



House of Commons

Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs Committee

Flooding: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2019–21

**Eighth Special Report of Session
2019–21**

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The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and associated public bodies.

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Eighth Special Report

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee published its Fourth Report of Session 2019–21, Flooding (HC 170), on 8 February 2021. The Government response was received on 22 April 2021 and is appended to this report.

Appendix: Government Response

Introduction

The Government thanks the committee for its report on flooding.

Flooding and coastal erosion have devastating impacts on people's lives—affecting their homes, communities, health and livelihoods. Reducing the impacts of all forms of flooding and coastal erosion is a priority. In 2020 the Government published its long-term policy direction in the Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Policy Statement.¹ It sets out commitments under five key policies: upgrading and expanding our national flood defences and infrastructure; managing the flow of water more effectively; harnessing the power of nature to reduce flood and coastal erosion risk; better preparing our communities; and enabling more resilient places through a catchment-based approach. They reflect the wide range of actions needed to better protect and better prepare the country, making us more resilient to the risk we face.

The Government has just begun a new six-year programme of investment in flood and coastal defences. A record £5.2 billion across 2,000 new projects will better protect 336,000 properties. This follows the previous £2.6 billion six-year investment programme, which delivered 700 schemes to better protect more than 300,000 homes.² The previous investment programme is projected to save the economy more than £30 billion in avoided damages, whilst the new investment programme is projected to reduce national flood risk by 11% and will help to avoid £32 billion in future economic damages. These investment programmes provide economic benefits to the whole nation, support job creation and provide reassurance and peace of mind to communities. This growth will help the country to build back better, faster, and greener from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alongside the Policy Statement, the Environment Agency published its updated National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England.³ This strategy is a statutory requirement, which provides a framework for guiding operational activities and practitioners' decision making to deliver the Government's policies.

The Government is also facilitating other mitigating actions to boost resilience. This includes ensuring there is a long-term approach to maintenance, through a combination of investment, and action by risk management authorities, Government, riparian owners and wider beneficiaries. The Government is also committed to harnessing the power of nature through nature-based solutions.

1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flood-and-coastal-erosion-risk-management-policy-statement>

2 <https://www.gov.uk/Government/news/more-than-300000-homes-better-protected-from-flooding-since-2015>

3 Under the Floods and Water Management Act 2010, the Environment Agency must develop, maintain, apply and monitor a strategy for flood and coastal erosion risk management in England. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-flood-and-coastal-erosion-risk-management-strategy-for-england--2>

At a local level, the Flood and Coastal Resilience and Innovation Programme⁴ will test innovative actions to improve resilience in 25 local areas.⁵ The pioneering projects, which will be delivered over the next six years, will receive a share of £150 million as part of the Government's new programme, managed by the Environment Agency. This will complement the Government's investment in conventional flood defences, including through nature-based solutions, trialling new technologies and proactive solutions for making properties more flood resilient, as well as fostering more community engagement.

Meeting the challenge

Conclusion and Recommendation 1: We welcome the doubling of investment in flood defences announced at Budget 2020, amounting to £5.2 billion over the next six years. It is vital that measures to address the growing, long-term, flood and coastal risk in the face of climate change are adequately resourced. The Government should therefore keep the level of investment under constant review, with reference to the Environment Agency's long-term investment scenarios. The Government should commit to ensuring that funding for FCERM management will keep pace with climate science and modelling of flood and coastal risk, both during the 2021–27 programme and beyond. (Paragraph 12)

Since 2010 the Government has significantly increased its investment in flood and coastal erosion risk management and has just begun a new six-year capital investment programme, investing a record £5.2 billion in delivering around 2,000 schemes to better protect 336,000 properties. This doubles the Government investment when compared to the 2015–21 programme. The new investment programme alongside a range of other anticipated capital and revenue investment sources in England (such as the £200m innovation fund and the £170m economic recovery funding for 22 accelerated flood defence schemes) will, for 2021 to 2027, exceed the average optimum investment level identified by the Environment Agency's Long Term Investment Scenarios.⁶ The new investment programme alongside other anticipated capital investment sources will also exceed the minimum required to maintain resilience, as estimated by the National Infrastructure Assessment.

The Government's long-term approach to its investment programme enables it to better address the impacts of climate change. The Environment Agency provides guidance on assessing a range of future climate change scenarios when developing individual schemes. This guidance reflects the higher climate scenario from the latest UK Climate Projections⁷ and ensures that schemes are resilient to future changes in climate, provide adequate protection to people and places and account for uncertainties where the science is still being developed. The Environment Agency regularly keeps this guidance under review and updates it to reflect the latest science and data.

Beyond this parliament and the current six-year flood defence investment programme, the level of investment will be for the next Government to determine.

Conclusion and Recommendation 2: We welcome the steps taken thus far to improve the partnership funding formula, to better take account of climate change and the

4 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/flood-and-coastal-resilience-innovation-programme>

5 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/innovative-projects-to-protect-against-flooding-selected>

6 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flood-and-coastal-risk-management-in-england-long-term-investment/long-term-investment-scenarios-ltis-2019>

7 <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/approach/collaboration/ukcp/index>

wider impacts of flooding. However, it is disappointing that the Government's call for evidence on further changes to the formula has only just been launched, and will not close until the eve of the next investment programme starting in April 2021. We believe there is more work to be done to ensure that flood capital investment protects people and property without favouring certain areas or disproportionately focussing on certain types of flooding. When considering cost-benefit analyses, natural capital should also be a factor that is taken into consideration. *The Government should ensure that any further steps to address shortcomings of the flood funding formula, following the current call for evidence, are communicated and implemented as quickly as possible.* (Paragraph 16)

The Government's investment programme is based on risk mitigation and where the greatest benefit to people and property can be achieved. The Environment Agency use a consistent set of criteria to prioritise funding for schemes proposed by all risk management authorities, which ensures a fair distribution of funding based on agreed priorities, principles and needs. This includes ensuring that schemes mitigate and compensate for any impacts on natural capital assets, which can be accounted for in the scheme's benefits whilst maintaining the primary purpose of the scheme.

The Government made technical changes to the partnership funding rules in 2020, including an updated approach to funding environmental benefits which encourages more nature-based solutions. The Government's Call for Evidence is considering several specific changes that could strengthen the assessment of local circumstances in the new investment programme, such as providing further benefit to frequently flooded communities. Central to this is exploring how further benefits could be provided to frequently flooded communities—such as through potential changes to the partnership funding policy, appraisal policy or to the way schemes are prioritised.

