for more consistency, guidance and opportunities for organisational learning. These issues are briefly outlined in a research note prepared for the Environment Agency in March 2014 (O'Brien et al. 2014). They are expanded on here so that they might inform future decision making by the Environment Agency including the possible development of operational guidance.

Where appropriate, options are provided relating to these issues that were highlighted through the research for this project and which illustrate how the issues are currently being tackled by the Environment Agency and its FCRM partners, volunteers and community groups. The points made are organised under three headings:

- governance of FCRM volunteering
- evidence and learning
- volunteer management

2.1 Governance of FCRM volunteering

2.1.1 The direction of travel

Balancing a consistent approach with flexibility to local circumstances

There is a striking diversity in the forms of FCRM governance across England. Of the 450 warden schemes in operation in August 2011, 38% were owned by local authorities, 35% by parish councils, 18% by the Environment Agency, 3% by flood action groups and 6% by others (Environment Agency 2011). This is partly a reflection of local differences in flood risk, funding opportunities, governance structures, and local capacity and willingness to engage. However, it also reflects the multiplicity of ways in which the Environment Agency has sought to manage FCRM volunteers at regional and local level.

The Environment Agency's specification for the project states that the research should enable the Environment Agency Strategy and Engagement team to develop a 'consistent approach' to working with flood volunteers in the future and to evaluating the benefits of working with them. What would a more consistent approach look like, and to what extent would it be appropriate given the need to be responsive to local conditions, capacity and needs?

From a national perspective, it could be seen as attractive to identify a single approach to the governance of FCRM volunteering that could be applied to most situations and rolled out across the country. However, stakeholders at all levels in the Environment Agency highlighted the importance of adapting to the local contexts in which it operates to increase local acceptance, empowerment and action. This idea is very much in line

with the notion within the Environment Agency of a 'place based approach' whereby initiatives are allowed to grow organically in local areas.

In this context, the national level needs to define the parameters of what's appropriate and what is expected of staff, at the local level – adding value through the provision of guidance, permission, information, processes and tools – in a way that is not prescriptive. This approach recognises that local staff and volunteers have invaluable local knowledge and the right to assert their opinions as much as the agencies do, without which the intervention could fail. Interviewees gave examples of situations in the past where initiatives, particularly flood defence schemes, ran into local opposition and hostility as a result of a paternalistic approach to designing, building and presenting solutions rather than through early community engagement to develop a shared approach that locals bought into.

Four models of governance

The project specification, along with a number of Environment Agency strategic documents, identifies four governance models for volunteer engagement:

- others working directly for the Environment Agency
- working with partnerships
- working through others
- others (for example, communities) working for themselves

These models were put forward by the Environment Agency to support internal thinking around the direction of travel for volunteer management. They informed much of the research for the project. As explained in the report for Work Package 3 (Environment Agency 2015c), the case studies were selected to represent, as far as possible, one of each of the models, and the analysis of questionnaire responses was broken down by governance type, while the value for money (VFM) questions in the online survey explicitly sought to evaluate each approach through stakeholder responses to the questionnaire. However, the research revealed that it is difficult to describe any given example of FCRM by one of the four models. In many areas, the situation is increasingly complex and dynamic at the local level.

Over recent years, there appears to have been a broad trend across the country – especially noticeable in areas with high flood risk – away from traditional direct management of volunteers by the Environment Agency towards more complex arrangements. Interviewees highlighted how, in the past, prior to the Pitt Review (Pitt 2008) and recent major flood events (especially in 2010), engagement around resilience was focused on the technical aspects of the flood warning service delivered to individual households at risk through 'traditional' means such as putting notes through doors, setting up stalls in supermarket car parks, and advertising.

The Pitt Review in 2008 and subsequent flood events took engagement to a new level. For some interviewees working for the Environment Agency in flood resilience at local level, there was a realisation that empowering the community through its leadership and structure not only helps deliver the Environment Agency's FCRM outcomes but is actually the most cost-effective way of doing so.

Alongside the new focus on active community engagement, a number of other shifts in approach have unfolded, especially in areas with a high incidence of flooding:

- **Partnership working** – there has been a shift from the Environment Agency acting on its own, or with lead local flood authorities, towards multi-agency partnerships sharing resources and goals

- **Scope of engagement** – from a narrow focus on flooding towards wider community resilience and community emergency planning, of which flooding is just one component (alongside crime, fire, snow and so on)
- **Motivations and benefits** – from an individual focus ('traditional' volunteering) towards more of a community focus ('community action')
- **Range of activities** – from activities managed through simple direct relationships with Environment Agency (for example, monitoring, asset management and habitat management) to encompass multiple additional roles such as awareness, education, campaigning, planning and web-based work
- **Level of engagement** – from reactive recruitment of volunteers and communities towards proactive recruitment, and provision of support, with agency inputs declining after a few years as individual community groups become established

Interviewees described how this shift is a consequence of national policy drivers that cut across government agencies – Big Society, localism, community resilience, a 'working with others' approach – and the refocus back on ideas such as neighbourhood planning at town and parish council level. Within FCRM, it is also a consequence of the Pitt Review, the experience of recent storms and a growing realisation (supported by evidence) that community flood groups actually work.

