

Letters to DARD and DFP

Dear Minister

**Re: Progress on the delivery of individual flooding defences for householders in Northern Ireland**

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of Belfast City Council is concerned that many Belfast City Council residents have experienced or been threatened by flooding from various sources over the last six years, with some properties being repeatedly flooded and householders suffering significant financial loss. The Elected Members are aware that a number of independent reviews, most recently the PEDU report into the 2012 flooding, have called for individual property protection schemes, alongside other measures, and would urge the Department to bring forward such a scheme at the earliest opportunity.

In January 2014, in response to the risk of tidal flooding, 45,000 sandbags were deployed across Northern Ireland to provide some protection to properties and to reassure the public. It is our view that tailored individual property protection systems/devices are far more effective and efficient than sandbags. By August 2012, the Scheme of Emergency Financial Assistance had provided £1,000 payments to 4,259 households (10% had claimed on more than one occasion). It is estimated that this does not adequately represent the number of homes which have flooded as some individuals do not wish to claim and some do not meet the criteria to claim. The actual and human cost of flooding is significant and while permanent alleviation schemes have been identified for some high risk areas, for other areas individual property protection is the only viable solution.

The Committee acknowledges that significant work has been progressed in relation to flooding with measures such as large scale alleviation investment schemes, improved alert systems etc. being implemented and accept that property protection schemes are not necessarily the solution in all areas.

We understand that the Rivers Agency has produced a business case for such a scheme but that this is awaiting assessment and approval within your department. We also understand that the business case includes a proposal that district councils would support the administration of such a scheme and would therefore welcome early discussions on this aspect of the proposal and the implications this might have for councils. Such a scheme has significant potential to empower the public to help themselves, reduce the likelihood of their homes flooding and prevent financial hardship.

The recent coastal flooding threat also highlighted the importance of individual agencies protecting their own infrastructure. Flooding of critical infrastructure such as pumping stations, electricity substations and telecommunications hubs compounds the impact of a flooding incident on residents and businesses and inhibits our ability to recover quickly after an incident. While some organisations already have business continuity plans in place, all organisations need to be encouraged to ensure that they assess their own assets and implement protective measures, with financial support where necessary.

In addition, the Committee would also take this opportunity to point out that the absence of a single organisation with responsibility for flood planning and response continues to confuse the public and create a reliance on local councils and the PSNI to co-ordinate the response in flooding emergencies. However, flooding expertise does not lie with these agencies and various reports have recommended that this issue needs to be resolved.

I would appreciate it if your department would provide the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee with some clarification on the proposals, finance, timeframes and

administrative arrangements for the introduction of a household property protection scheme and would welcome early discussions around these issues.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these matters. We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

Alderman Gavin J Robinson  
Chair of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee  
Belfast City Council