Following the analysis of the results of the Call for Evidence, the Government will launch a public consultation to invite views on potential changes it wishes to make. Any changes will be published and applied as soon as possible in the current investment programme—the timing of which will be balanced with providing appropriate notice and guidance to enable stakeholders to effectively plan and deliver schemes.

Conclusion and Recommendation 3, 4 & 5: We share the concern of our predecessor Committee about the apparent stalling of private sector contributions under the partnership funding model. The recent National Audit Office report shows the Government faces an uphill struggle to reverse the decline in private sector contributions. We welcome the steps the Government is taking to encourage more private contributions, including reviewing guidance on corporation tax relief. However, we note with concern that the Environment Agency has said it will be challenging to secure the partnership funding needed to deliver the outcomes of the next multi-year capital investment. (Paragraph 22)

While we acknowledge the great value of partnership contributions from public sources, it is obvious that private sector investment is too low (as the Government has implicitly accepted), and this could contribute to uncertainty about whether schemes will be deliverable. *The Government should explain how it will monitor whether the level of partnership funding, including private sector contributions, is jeopardising the outcomes of the multi-year capital investment programme.* (Paragraph 23)

The Environment Agency should facilitate this by keeping a record of schemes that are unable to proceed due to being unable to secure adequate partnership contributions, including a quantification of the losses in flood resilience that result. (Paragraph 24)

The Government's partnership funding approach is designed to ensure that funding contributions can be secured from a range of sources. It also ensures a consistent national approach to allocating the investment programme, prioritising those schemes that secure the greatest benefits with a higher percentage of Government funding. The previous investment programme secured around £530 million of partnership funding contributions.

The partnership funding approach is successfully delivering its objective, as demonstrated by an independent evaluation⁸ published in November 2018. This evaluation identified that the partnership funding approach enabled 400 more schemes to be delivered and better protected 65,000 homes. This would not have been possible under the previous funding policy.

The Government's Policy Statement sets out actions to further strengthen incentives for generating partnership funding, particularly from the private sector.

The partnership funding contributions required in the new six-year investment programme, from April 2021, will be lower than that required in the previous investment programme as a direct result of the additional funding that the Government is providing, as well as the changes already made to the partnership funding rules in April 2020. As such, Government is confident that the level of partnership funding required is achievable.

Partnership funding, including private sector contributions, will be regularly monitored by the Government and Environment Agency to ensure key risks are identified early and enable mitigating action to be taken, as required. This includes monthly monitoring and more intensive support by the Environment Agency for those current and future schemes with the greatest benefit and highest risk of non-delivery.

Conclusion and Recommendation 6: It is critical that the considerable outlay of public money through the Government's £5.2 billion capital investment in flood defences is not wasted through a failure to adequately resource the maintenance of new and existing assets. We are concerned by the evidence we have received about existing shortcomings in asset maintenance, and this situation will only be exacerbated by the twin pressures of climate change and increased capital funding if the Government does not act. We recognise the Government's stated commitment to ongoing maintenance, but a step change is needed. The Government should put in place a long-term resource budget settlement for FCERM, that is aligned with the increased multi-year capital investment programme, so that the EA and others are able to effectively plan and maintain the network for flood and coastal risk assets. (Paragraph 29)

The Government's Policy Statement sets out a holistic approach to maintain the network of flood and coastal erosion risk management assets across England, through a combination of investment and action by risk management authorities, Government, riparian owners and wider beneficiaries.

8 sciencesearch.defra.gov.uk/Document.aspx?Document=14477_Evaluation_Report_for_publication.pdf

The Government recognises the importance of maintaining existing flood defence assets and ensuring there is revenue funding for this purpose. The Environment Agency currently maintains 78,000 flood and coastal erosion risk management assets across England. Between 2015 and 2020 the Government significantly increased funding over this period for the maintenance of such assets and wider maintenance e.g. river conveyance. In addition, the March 2020 Budget provided the Environment Agency with an additional £120 million of funding for 2020–21 to repair assets damaged during the 2019–20 winter floods. The Government continues to invest in the maintenance of existing assets. This includes an increase in maintenance funding in 2021–22 compared to the previous year. The Government will be working with the Environment Agency to maximise the benefits of this funding, including reducing properties at risk and addressing risk of further degradation. Future spending will be determined by the 2021 Spending Review.

Conclusion and Recommendation 7 & 9: The Government's refusal to set a national standard for resilience to flooding means there is uncertainty about the level of its ambition. We would expect the Government to show leadership in the face of severe and growing risk by setting out its long-term objective. We are not convinced by the Government's rationale for rejecting the National Infrastructure Commission's recommendation of a nationwide standard for flood resilience. Such a standard could address limitations of cost benefit approaches to allocating funding, and would improve public confidence in the Government's approach to creating a country better protected and better prepared for flooding. The Government believes that national standards would be a "lowest common denominator", but it is surely right for the Government to take a political decision on what its policies are meant to achieve. *The Government should clearly set out the level of resilience that its interventions, including future capital investment and the actions in its July 2020 policy statement, are intended to deliver in the long term. This should be aligned to climate projections, and should include qualitative and quantitative objectives for what a nation resilient to flooding looks like. The Government should seriously re-examine the case for expressing this as a national standard for flood resilience, as recommended by the National Infrastructure Commission.* (Paragraph 35)

We welcome the focus on protecting not just homes, but also other properties. It is crucial that the success or otherwise of flood risk management interventions is closely monitored, in order to demonstrate progress toward strategic objectives and ensure value for money. We are particularly concerned that the EA has no plans to monitor progress on the number of properties that will be better protected in the next capital investment programme. *The Government should provide further detail on its intentions to a "national set of indicators", including how they will monitor progress toward a defined objective for flood resilience, and address shortcomings of the "homes/properties better protected" metric.* (Paragraph 39)

The Government has considered the National Infrastructure Commission's work on resilience and set out its response in July 2020. This addressed the difficulty of a 'one size fits all' approach that tries to express as a national standard, the right range of actions suited to the particular characteristics of each catchment, and nationally, that would unlock greater flood resilience. The Government is demonstrating leadership through its Policy Statement to enable greater action in a comprehensive, meaningful and practical way.

In order to drive progress to create a nation more resilient to future risk, the Government has committed to develop a national set of indicators to monitor trends over time, strengthen reporting of progress and transform local flood and coastal erosion planning to accelerate progress. In addition, the Government will enhance cost-benefit appraisal techniques to reflect a wider range of resilience actions thereby providing a robust basis for guiding decisions locally and nationally.