Partnership working is now essential for every agency involved in community resilience: the Environment Agency, local authorities and emergency services. Overall, the idea of the active participation of volunteers and communities to meet objectives they share, as individuals and communities, with a range of agencies as part of a complex multi-agency partnership, was described as 'an idea that is of its time'.

In terms of the four governance models for FCRM volunteering, what has emerged in many areas of high flood risk, and elsewhere, could be described simply as 'working with partnerships'. However, this label hides the complexity and dynamism of what is actually unfolding on the ground, where it is often possible to identify elements of all four governance models. Broadly speaking the situation is characterised by multi-agency partnership. Thus, in Cornwall, where FCRM engagement falls under the umbrella of community emergency planning, community groups are approached by a single individual representing several agencies – the Environment Agency, the local authority and the emergency services:

'They deliver our message in some places; we deliver their message in others'.

There are many hybrid approaches. The distinction between 'others working directly for the Environment Agency' and 'others working for themselves' is often blurred. For example, in the past, operation of tidal floodgates was typically done by local volunteers on behalf of the Environment Agency, organised through a one-to-one relationship with the volunteer. This can be seen as an example of working directly for the Environment Agency. With the new approach to engagement, one interviewee described how the Environment Agency has made sure these one-to-one relationships are retained, but they have become part of the community flood plan that local people own and benefit from, as well as delivering on the Environment Agency's behalf. So within the wider context of community flood planning, operating floodgates can also be increasingly seen as 'communities working for themselves'.

The procedure for working under multi-agency flood plans is clearly laid out in terms of roles of different agencies. One of the roles of Environment Agency is to help ensure

that, if a community is working in FCRM, it is working in parallel with that process, supplementing and supporting it, so that the community becomes part of the response.

Within this framework, one interviewee described how the situation regarding who is taking the lead – the agencies or the community – switches back and forth throughout the course of a flood event. At the point when a flood is starting, the local community flood (and/or emergency) plan is triggered, with people being warned, temporary defences put in place and so on. But once the flood event is fully underway, it is probably very dangerous for the volunteers to be actively helping out, especially with evacuation. The local flood wardens go back to their co-ordination centre while the emergency services take over. The flood wardens then become a resource for the Bronze Commander, who is then effectively in charge of them: they are no longer an autonomous group but they come under the auspices of the emergency services. The individuals involved in the community emergency plan become pivotal, because they have the local knowledge and information. Their role then changes to informing the emergency services:

‘That’s when the plans mesh together, so that’s where the top–down and the bottom–up come together’.

Afterwards, during recovery, the Environment Agency needs to make sure there is good communication, feeding into the lessons learned, while the community groups may decide to revise their flood plans.

Conclusions

There can be considerable complexity and dynamism in the local governance of flood resilience and in FCRM volunteering. To highlight this, one interviewee said:

‘I need to write this down in a big diagram at some point ... it would almost have to be 3D’.

Hence, the problems around evidence to support decision making is less a matter of evaluating each of the four models and deciding which is the most efficient and effective to roll out. It is more about the provision of guidance, and opportunities for organisational learning, to empower local teams to respond creatively to local circumstances.

Overlapping policy drivers shared by a range of agencies, reinforced by practical experience on the ground, have largely determined what the direction of travel should be, that is, a shift towards more complex, dynamic multi-agency partnerships with active volunteer and community engagement, to meet shared objectives (that often go beyond just FCRM), through approaches that are co-developed, and where it becomes increasingly difficult to identify who is working for whom.

One exception to this pattern is the ‘working through others’ model, where a different type of volunteering is often being supported, such as younger people volunteering for example in vegetation management, who are primarily motivated by personal goals – in particular skills development to support their careers. There is less need to co-ordinate precisely with the activities and responsibilities of other agencies, allowing their management to be relatively isolated from the multi-agency partnership working associated with community emergency planning.

An important health warning for the direction of travel reported here is that this has evolved in places such as the West Country where there has been a particularly high incidence of flooding since 2010. In other areas, where the risks are less severe, or the degree of co-operation between agencies less well developed, the multi-agency approach with strong local engagement might not be seen to be a priority. There is,

however, a danger that Environment Agency staff will fall back on traditional approaches to engagement, for example, door-to-door contact with isolated individuals, especially when there is high pressure to deliver and delivery is still being evaluated in terms of quantitative outputs.

To what extent would a more consistent approach be possible or necessary? Consistency is needed in terms of setting the limits of what is appropriate, and what should be expected of staff, at the local level. However, consistency in terms of the precise approach to be employed is arguably less important than transparency. With better transparency, and better internal mechanisms for communicating what is happening across the country, it would be possible for the Environment Agency staff at national level to see what is happening in different areas and make judgements on its effectiveness and efficiency in specific areas, and respond with improvements. The evaluation framework developed as part of this project provides methods and tools that could be used to support this learning process (see Section 2.3.3).

2.1.2 Transferring successful approaches: what elements are replicable?

The multi-agency partnerships with active volunteer involvement that have developed in south-west England and elsewhere have been put forward as a possible model for other parts of the country, for example within the National Community Resilience Committee. Interviewees highlighted how this approach has evolved organically through interaction between agencies and communities; it should not be imposed from above but put forward as options at appropriate moments during ongoing engagement and partnership work.

Features that could be transferrable include the following.

Multi-agency partnerships

These operate at regional level, where the multi-agency flood plan is seen as part of wider community emergency management. Local resilience forums operate across the country and provide a consistent structure for working closely with local authorities, local communities and the emergency services to plan for and manage a range of incidents.

Community flood forums

These operate at county level and are made up of local agencies, town and parish councils, community groups and businesses. One example is the Cornwall Community Flood Forum, which has representatives of the Environment Agency on its management board (see Work Package 3 report; Environment Agency 2015c).

Informal 'community (emergency) hubs'

In rural towns, these help co-ordinate communication and mobilise action among volunteers and community flood groups across neighbouring isolated communities.

The hubs are a new development in Cornwall. They are being proposed to:

- make communication and co-ordination more efficient across scattered settlements
- reach out, share skills and ideas

- recruit potential volunteers such as retired health and safety officers or fire officers
- help each community develop their own emergency or flood plan

It is possible that they will evolve as local versions of the Cornwall Community Flood Forum, acting autonomously to meet their needs but looking very specifically at local issues around flooding.

Community flood groups

Community or flood watch groups, community flood groups and so on are well established across the country. Despite variations in their name, they all have volunteers and coordinators within their communities who take action or act – in a warning and informing way, or in an intelligence led way – to help reduce the risk of flooding in their communities. In turn these groups will probably be able to help bring about these actions, not just for flooding, but for other emergencies in that community:

‘If there is a fire, and rest centres are needed to be opened up, it is often these same people who get involved’.

Comments

There has been interest in these approaches beyond the West Country, but they may not be seen as a priority in places that have had a drier period over the last 18 months.

While it may appear beneficial for a flood forum to evolve in every county, interviewees made it clear that it must be what the community and local partners feel they want and need – ultimately it should be up to them.

2.2 Evidence and learning

2.2.1 Capturing the value of volunteering

Evaluation of FCRM volunteering can be seen as having two broad applications, that is, to provide evidence of:

- why it should be done
- how it should be done

The second application is discussed in Section 2.2.2.

This section considers the evidence needed to help justify the resource committed to engagement by demonstrating successful delivery and a good return. The evidence may be directed towards central government, but also decision makers within the Environment Agency who decide where resources are allocated, including the FCRM Directorate Leadership Team (DLT) and Area managers.

The allocation of resources tends to be made on the basis of cost–benefit analyses, which fail to capture the often intangible, indirect and unseen ways in which FCRM volunteers avoid losses associated with flooding.

The case for investment in volunteer and community engagement within the Environment Agency is being pursued through four approaches outlined below, which could be further strengthened.

Economic case

Investment decisions around flood risk tend to be based on cost–benefit analysis (CBA) for assets, such as flood defences and properties at risk, with a cost–benefit ratio of 1 to 8 often cited as necessary to justify investment. Because flood incident management is harder to fit into this framework, the basis for decisions around level of investment in activities such as flood resilience and stakeholder engagement has been less explicit and harder to defend.

The approach to cost–benefit for flood risk is based on ‘damage avoided’, for example, through property level protection. This depends on flood incident management, including flood forecasts and warnings, which in turn depend on community engagement work to communicate the warnings and mobilise action that is co-ordinated across all partners.

The challenge is to assess and, if possible, monetise the contribution of each of these components to the overall outcome of damage avoided. A range of models are being discussed to incorporate these activities within economic appraisal by developing a comparative measure of inputs and outputs. This will hopefully produce credible figures that will feed into the decision making process and justify investment.