The Policy Statement sets out commitments reflecting a wide range of actions needed to achieve its ambition of a nation more resilient to flooding. As the Government implements these, it will bring forward proposals that, in more detail, indicate the contribution these different interventions will play. Together they will help secure the overall national ambition.

The Government undertakes a robust assurance process of the Environment Agency's activities and is strengthening its oversight and assurance processes for the new capital and revenue programmes which started in April 2021. This Government will track progress on the new capital programme, including the number of properties better protected and the wider benefits of the investment.

These actions will help to drive forward progress and contribute towards making the country more resilient. The Government will set out further detail of its proposals to develop indicators and to strengthen reporting of progress in due course.

Conclusion and Recommendation 8: Climate change poses a grave threat to the flood resilience of communities, with the Climate Change Committee warning that warming of 4°C or more implies inevitable increases in flood risk even in the most ambitious adaptation scenarios considered. The Government needs to be frank about the level of risk it is prepared to accept in extreme climate change scenarios, and those likely to be affected need to know now. *The Government should explain how a reasonable worst-case scenario for increased flood and coastal risk due to climate change would impact upon its national objective for flood resilience, and what this would mean for funding and decisions about whether to protect any given place.* (Paragraph 36)

Risks from flooding and coastal erosion are recognised in the Government's UK Climate Change Risk Assessment and are a key part of the UK National Risk Register, ensuring Government plans effectively for a reasonable worst-case scenario for flood risk. Critical national infrastructure must have high levels of resilience, including for flooding. Government's policies on flood and coastal erosion risk management are informed by the latest climate projections and evidence, including the independent Climate Change Risk Assessment evidence report.⁹ The 25 Year Environment Plan sets out the Government's commitment to ensure that all policies, programmes and investment decisions take into account the possible extent of climate change this century.

The National Flood Resilience Review extended the National Flood Risk Assessment analysis for river and coastal flood risks to develop new "plausible extreme rainfall scenarios". These scenarios, developed by the Met Office, were based on historically extreme rainfall events, to which were added substantial but plausible uplifts of 20–30%. Six catchments were then 'stress tested' using the Environment Agency's detailed models to predict the flooding which could be associated with these extreme rainfall scenarios. The

9 <https://www.theccc.org.uk/uk-climate-change-risk-assessment-2017/>

National Flood Resilience Review used these extreme flood outlines to test the resilience of key local infrastructure assets. Through the Surface Water Management Action plan, the Government has commissioned the Environment Agency, in partnership with the Met Office, to develop plausible extreme scenarios for surface water flooding and assess their possible impacts. The Government will then assess whether there are any implications for the extreme flood outlines on its surface water flood maps and will take this modelling into account in the next review of the National Flood Risk Assessment.

The Environment Agency's National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England¹⁰ supports risk management authorities to plan to adapt to a range of climate change scenarios, including higher scenarios such as a 4°C rise in global average temperatures. Robust climate change guidance for new development and infrastructure is also provided to ensure resilience to a range of climate scenarios.

The Environment Agency is also working to update the National Flood Risk Assessment which will launch by 2024 and will underpin the Environment Agency's flood risk management, providing the tools and evidence needed to support action to increase resilience. For the first time it will provide the flexibility needed to evolve with changing climate data.

Long-term investment decisions to manage these risks follow an adaptive approach. This takes account of climate and demographic changes over time to enable local decision makers to identify the best combination of resilience actions and the right time to act and invest. The Environment Agency's Long-term investment scenarios¹¹ for flood and coastal erosion risk management cover a range of climate change scenarios.

Conclusion and Recommendation 10: The Government must provide leadership to ensure that the division of flood risk responsibilities among various organisations does not result in local communities experiencing a less efficient and responsive approach to flood risk management than if all responsibilities were brought under one roof. We cautiously welcome the Government's commitment to reform flood risk planning, but it must effectively address the concerns we have heard about lack of integration, and not simply place unnecessary new bureaucracy or burdens on risk management authorities. *The Government should provide further detail on its plans to reform local flood risk planning, including which bodies will be expected to lead and co-operate, and how these plans will relate to existing plans and a cross-Government approach to climate adaptation. The Government should draw on best practice from Shoreline Management Plans and Catchment Partnerships in this process. The Government should also ensure that local authorities and other partners receive any additional funding required for this work.* (Paragraph 44)

The Government has committed to transform the current approach to local flood and coastal erosion risk planning so that every area of England will have a more strategic and comprehensive plan by 2026 that drives long-term local action and investment. We will consult on changes to ensure that future plans are clearer and more ambitious, taking account of current and future risks, and provide a framework for action and investment in

10 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-flood-and-coastal-erosion-risk-management-strategy-for-england--2>

11 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flood-and-coastal-risk-management-in-england-long-term-investment>

local areas. This will include providing further detail on which bodies will be responsible for planning and how we expect to achieve greater integration between local planning across a range of areas including land, water and the natural environment.

The Government agrees that future reforms to local flood risk management planning should draw on existing best practice. Local authorities are resourced to carry out their flood risk management duties and the Government will carefully consider any impacts of future reforms on local authorities.

Conclusion and Recommendation 11: The responsibility of riparian owners to maintain watercourses so as not to increase flood risk to others is well established in common law. Obviously, individuals must first know whether they are riparian owners, and their responsibilities, if they are to be expected to discharge them. Risk management authorities also need to be properly enabled and resourced to identify and communicate the right management approaches for riparian assets and enforce maintenance where necessary. *The Government's review of statutory responsibilities for asset maintenance should include reviewing the powers and resources of risk management authorities to communicate appropriate riparian management options, and effectively enforce responsibilities by riparian owners.* (Paragraph 48)

Everyone has a role to play in mitigating flood and coastal erosion risk and making the country more resilient. This includes risk management authorities and riparian owners who play an important role in maintaining assets and watercourses.

The Government has committed to ensuring that riparian owners are clear on their responsibilities and better engaged in the protection of their communities, and to ensuring there is a long-term approach to maintenance across England. The Environment Agency will develop and pilot new ways to provide clarity to riparian owners about their responsibilities.

Alongside this, the independent review into the arrangements for determining responsibility for surface water and drainage assets recommended that the Environment Agency review and update its *Owning a Watercourse* guidance,¹² which provides an explanation on riparian owners' roles and responsibilities, and ensure that it is promoted widely. The Government will publish its response to this review later in 2021.