Quantitative measures

In the absence of a strong economic case, the method used to assess flood incident management focuses on quantitative measures of outputs such as the number of people who have signed up to Floodline Warnings Direct. The Floodwise initiative used a framework of measures for community engagement which also included personal flood plans completed, amount of benefit in-kind, visits to specific web pages and so on. While acting as helpful proxies for the outcomes of engagement, interviewees suggested that these cannot measure how resilient a community has become or strengthen the economic argument (see Section 2.2.2).

Narrative and qualitative evidence

There is a need to articulate how flood resilience contributes to overall reduction in flood risk. Part of the evidence is likely to be through narratives that make the case.

Some interviewees noted that the most powerful evidence is often through case studies showing how collaboration led to shared outcomes:

‘That stuff is incredibly powerful, if you can get people to sit down and look at it.’

Personal experience gained by decision makers

A step further than communication of detailed case studies through presentations or written reports is for decision makers to have direct personal experience of how engagement contributes to risk management and to tangible benefits in terms of ‘damage avoided’.

Examples were given of this effect within the Environment Agency. One interviewee described how working at local level during the floods in 2012 made them realise that community flood groups really work:

‘The communities that were flooded who had community flood plans in place were better prepared for those floods, were more resilient.’

They knew this not through cost–benefit analysis but through day-to-day engagement with communities they worked with. The challenge is to find ways to share this knowledge within the organisation both horizontally and vertically (see Section 2.2.3).

The challenges associated with making a case

With all of these approaches, it is hard to evaluate costs and benefits in complex situations where different agencies are delivering partly on behalf of others. Similarly, volunteers derive individual and shared benefits over and above those that are of direct instrumental benefit to the Environment Agency and its partners – but which may meet wider governmental agendas, for example, around health and wellbeing, and community development.

Several interviewees at different levels within the Environment Agency suggested that the case for supporting volunteer and community engagement has already been made in the sense that most managers would agree with the importance of the agenda. Yet, they added that this support does not necessarily translate into additional funding.

It was argued that there needs to be a realisation within parts of the organisation that FCRM volunteering is an investment with future rewards that can pay back several times over. Those who agree with this view would also acknowledge that it is very hard to support it with evidence and then to present it in a way that makes an impact, especially given the pressured context in which decisions are made about resource allocation.

Area managers and Area flood risk managers are responsible for delivering outcomes against Service Level Agreements with Defra with tight timescales and budgets for multiple technical pieces of work. When the pressure is on these understandably become the sole focus of delivery. Without separate funding for community engagement, it becomes necessary to demonstrate a link between effective working with volunteers and partners and what local managers must deliver on the ground.

It was argued that there needs to be a cultural change, a change of mind set, around what evaluation looks like, with acceptance of qualitative and narrative approaches and the evidence gained from personal experience. There needs to be greater appreciation and confidence throughout the Environment Agency, from the local resilience teams to national level, in terms of knowledge of a wider range of tools and methods. This will require provision of guidance.

Meanwhile, some interviewees implied that there is still a long way to go to convince an organisation primarily composed of engineers and scientists for whom qualitative evidence may be seen as less credible or robust.

2.2.2 Monitoring and evaluation at a local level

As well as evaluation to make the case for investment, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is needed to show how to engage effectively: to identify what works and what does not. Guidance and training continue to be important, although it was suggested that this may make little difference unless Environment Agency staff are able to settle the argument that FCRM volunteering is an effective way to deliver more outcomes.

The numerical approach to evaluation implemented through Floodwise (see above) was seen by interviewees as a step forward. However, some saw the approach as too generic and insufficient to measure the resilience of a community or understand the factors influencing success. There has been a move towards SMART objectives and getting people to think more about using a narrative approach to M&E such as

statements from interviewees to gauge perceptions on whether they feel more resilient or empowered, or have taken certain actions if they have filled in a personal flood plan.

One interviewee suggested:

'Instead of having everything on a massive spreadsheet which just comes across as a load of numbers, you need a sort of narrative to say 'okay, this is engagement with people in a flash flooding catchment and this is the sort of work that we've done and these are the outcomes'.

A qualitative and narrative approach is still at its early stages within the Environment Agency and there is seen to be a need for capacity building that changes thinking so that it becomes more accepted. Currently the default is still a preference to count the things the Environment Agency does.

In terms of operational monitoring, there was a reported need for clear and consistent data to be kept on numbers of volunteers, contact details and roles, and how they are managed (directly or through another agency) to keep track of the overall status of FCRM volunteering. More detailed assessment of profiles, activities, motivations, outputs and outcomes of volunteers would usefully be carried out every few years – using the prototype evaluation framework developed for this project – to help the Environment Agency identify:

- what is working
- what roles the Environment Agency and its partners should play in different locations

Without this M&E, decisions about FCRM volunteering and the role that the Environment Agency should play in this will be difficult to make.

The annual 'Flood Awareness Tracker Survey' commissioned by the Environment Agency provides an opportunity to ask a representative sample of people:

- whether they get involved in FCRM volunteering
- whether they would be interested in getting involved
- what types of activities they take part in when volunteering
- what benefits they receive

The prototype evaluation framework could be used to choose appropriate questions and indicators that could be asked in the survey.

2.2.3 Sharing lessons and good practice within the organisation

At the broadest level, the National Resilience Committee and the meetings of the National Flood Resilience team leaders both provide effective forums for participants to communicate and learn about best practice in (flood) risk management across the country. The National Resilience Committee includes representatives from the Cabinet Office, Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), Defra, the Environment Agency and emergency planners.

At a local level, monthly teleconferences have allowed discussions about particular issues and projects. An online forum provides a similar function. Face-to-face events for engagement specialists twice a year have been planned. It is recognised that people benefit most from the network building and informal sharing of experiences possible through face-to-face meetings. It is also recognised that, while systems and

venues are being put in place, their effectiveness will need to be enhanced by actively building a network of engagement practitioners to use these systems.

Despite these initiatives, during interviews it appeared that there was still much to gain by improved internal organisational learning to share lessons and good practice. Some Environment Agency staff felt it useful to discuss issues with others who face similar types of flood events (fluvial, coastal, rapid response and so on) or similar types of communities (for example, rural, urban). Face-to-face seminars and meetings were seen to be very important for this type of sharing with a structure that considers how engagement staff can consider or implement and take forward any new ideas, heard from others, in their own areas. Some concerns were expressed in the research that the opportunity to meet face-to-face will reduce with further constraints on budgets.

A small number of staff were keen to explore in more detail activity in other parts of the country, for example, being able to unpick some of the detail of the Cornwall Community Flood Forum approach was mentioned, so that they could really start to understand if and how it could apply or be applied to their areas.

2.2.4 Guidance and training of Environment Agency staff

Training relating to FCRM engagement has been delivered to the Flood Resilience Teams, using a Working with Others approach. It has involved teaching local staff to:

- set clear objectives
- build in evaluation of engagement at an early stage in project design
- ensure engagement takes place with the correct partners and stakeholders

This allows staff to plan where and for how long and to what end their engagement is focused at a local level.

Guidance, tools and planning techniques have been developed to support training. Training in collaborative working, facilitating meetings and engagement are available to a range of Environment Agency staff. The staff of the local resilience team in South West Region have all received bespoke training in community engagement.

However, it was not clear from this research to what extent the training covers specific issues faced in connection to FCRM volunteering. For example, there is a need for staff to realise the wide range of potential roles of volunteers such as fundraising, social media and public relations, as well as the roles normally associated with being a flood warden that may not be immediately obvious to staff who have not worked much with volunteers.

As explained in Section 2.3, staff need to understand:

- volunteers' motivations
- what volunteering management involves
- how to recruit, retain and mobilise volunteers to achieved shared outcomes

2.2.5 Corporate volunteering and exchanges

As well as in-house staff training, there are also opportunities for the Environment Agency to learn from other organisations that work with volunteers in the environment sector, such as the Forestry Commission, or with the voluntary sector. This relates to the idea of corporate volunteering and exchanges. The Environment Agency and other organisations allow staff to spend 1–2 days per year volunteering. There are potential

opportunities for corporate volunteers from outside the Environment Agency, or other parts of the Environment Agency, to get involved and this could include habitat and vegetation management, leaflet drops, design of leaflets or production of web information. There might be an opportunity to specifically target organisations that work regularly with volunteers (for example, The Trust for Conservation Volunteers) to carry out corporate volunteering in the Environment Agency to provide new ideas and expertise. Similarly, the Environment Agency could benefit from secondment of staff to agencies that manage volunteers to learn how it is done in other settings.

2.2.6 Volunteering champions

It seems that some work is needed to promote volunteering internally within the Environment Agency. The Environment Agency could consider whether a volunteer champion would provide an important opportunity to raise the profile of volunteering in a broad sense or to raise the profile of FCRM volunteering in particular within the Environment Agency.

The volunteer champion could enthuse and support Environment Agency staff at an Area level and also develop a national overview and vision of volunteering that they could convey to senior managers. This person could also be responsible for collaborating with other organisations that work with volunteers so that the Environment Agency could learn and benefit from a diversity of experience.

A volunteer champion could also make known to staff the range of research conducted for the Environment Agency in recent years that is relevant to FCRM volunteering and the suggestions and recommendations highlighted by this research (Glen and Langridge 2012, Groundwork North East 2012, Groundwork North East 2013a, Groundwork North East 2013b, TNS 2013).