Conclusion and Recommendation 12: Local authorities will be a key delivery partner for the Government's new flooding policies, so we are very concerned by evidence of inconsistency and shortcomings in capacity. While it is for local authorities to take local decisions, central Government must ensure that they are properly resourced to implement their existing functions and the Government's new flooding policies. We note that the Government has recognised the need to review funding for local Government statutory flood risk functions, and it is essential that this review is completed in good time especially given the wider financial pressures local authorities are facing. *The Government should set out details on the scope and timescale of its planned review of funding for local Government flood risk functions. The Government should ensure that local authorities have dedicated resources to effectively deliver existing flood risk management functions and any new roles, and that their needs are continually monitored to avoid future shortfalls.* (Paragraph 53)

12 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/owning-a-watercourse>

Local government has always been a key delivery partner and flood and coastal erosion risk management funding is a part of the overall local government settlement. Depending on local decisions, the settlement for 2021–22 will see councils' Core Spending Power in England rise from £49 billion in 2020–21 to up to £51.3 billion in 2021–22, a 4.6% increase in cash terms. This recognises the resources councils need to meet their pressures and maintain current service levels. Most local government funding is un-ringfenced, recognising that local authorities are best placed to decide how to meet the major service pressures in their local areas.

The Government has committed to review local government funding for statutory flood and coastal erosion risk management functions, including the way in which it is allocated, to ensure it is fair and matches the needs and resources of local areas – recognising that each face different risks. As announced last year, the Government will not proceed with reforms, such as the implementation of the Review of Relative Needs and Resources (formerly the Fair Funding Review) and 75% Business Rates Retention, in 2021–22 to allow efforts to focus on meeting the Covid-19 pandemic challenges. As part of the 2021 Spending Review the Government is considering the priorities for local government finance reform, including how we allocate funding to councils.

Conclusion and Recommendation 13: We recognise and pay tribute to the substantial effort undertaken by all emergency responders, as well as local communities and the armed services, in responding to the severe flooding over the autumn and winter of 2019–20. However, we are concerned by ongoing indications of resourcing issues for those bodies undertaking the vital work of helping protect lives and livelihoods in the immediate wake of a flood. As the Secretary of State has rightly acknowledged the increasing frequency of severe flooding events, it is not right to expect these organisations to operate at the limit of their capacity. *The Government should engage with all bodies involved in flooding incident response to review their capacity to deal with more frequent severe flooding. The review should ensure that local co-ordination is effective and all partners are properly resourced to meet future challenges.* (Paragraph 58)

The Government recognises the crucial and valuable roles undertaken by many during every incident and the near misses. This includes the Environment Agency, local authorities, emergency services, military, third sector organisations, flood action groups, community leaders, volunteers and neighbours. The total level of support and work is hard to quantify but all actions are appreciated.

The Government and Environment Agency continue to work closely with local responders in developing preparedness, response and coordination capabilities and our priority will always be to protect life and welfare through quick and effective response to major flooding incidents. The Environment Agency is also assessing Multi-Agency Flood Plans to further improve response capability, following the Multi-Agency Flood Plan Review,¹³ which was published in 2018.

Conclusion and Recommendation 14: It is welcome that the Government has now put in place a package of support measures for households and businesses impacted by severe flooding. While it is right that local authorities will usually be best placed to

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multi-agency-flood-plan-mafp-review-government-response/government-response-to-the-multi-agency-flood-plan-review-web-version>

deliver these measures in their areas, it is concerning that some appear to have been left ill-prepared to deal with expectations being set by high-profile announcements from central Government. The eligibility criteria for these schemes have also created at least the impression of unfairness. The use of a single threshold of 25 or more flooded houses, across local authority areas of different sizes, also raises questions of fairness. *The review of the Flood Recovery Framework and the property flood resilience grant scheme should include an evaluation of the timeliness and adequacy of communication from central Government to local authorities, as well as whether the scheme ought to include an additional element of reimbursement for administrative costs. The Government should also ensure that the eligibility criteria for these schemes are clearly communicated, and fairly reflect the differences between local authority areas, including size. The operation of the Bellwin scheme in relation to flood events should also be reviewed as part of this work.* (Paragraph 64)

The Government is currently conducting a review of the Flood Recovery Framework¹⁴ and this includes the use of thresholds and the timescales for determining local eligibility for recovery schemes. The Government will also be undertaking an evaluation of the delivery and impact of the Property Flood Resilience Repair Grant scheme currently in operation. Guidance for the Repair Grant Scheme is promptly issued to local authorities when the scheme is activated. The guidance will be updated following any changes made as a result of the evaluation and communicated through a range of means to local authorities and community stakeholders. There are currently no plans to review the Bellwin scheme.

Conclusion and Recommendation 15: Our engagement with local communities at risk of flooding has highlighted the significant long-term challenges that result from a flood. In particular, the mental health impacts of flooding have been vividly described to us. This includes both the initial trauma of having one's home flooded, and the resultant anxiety whenever severe weather approaches. There is a lack of support for long-term recovery after a flood, once the immediate response phase has passed. We agree with the Government that support should be delivered in the most effective way, often by local Government or voluntary groups. In establishing the Flood Recovery Framework the Government has, rightly, accepted that it has a responsibility to support communities struck by severe flooding. It should not forget them when the flood waters recede. We look forward to further detail from the Government on how it will engage with local partners to make sure that these communities are properly supported. (Paragraph 68)

The Government recognises the long-term impact flooding can have on someone's mental health and well-being. In April 2020, the Government announced changes to its funding formula for flood defences, to include new evidence on the overall impacts of flooding, such as mental health and wellbeing.

The long-term health response following a flood, including for mental health, is managed at the regional level with national co-ordination if required. To support this approach, NHS England has developed clinical guidelines on dealing with major incidents, including providing psychosocial support for both patients and staff and talking therapies which can be accessed remotely. The NHS is also working to ensure face to face support is available, where possible and safe, and all NHS mental health providers have established 24/7 urgent mental health helplines. As part of recovery efforts, local authorities may also choose to

14 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flood-recovery-framework-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england>

call on the expertise of organisations in the voluntary sector, such as the National Flood Forum, a national charity for England and Wales, for both the immediate and long-term support for the wellbeing of flood affected communities.

The Government remains committed to continuing its investment in expanding and transforming mental health services in England. This will amount to an additional £2.3 billion of extra funding a year in mental health services by 2023–24 and an additional £500 million in 2021–22 to address waiting times for mental health services, giving more people the support they need, and investing in the NHS workforce.