The role could be taken by an existing member of staff working on related community engagement issues but would ensure 'volunteering' is not forgotten about.

2.2.7 Learning from other organisations

Previous research by Forest Research on the governance of environmental volunteering at a national and local level reported on interviews with representatives from organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), The Conservation Volunteers (TCV), National Trust, Natural England, The Wildlife Trusts and Forestry Commission (O'Brien et al. 2011, p. 59). The report discusses how these organisations work with volunteers and identifies some key issues.

For example, the organisations in this research talked about a changing focus for environmental volunteering, moving from a traditional approach (that is, one involves those with an interest in and knowledge of the environment, and is focused on what people can do for the environment) to a more inclusive approach that tries to reach non-traditional audiences through outreach and targeting community groups. This approach concentrates on what the environment can do for people in terms of well-being and community development. It requires staff to have the skills to work with non-traditional audiences.

The RSPB and TCV both have online systems for gathering data about who volunteers, what they do and where they are. The RSPB also carries out a survey every 3–4 years to understand how volunteers feel about their experience.

All the organisations in the research recognised that staff needed support in managing and training volunteers. The majority of the organisations viewed word of mouth as a

key way in which volunteers could be recruited, realising that volunteers spread the word to their friends and family.

Finally, the organisations indicated that an important objective was to encourage people outdoors and connect them with them with the environment as well as to get conservation work done that the organisations would not be able to do without the help of volunteers.

Volunteer England has a 'Good Practice Bank' (www.volunteering.org.uk/goodpractice) that acts as a 'one stop shop' for volunteer managers and volunteers who are looking for advice and guidance on how to support volunteering.

2.3 Volunteer management

2.3.1 Signposting and recruiting volunteers

The research showed that potential volunteers are more likely to be motivated to take part in FCRM if there is a clear pathway to involvement. Signposting people to volunteering opportunities is seen as vital to generating and maintaining interest. However, there does not appear to be readily available information for people who might be interested in becoming a flood warden about the role, what it involves and how they can get involved. It seems that people only receive that information once they become a flood warden but not beforehand.

At the time of writing, the Environment Agency did not appear to have a portal on its website that outlined how and where people can volunteer. However, searching for 'volunteering' on the website did provide a number of options. Having a single clear route into Environment Agency web pages on volunteering would make it clearer for those who might be interested in volunteering. This was one of the key determinants of being an FCRM volunteer identified in research for Work Package 3 (Environment Agency 2015c).

Signposting potential volunteers to other relevant agencies and opportunities can also be important. If, for example, someone approaches the Environment Agency to become a flood warden and it does not have the capacity to work with that person, the Environment Agency could signpost them to a local flood group or a charity working with flood volunteers or to a partner organisation it works with. A local flood event is very often the catalyst that leads people to become volunteers. Often face-to-face engagement with the Environment Agency can help make this happen. There are perhaps lessons to share between local teams about how to recruit volunteers after flood events.

The Forestry Commission in England has dedicated web pages on volunteering (www.forestry.gov.uk/england-volunteering), providing ideas of what activities people can get involved in and where this can take place. Volunteers should only need to click two or three times to obtain information about the opportunities available, and how and where they can get involved.

2.3.2 Clarifying the role of the FCRM volunteer

As with the role of potential volunteers, concerns were expressed in the case studies about the clarity of information for existing flood wardens and other FCRM volunteers about their role and what is expected of them.

There is a set of common functions a flood warden does, such as raise awareness of flood risk and contribute to the development of flood plans. However, flood wardens

can also grow their role if they have the time, capacity and interest to do so. For example, some flood wardens actively use Facebook and Twitter to provide information to their community, or they might perform some form of vegetation and habitat management. Other flood wardens give talks to communities, schools and parish and town councils on flood awareness. The range of ways in which the role can be developed could be better highlighted. It is also important to clarify what it is that flood wardens should not be doing, for example, attempting to evacuate people during a flood event.

As part of its development of training for flood wardens, the Cornwall Community Flood Forum is developing information, via its Defra Pathfinder project, on the role of the flood warden before, during and after a flood event. The Environment Agency Anglian Region flood warden toolkit developed in 2011 also outlines the role of a flood warden during a flood event. There is potential to use these resources elsewhere with FCRM volunteers and to adapt them to local circumstances where appropriate.

2.3.3 Training of FCRM volunteers

There does not appear to be a consistent approach to training FCRM volunteers. Some flood wardens in the research talked about getting induction and some training when they started volunteering and others did not. Volunteer training is being developed in Cornwall via the Cornwall Community Flood Forum as outlined in Work Package 3 report (Environment Agency 2015c). For some local flood groups in Cornwall, this will mean that they can get insurance via their local parish council if they can show they are trained to a specific standard.