Conclusion and Recommendation 16: *The Government should supplement its July 2020 policy statement with an additional action plan, developed with local partners, for the long-term physical, economic, and psychological recovery of communities impacted by flooding. This should include a clear explanation of which national and local actors should be responsible for key aspects of flood recovery support, how they will be supported and resourced, and a plan to monitor delivery against a set of recovery indicators. The Government's commitment to support the voluntary sector should include funding to help charities respond to flooding and build capacity in other organisations.* (Paragraph 69)

The Government has taken action and in 2020 published the National Resilience Standards for Local Resilience Forums where after each event in a local area the human welfare, economic impacts, social disruption, psychological impacts and any other dimensions of harm considered appropriate are assessed. Local Resilience Forums are also expected to define and agree roles and responsibilities for the organisations who may lead or support recovery work, recognising the broad spectrum of public, private and voluntary sector stakeholders. It should clearly define the relationship between multiple local authorities within and across Local Resilience Forums, for recovery.

The Government welcomes the support the voluntary sector has provided to those impacted by flooding and has provided over £1.32 million of discretionary grants, through the Charities Match Funding scheme, following the severe and widespread floods in 2019–20. This scheme distributes monies to local charities, matching contributions made to local appeals, to offer additional help to vulnerable people affected by flooding.

In the Government's Policy Statement we have committed to reviewing the role of the voluntary sector to improve their capacity and capability to help local communities in the event of a flood.

Development and flood risk

Conclusion and Recommendation 17: *The Government should explain how its proposals for planning reform will contribute to better flood resilience outcomes than the current planning system. It should also explain how leadership will be provided within Government so that flood risk and planning policies are integrated within a coherent approach to climate adaptation.* (Paragraph 73)

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan¹⁵ set out its commitment that all policies, programmes and investment decisions take into account the possible extent of climate

15 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>

change this century. The National Adaptation Programme sets out the actions that Government and others will take to adapt to the challenges of climate change in the UK—including in relation to flood risk and planning policy. The Programme is a cross-department collaboration, bringing together Government's policies on managing climate risks in one place. It includes actions in a broad range of areas, including the natural environment, infrastructure, people and the built environment, business and industry, and local government.

The Government Policy Statement sets out a number of actions to maintain and enhance the existing safeguards concerning flood and coastal erosion risk management in the planning system. The National Planning Policy Framework¹⁶ already states that the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change. The framework requires plans take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change, taking into account the long-term implications for flood risk and coastal change. Policies should support appropriate measures to ensure the future resilience of communities and infrastructure to climate change impacts, such as providing space for physical protection measures, and when new development is brought forward in areas which are vulnerable, care should be taken to ensure that risks can be managed through suitable adaptation measures.

The Government is undertaking a review of policy for building in areas at flood risk which includes reviewing whether the current protections in the National Planning Policy Framework are adequate and to consider options for further reform. In January 2021, informed by the emerging findings, the Government published a consultation¹⁷ which set out proposals to make changes to the framework, including to strengthen environmental protections and some aspects of planning policy concerning flood risk. For example, the proposed changes clarify that plans should manage any residual flood risk by using opportunities provided by new development and improvements in green and other infrastructure to reduce the causes and impacts of flooding. Following the completion of the review and consultation the Government will consider what further measures may be required in the longer term to strengthen planning policy and guidance for proposed development in areas at risk of flooding from all sources. This includes through the wider planning reforms set out by the Government in the Planning for the Future White Paper.¹⁸ The white paper proposes that areas at risk of significant flooding will be protected from development and it will only be permitted in growth areas where the risk is fully mitigated.

Conclusion and Recommendation 18: We are concerned that the words on flood risk in national planning policy still do not always translate into actions. We are encouraged by the Government's proposal that planning applications approved against flood risk advice could in future be subject to call-in by the Secretary of State. *The Government should provide further detail on its proposals for cases in which flood risk advice on planning applications is not followed. The remit of the Environment Agency as a statutory consultee should be expanded to include areas of future risk owing to climate change.* (Paragraph 79)

16 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

17 <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-planning-policy-framework-and-national-model-design-code-consultation-proposals/national-planning-policy-framework-and-national-model-design-code-consultation-proposals>

18 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/958420/MHCLG-Planning-Consultation.pdf

There are already statutory provisions in place which enable the Government to call-in planning applications to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for determination, where there are particular concerns. In addition, the Government has committed to consider what more could be done in cases where the Environment Agency's flood risk advice is not followed to ensure that flood risk considerations are addressed during the planning stages so that all developments are safe and resilient to future flood risk. The Environment Agency is planning to publish more detailed information where local authorities have granted planning permission against its flood risk advice by autumn 2021.

The Environment Agency is a statutory consultee for the preparation of local and neighbourhood plans, on planning applications (other than minor development) in high and medium flood zones and in areas with critical drainage problems as notified to the Local Planning Authority. It can also provide pre-written advice (known as Flood Risk Standing Advice) on Flood Risk Assessments for certain developments. The vast majority of planning decisions are determined in line with Environment Agency advice, over 95% in 2018–19, and over 99% of new homes proposed complied with Environment Agency advice.¹⁹

The Environment Agency already provides advice on future flood risk caused by climate change when consulted on Flood Risk Assessments and Strategic Flood Risk Assessments. They use climate change allowances, which are predictions of anticipated change for peak river flow, peak rainfall intensity, sea level rise, offshore wind speed and extreme wave height, when they provide advice on Flood Risk Assessments and Strategic Flood Risk Assessments. The Environment Agency's climate allowances are applied to new developments, national infrastructure and strategic development allocations. This includes developments that may currently be in Flood Zone 1 (low probability of flooding) but may be at increased risk of flooding from rivers and sea in the future (e.g. Flood Zones 2 and 3). Climate change allowances are also applied to the design of surface water drainage schemes associated with new development, to ensure they can drain effectively throughout its lifetime.

The Environment Agency's climate change allowances for sea level rise are based on the 'higher' scenario of climate change from the 2018 UK Climate Projections.²⁰ Allowances for peak river flows will be updated in line with the 2018 UK Climate Projections later in 2021.

Conclusion and Recommendation 19: While we welcome the commitment to consider improving transparency for flood risk advice, the Government must ensure that any development which still goes ahead against advice is clearly communicated to prospective homebuyers. The Government should ensure that information on development against flood risk advice is published in a clear and accessible form. (Paragraph 80)

The Government's Policy Statement includes a commitment to consider ways to boost transparency, data collection and reporting where Environment Agency or lead local

19 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flood-and-coastal-risk-management-national-report/managing-flood-and-coastal-erosion-risk-management-report-1-april-2017-to-31-march-2018>

20 <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/approach/collaboration/ukcp/index>

flood authority advice is provided. To increase transparency, the Environment Agency is proposing to publish more detailed information where planning permission is granted and doesn't reflect the advice provided.

Greater use of digital services has the potential to transform the way such information is communicated so people can become more resilient and aware of the local risk. The Planning for the Future White Paper includes several digital reforms to improve the planning system and make a range of information and data more readily accessible. These proposals, for a system based on data-led processes would allow local authorities and innovators to design and build new digital tools and platforms to improve the user experience, making it easier to understand and participate in.

The Environment Agency is playing a leading role in using digital services, with 75% of the eight million visitors to its webpages each year being flood and coastal erosion risk management related and is continuing to develop and improve in this area.

Conclusion and Recommendation 20 and 22: It is clear that planning and risk management authorities must be empowered and resourced to effectively monitor and enforce the fulfilment of planning conditions in areas at risk of flooding. The Government should urgently review whether planning conditions to mitigate flood risk are being fulfilled. The Government should then bring forward proposals to address any limitations in the powers and resources available to appropriate authorities for the enforcement of planning conditions. (Paragraph 81)

We are very concerned that local planning authorities lack the skills base and resources to effectively factor the impacts of climate change into development decisions. While plans and individual decisions are rightly made at a local level, it is the duty of Government to provide leadership to local authorities facing potentially significant increases in future flood risk. The Government should commit to ensuring that all local planning authorities have the powers, resources and information to effectively factor current and future flood risk into local plans, Strategic Flood Risk Assessments and individual decisions, including properly trained dedicated staff. The Environment Agency should work closely with such staff to improve strategic co-ordination around local plans. The Government should urgently undertake, and publish the findings of, a review of current capacity in local planning authorities to perform this function. (Paragraph 89)

All local planning authorities and risk management authorities should ensure they can deliver their statutory functions, especially in relation to the planning process and to deliver local plans. This includes ensuring that local developments and plans are resilient to local risk and the factors that contribute towards it. The Government wants to ensure local planning authorities are equipped to create great communities through world-class civic engagement and proactive plan-making.

The Government would like to see local planning authorities place more emphasis on the enforcement of planning standards and decisions and through the Government's reforms they will be able to focus more on enforcement across the planning system. Effective enforcement is important to tackle breaches of planning control which would otherwise have an adverse impact and local planning authorities have discretion to use a wide range of enforcement powers, with strong penalties for non-compliance.

The Planning for the Future White Paper includes reviewing local planning authorities' capacity and developing a comprehensive resources and skills strategy to support the implementation of future reforms. The Government has also committed to reviewing and strengthening existing enforcement powers and penalties to ensure they support the new planning system and more enforcement action. This will include greater powers and stronger penalties to address intentional unauthorised developments. Further details will be set out in due course.

Alongside this the Environment Agency is working with the Town and Country Planning Association to develop online tools for risk management authorities to ensure flood risk and future climate impacts are considered appropriately within planning decisions. The Environment Agency and risk management authorities are also developing the planning skills and capabilities they will need to ensure new development and spatial plans are resilient to flooding and coastal erosion.

Conclusion and Recommendation 21: We welcome the Government's commitment to act upon our recommendations regarding the cumulative impact on flood risk of smaller developments. While we recognise that national planning policy does refer to cumulative impacts, this has clearly not allayed concerns that these impacts are not given due regard when planning decisions are made. *The Government should, as part of its review of planning policy for flood risk, establish to what extent flood risk is increased by the lack of scrutiny given to the cumulative impacts of smaller and permitted development.* (Paragraph 85)

The Government's National Planning Policy Framework is clear about the potential flood risk impacts of new development and states "when determining any planning applications, local planning authorities should ensure that flood risk is not increased elsewhere" and that applications for householder development, small non-residential extensions and some changes of use should meet the requirements for site-specific Flood Risk Assessment. The 2019 update to the National Planning Policy Framework clarified that plans should have regard to the cumulative impacts of flood risk, rather than just to or from individual development sites. Planning Practice Guidance²¹ recognises that the cumulative impact of minor developments can have an effect on local flood storage, capacity and flood flows and the Environment Agency provides Flood Risk Standing Advice²² on minor developments to ensure this is taken into consideration. Where a minor extension is in an area with increased flood risk as a result of multiple minor extensions in an area, an assessment of the off-site flood risk is needed.

Prior to certain permitted development rights being used the applicant must first obtain "prior approval" from the local planning authority in relation to the local flood risk to or from the site. The local planning authority must consult with the Environment Agency as required and may refuse prior approval. To minimise cumulative impacts, the provision of over 5m² of hard surfacing in front gardens is permitted where the hard surface is made of porous materials, or the run-off is directed from the hard surface to a permeable or porous area or surface within the curtilage of the house. If this cannot be achieved the homeowner must make an application for planning permission.

21 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/flood-risk-and-coastal-change>

22 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/flood-risk-assessment-standing-advice#advice-for-minor-extensions>

Conclusion and Recommendation 23: The engagement of communities in the development of local plans is already inadequate, and the proposed reforms to the planning system must not compound this problem. Greater community involvement in planning decisions in many areas at flood risk would have the twin benefits of building trust and contributing valuable technical knowledge about drainage issues. *The Government should develop national guidance on incorporating local knowledge of flood risk into planning decisions, the development of local plans and the preparation of strategic and site-specific Flood Risk Assessments.* (Paragraph 92)

Engaging with local communities on the development of local plans is an important part of the process and that is why the Planning for the Future White Paper proposes that local planning authorities radically and profoundly re-invent the ambition, depth and breadth with which they engage with communities as they consult on local plans. The Government's planning reforms will democratise the process by putting a new emphasis on engagement as plans are developed and anticipate that neighbourhood planning will continue to form an important aspect under these reforms.

The Government will also consider whether the content should become more focused to reflect its proposals for local plans, as well as the opportunities which digital tools and data offer to support their development and improve accessibility.

Lead local flood authorities have a statutory duty to lead on local flood risk management in their area and the development of a local flood risk management strategy. Many have set up local partnerships which bring together key local stakeholders, including other risk management authorities, to contribute towards developing, maintaining, applying and monitoring the local strategy. Lead local flood authorities are also statutory consultees for major planning applications with surface water drainage implications.

Conclusion and Recommendation 24: We recognise the concerns of several stakeholders about site-specific Flood Risk Assessments, and the Government should use its reform of the planning system as an opportunity to investigate this issue further. *The Government's standardisation of technical supporting information should include an evaluation of the current arrangements for the preparation and content of site-specific Flood Risk Assessments, and whether these adequately contribute to flood resilience objectives and public confidence.* (Paragraph 94)

The Planning for the Future White Paper proposes reforms to streamline the planning application process including "greater standardisation of technical supporting information", including flood risk, with "clear national data standards and templates developed in conjunction with statutory consultees". Currently the Environment Agency provides specific guidance on the technical content of Flood Risk Assessments for developers and local planning authorities and in 2020 updated its guidance on these assessments to take account of the 2018 UK Climate Projections.