At the River Stewardship Company (another Work Package 3 case study), the long-term voluntary river stewards are allocated a training budget so that they can access appropriate training while carrying out their voluntary activities. This is part of the attraction of the role as the volunteers gain job experience and training they can add to their CV in future job applications. Provision of training opportunities as part of the volunteer 'offer' can be a motivation to start volunteering and stay involved.

Training of FCRM volunteers in Cornwall is being developed by the Environment Agency and its multi-agency partners in a modular form so that it is applicable for all emergencies. There are specific units for flooding, but volunteers could be taught a separate unit on snow or fire, as well as generic modules such as dynamic risk assessment and how to work with the emergency services. Engagement work has identified local retired health and safety inspectors or fire officers who can do risk assessments and train local people. Some volunteers managed through Volunteer Cornwall are helping to provide training to community groups. Some of these developments could be introduced elsewhere.

2.3.4 Recognition of FCRM volunteers

There seems to be no system at present within the Environment Agency to recognise the efforts that volunteers put in. This is made more difficult by volunteers not necessarily directly volunteering for an organisation such as the Environment Agency, but volunteering via their parish council, for example.

Annual seminars organised by the Environment Agency in some areas to which volunteers are invited provide an opportunity to acknowledge and thank volunteers for their input. This could also be done via any newsletters that Environment Agency may send out to volunteers. However, is this broad brush, unsystematic approach effective? Can the Environment Agency work in partnership with other organisations to thank volunteers in a more structured way?

Other organisations that work with volunteers such as the National Trust have a system of rewarding volunteers including acknowledgement of long service, organising a Christmas meal for volunteers, and issuing certificates.

According to an Environment Agency staff member, the Environment Agency staff were acknowledged by senior managers on a regular basis during the recent severe flooding for their hard work and the extra hours they were putting in. However, it is not clear to what extent FCRM volunteers who were also getting involved during the recent storms have been thanked for their extra efforts. Volunteers can be putting in a lot of time and effort, carrying out some of their activities during very bad weather, during the night time when a flood event is in progress.

2.3.5 Reimbursement of expenses

Some flood wardens incur out-of-pocket expenses, for example, for travel costs to monitor their areas or attend meetings, make telephone calls, and possibly pay for printing or photocopying.

There does not seem to be any consistency around reimbursement of flood wardens by the Environment Agency or other organisations, or about whose responsibility this might be when the Environment Agency is working in partnership with others. Sometimes reimbursement is connected only to emergency flooding events rather than to everyday volunteering activity.

Some flood wardens from the survey did not feel that they need to be reimbursed. However, a few did talk about the principle of reimbursement being important even if they choose to decline it. Reimbursement is also about providing recognition to volunteers for the work they do.

Volunteer Cornwall states that good practice is to offer reimbursement to volunteers. For those on lower incomes who might want to engage and become a volunteer, a lack of reimbursement could be a significant barrier to getting involved. A discussion with an Environment Agency staff member described a volunteer who had wanted to attend an annual event for flood wardens but who stated they could not afford the petrol money to attend the meeting (Environment Agency 2015c). In considering how to increase the diversity of FCRM volunteers in terms of age, income and ethnicity, it could be important to be clear about any reimbursement options available to volunteers.

2.3.6 Insurance of FCRM volunteers

The main approach to insuring flood wardens in their volunteering activities seems to be primarily to ensure that they are covered via their local parish or town council. Some local authorities insure a number of their volunteers. For example, Lincolnshire County Council insurance covers its coastal flood wardens.

Some individual community flood groups take out their own insurance, for example, the Par and St Blazey Community Flood Group in Cornwall has insurance costing it about £200 per year. The Cornwall case study described in the Work Package 3 report (Environment Agency 2015c) highlighted that the Lostwithiel Flood Watch Group found it difficult to gain insurance cover for its flood wardens as the insurance company wanted to see evidence of flood wardens having received training.

Some flood groups are trying to be more explicit about what a flood warden does and doesn't do, making it clear – by asking flood wardens to sign a document – that the flood warden's role is not to go into flood water. If a volunteer does do this, they therefore do so at their own risk and would not be covered by insurance.

A small number of flood wardens interviewed for the research in Work Package 3 had not considered insurance and did not think they were covered. This raises the question: which organisation should be talking to them about this? Clear signposting would be valuable to provide flood wardens with options and ideas about how to get insurance cover. This is linked to clearer guidance on the role of the flood warden as well as any training that flood wardens should or could receive.