The Environment Agency is currently developing a new National Flood Risk Assessment that will provide a single picture of current and future flood risk from rivers, the sea and surface water, using both existing detailed local information and improved national data. It will launch by 2024 and will be available as open data and will provide more accessible and trusted data and information for accessing the local risk and making appropriate

decisions. The Environment Agency has developed a programme to ensure the new assessment is continuously improved and updated, for example by exploring opportunities to include other flood risks, e.g. groundwater and sewers, once they are better understood.

Conclusion and Recommendation 25: A step change is needed in promoting the uptake of appropriate property flood resilience measures. It is important that reforms to Flood Re to incentivise PFR form part of wider work aimed at encouraging people to improve the flood resilience of their own property. We welcome the Government's call for evidence on ways to accelerate PFR uptake, and the findings of our inquiry should inform this work. *Following its current call for evidence, the Government should publish an action plan of new measures to deliver a significant increase in the uptake of property flood resilience, including identifying where more evidence is needed on which measures will be most appropriate and effective. The Government should consult on amending building regulations to ensure an ambitious level of flood resilience in new build and reinstatement works. The Government should also consider developing a consistent national funding stream for PFR measures.* (Paragraph 101)

The Government recognises that further action is needed on property flood resilience measures and has identified several barriers to the uptake of these measures and matching enablers to overcome them. There are a wide range of stakeholders who have a role in driving forward uptake and should benefit from the outcomes, including local Government, the building and developer sector and insurers, and finance sectors.

The Government has launched a consultation²³ into changes to the Flood Re Scheme and a Call for Evidence,²⁴ both of which cover property flood resilience measures and how uptake can be accelerated. The Flood Re consultation proposes including reduced premiums for households with property flood resilience and enabling households to 'build back better' after a flood. The Call for Evidence looks into a range of enablers, including financing and building regulations. Following their conclusion, the Government will review the responses and provide an update on next steps.

Conclusion and Recommendation 26 & 27: It is essential that the Government works with Flood Re and the insurance industry to identify and address continuing obstacles to the uptake of insurance among people at risk from flooding. *The Government should set out what further research will be undertaken, building on the Blanc review of insurance in Doncaster, to better understand and address barriers to uptake of household flood insurance cover.* (Paragraph 105)

We understand the Government's argument that businesses are in a different position compared to households in respect of flood insurance cover. However, we are concerned about the position of small and medium-sized enterprises, which do not benefit from any Government-backed initiative, equivalent to Flood Re, that would smooth the transition to risk-reflective pricing. Access to affordable insurance cover is crucial for improving flood resilience, and the Government must ensure that small and medium-sized businesses are not disadvantaged in this regard. *The Government should work*

23 <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/amendments-to-the-flood-re-scheme>

24 <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-factors-in-managing-flood-and-coastal-erosion-risk-and-property-flood-resilience-call-for-evidence>

with industry and stakeholders to establish, as a matter of urgency, additional measures, beyond guidance and signposting, to support small and medium sized businesses to access affordable flood insurance cover. (Paragraph 108)

The Flood Re Scheme is a joint Government and industry initiative aimed at improving the availability and affordability of flood insurance for UK households at high flood risk. Since its launch in 2016 more than 300,000 households have benefitted with 96% of policy holders with a prior flood claim now able to obtain five or more quotes. Prior to Flood Re no policy holders with a prior flood claim could get five or more quotes and only 9% could obtain two or more. The Government will continue to work with Flood Re and the sector to identify and address obstacles to flood insurance.

In December 2019, the Government commissioned an independent review into the affordability and availability of insurance in Doncaster led by Amanda Blanc, former Chair of the Association of British Insurers. On 5 November 2020 the final report was published and made 12 recommendations that Government is considering and will respond to formally in due course.

In line with two of the recommendations, the Government is repeating the 2018 research into the affordability and availability of flood insurance for households and small and medium sized enterprises. This study is the continuation of a series of studies to evaluate the market situation, to identify trends in relation to the availability and affordability of flood insurance and the impact of Flood Re. The research is expected to commence in spring 2021 and will inform future policy.

The Government is working with the insurance sector and the wider private sector to help all businesses become more resilient and to speed up recovery. There is no evidence of a systemic problem for businesses at high flood risk being unable to access suitable flood insurance cover. Indeed the 2018 research found that only 2% of small businesses in the UK were not able to find suitable insurance cover for flood risk. However, we acknowledge that there is a problem for some small and medium sized businesses, particularly in communities that have recently been flooded.

Business flood insurance is already risk reflective, given Flood Re does not cover businesses, and those in high flood risk areas can seek the best quote available and consider the services of an insurance broker. There are also several innovative products offered by the industry to help small and medium sized businesses, including increased flood excess with reduced premiums, and parametric insurance which allows property owners to set the level of premium in line with an agreed level of risk.

Managing water

Conclusion and Recommendation 28: It is essential that work is done to improve understanding of the scale of surface water flood risk at a national and local level. In particular, we are concerned to hear evidence of surface and foul water flooding caused or exacerbated by the failure to adequately maintain drainage systems. It is difficult to determine the scale of this risk due to the lack of centralised information on the capacity of sewer systems. The Government should quantify the surface water

element of its overall ambition for flood resilience. In its update on the Surface Water Management Action Plan, it should also explain how it will improve the collection and sharing of data on drainage and sewerage capacity. (Paragraph 111)

Mitigating the impacts from all forms of flood and coastal erosion risk is a priority and this includes surface water (pluvial) flooding, which is the most widespread in England and affects around 3.2 million properties. In 2020 the Government amended the partnership funding formula to include a new risk category which will enable more surface water flooding schemes to qualify for Government funding.

The Government has made progress at better understanding the scale of surface water flood risk at a national and local level and has provided grants to 28 lead local flood authorities to update their surface water risk maps, benefiting 2.4 million people. These improvements will strengthen the next update of surface water risk maps and the Government's next National Flood Risk Assessment update, providing an improved, single picture of current and future risk, including surface water. Alongside this, the Environment Agency is delivering actions in the Government's Surface Water Management Action Plan,²⁵ through enhanced modelling, mapping and communication. The Government has also committed to going further; requiring water and sewerage companies to develop statutory Drainage and Sewerage Management Plans, which will include a full assessment of network capacity, short- and long-term infrastructure needs and the impact of their activities on the environment. It has also set up a Storm Overflows Taskforce, which has set a long-term goal to eliminate harm from sewage discharges. This Taskforce is considering drainage issues and the impacts of sewage discharges on people and the environment and the Government has already announced some legislative changes.²⁶

The Government will be providing an update on progress with the Surface Water Management Action Plan, which includes actions on data sharing, in 2021, and will also be formally responding to the independent review into the arrangements for determining responsibility for surface water and drainage assets,²⁷ which was published in August 2020.