On a related note, concerns were expressed by some Environment Agency staff in the case studies about health and safety issues related to volunteers, with worries that volunteers might put themselves in danger in a flood event. The Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group (<http://vscg.co.uk>) might be a useful forum to discuss some of these concerns to learn how other organisations deal with them. The Environment Agency's Environment and Business Advisor – Recreation is a member of this group.

2.3.7 Widening volunteer diversity

While there seems to be a mix of men and women among FCRM volunteers, they do tend to be older, often 50+ years. In addition, there is very little ethnic diversity and probably few volunteers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. To what extent does the Environment Agency think this is an issue to be addressed, either alone or with its partners?

There are examples within and beyond Environment Agency that could be drawn upon. In Cornwall, the Cornwall Community Flood Forum works with faith communities to help set up rest centres. Targeted projects that use a 'working through others' approach, for example, via the River Stewardship Company, bring in younger age groups that want to improve skills development to aid in future employment.

TCV created a small number of projects called 'Changed Places, Changed Lives' in 2005 to 2006 that focused on engaging black and minority ethnic (BME) communities in conservation volunteering. TCV collaborated with the Black Environment Network on the project and participants were also actively involved in research on the project. From a purely environmental view, the impact of participants' activities was limited. From a social impact view, however, the contribution of the projects was significant and allowed communities to see that caring for the environment was an important part of what they were (Church 2007).

Efforts to promote a more diverse profile of volunteers should respond proportionately to the duties placed on public authorities under the Equalities Act 2010, for example, by taking into account the possibility that rural areas have lower populations of BME groups.

2.3.8 Pooling and sharing volunteers

There may be scope for developing partnerships with volunteer organisations to increase access to volunteers during times of need.

In Cornwall, Volunteer Cornwall is a member of the management board for the Cornwall Community Flood Forum. Volunteer Cornwall has what it calls 'winter friends' – volunteers who help in communities in severe weather and carry out activities such as clearing drains to prevent flooding.

Forestry Commission England has signed a memorandum of understanding with Volunteering England (part of the National Council of Voluntary Organisations), which outlines their common objectives and sets out how they will try and work together to achieve them.

2.3.9 Social media

Some of the volunteers in the case studies were making effective use of Facebook and Twitter to update local communities about flood risk and to disseminate information. The Par and St Blazey Community Flood Group and the Mevagissey Flood Watch Group in Cornwall are being used as an example by the Cabinet Office to showcase the use of social media for community resilience. Within Environment Agency there is an online community of practice for staff, with a forum and resource sharing platform, allowing staff to asking questions and comment on their experiences.

Social media can be used:

- to promote and recruit volunteers
- for volunteers to tell others about what they are doing
- as a data gathering tool, for example, the WeSenseIt project in which data are being collected via citizen smart phones

The Environment Agency can use social media to track what is happening on the ground – as a research tool by the Environment Agency or its contractors.

New websites such as Flood Volunteers (<http://floodvolunteers.co.uk>) connect people in need with local volunteers who outline how they can help such as feed horses, provide general maintenance or medical assistance.

2.3.10 Maintenance efficiency

The research found that volunteers are performing a wide range of activities that can contribute to the Environment Agency's maintenance efficiency programme. This includes asset inspection whereby coastal based volunteers walk defences and grade them, for example. according to visible cracks in the concrete walls. It also covers vegetation management and catchment walkovers to spot and address problems such as blocked rivers and waterways. The online survey of volunteers identified that 36% of the participants were involved in working to improve the physical environment.

Another aspect in which volunteers could be involved is the maintenance of assets in terms of individual property protection.

A possible way to enabling this function could be with the 'working through others' approach, as in the River Stewardship Company case study, or supporting active communities that feel able to carry out this type of activity themselves, as in the Bodenham case study (Environment Agency 2015c).

3 Conclusion

The primary data for this research on FCRM volunteering were collected before the severe flooding in the winter of 2013 to 2014. Given the impact of those floods it could be argued that there has never been a better time to focus on the role of FCRM volunteering and its importance as part of the integrated multi-agency response needed to deal with future severe weather events due to potential changes in the climate.

Much debate has taken place due to the severe weather about the future management of land, the infrastructure needed and the limitations of hard flood defence infrastructure as the key measure to prevent such severe flooding. Communities need to be resilient and able to take action themselves, and the research for this project has provided case studies where this is taking place in different parts of England.

There has been a change in culture, attitudes and practices over recent years within the Environment Agency regarding FCRM volunteering. But all stakeholders involved in the research acknowledged that there is still much that can be done. Most importantly, perhaps, there is still a need to make the case for volunteer engagement within the Environment Agency and show how it is not just cost-effective but also essential to the successful delivery of its FCRM outcomes.

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