Conclusion and Recommendation 29: Water and sewerage companies have an important role to play in managing flood risk and we welcome moves to put drainage planning by companies on a statutory footing. It will be necessary for other Risk Management Authorities and owners of drainage assets to be involved in preparing and maintaining these plans. The Government should explain how the statutory provisions for water company Drainage and Sewerage Management Plans will ensure appropriate co-operation and consultation with other Risk Management Authorities and owners of drainage assets. (Paragraph 115)

Effective drainage and sewerage networks contribute towards local flood risk mitigation and are crucial in ensuring surface water can be removed from the environment. Water and sewerage companies do have an important role and, following the 2019 Price Review, will be investing £1 billion over five years to reduce flood risk.

The new drainage and sewerage (including wastewater) management planning process will help water and sewerage companies to collaborate with other stakeholders to undertake a

25 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/surface-water-management-action-plan>

26 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/measures-to-reduce-harm-from-storm-overflows-to-be-made-law>

27 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/surface-water-and-drainage-review-of-responsibilities>

comprehensive assessment of network capacity, the challenges and risks they face over a 25-year period, and to develop a robust five-year action plan. The companies are already developing non-statutory plans for publication in spring 2023 and the outcomes will input into the 2024 Price Review.

All risk management authorities, which includes water and sewerage companies, must co-operate with each other in the interests of flood risk management and may share information for this purpose. The Government encourages all risk management authorities and stakeholders to engage with water and sewerage companies to help ensure comprehensive plans are produced.

The Government is also legislating, through the Environment Bill, to make this planning process statutory and intends to amend the Flood Risk Management Functions Order 2010 to ensure that these plans are captured as a flood risk management function, encouraging co-operation and the sharing of information between risk management authorities.

Conclusion and Recommendation 30: While the uptake of sustainable drainage systems has improved in recent years, we are concerned that the installation of high-quality SuDS features delivering multiple environmental benefits may still be insufficiently incentivised. The evidence we have received clearly shows that the non-statutory approach to promoting SuDS, coupled with the persistence of the automatic right to connect surface water drainage to the public sewer, is not working. The Government has not adequately explained why it believes the commencement of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, which is widely supported, is the wrong approach, and we consider that the case should be re-examined. *The Government, as part of its ambitious plans to manage flood risk, should commit to ending the automatic right to connect to the public sewer, and consult on measures to improve the uptake of high-quality SuDS features. This consultation must include a legislative option, commencing Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 or making equivalent statutory provision, along with a commitment to further consultation with local authorities on any new burdens arising from this.* (Paragraph 123)

The Government's planning policy is clear that Sustainable Drainage Systems are to be provided in all major, new developments, unless there is clear evidence that this would be inappropriate, and that they should be given priority in new developments in flood risk areas.

In 2018 a Government review²⁸ on the application and effectiveness of planning policy for Sustainable Drainage Systems found that 87% of the sample of approved planning applications explicitly stated that they would feature.

The suitability of Sustainable Drainage Systems in a planning application is for the local planning authority to determine, with advice from relevant stakeholders e.g. the lead local flood authority. There is also guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework, including promoting the use of multi-functional Sustainable Drainage Systems, future maintenance and multiple benefits.

28 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-review-of-the-application-and-effectiveness-of-planning-policy-for-sustainable-drainage-systems>

Government is also completing a research project on the Non-Statutory Technical Standards for Sustainable Drainage Systems investigating whether there is a case for updating the standards to include standards on multi-functional benefits.

As part of the work of the Government's Storm Overflows Taskforce, set up to eliminate harm from storm overflows, a number of drainage issues are being considered, such as Sustainable Drainage Systems, including Schedule 3, and section 106 of the Water Industry Act 1991—right to connect to the public sewer. The taskforce will be reporting to Government in summer 2021.

Conclusion and Recommendation 31: *The Government should explain how it will promote the retrofitting of SuDS and an integrated approach to water management through measures such as rainwater harvesting.* (Paragraph 125)

The Government has committed to delivering an integrated approach to managing water, that will help better protect communities from flooding, making them more resilient, and provide wider benefits for water resources management and the environment. Whilst Sustainable Drainage Systems and rainwater harvesting have an important part to play the overall policy is much wider.

The Environment Bill will enhance the water resources management planning process. This change will complement the Environment Agency's *Meeting our future water needs: a national framework for water resources*.²⁹ This national framework sets out England's future water needs and expectations for how regional groups working collaboratively will deliver those needs. The Government is keen to enhance collaboration between water companies and other stakeholders on planning for future water resources, which should improve future planning and resilience towards future challenges such as droughts or flooding.

The Government has committed to continue taking forward the actions from the Surface Water Management Action Plan and will be providing an update on progress made to implement the plan in 2021. Alongside this, the Government will also be formally responding to the independent review into the arrangements for determining responsibility for surface water and drainage assets. Also this year the Government will respond to its consultation measures to reduce personal water use,³⁰ which sought views on water efficiency measures, including the potential role of rainwater harvesting.

The Government has committed £200m to the Flood and Coast Resilience Innovation Programme. £150m of this will be provided to 25 areas (spread across England) with the opportunity to explore and implement new ways of dealing with local flooding issues. More than half of the selected areas will tackle surface and/or groundwater flood risks. The evidence gathered from this programme will help with nationwide approaches to flood management (including Sustainable Drainage Systems) in the future.

In considering the role retrofitted Sustainable Drainage Systems may play in managing surface water and mitigating surface water flood risk, the Government has commissioned a research project into how effective current strategic surface water management plans are

29 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/meeting-our-future-water-needs-a-national-framework-for-water-resources/meeting-our-future-water-needs-a-national-framework-for-water-resources-accessible-summary>

30 <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/water/measures-to-reduce-personal-water-use/>

informing spatial planning and development management. It will also look at how they define the requirements for Sustainable Drainage Systems at a local planning authority level to reduce surface water flood risk. This research will be completed by spring 2021 and the Government will consider its conclusions and recommendations.

Conclusion and Recommendation 32 & 33: Working with natural processes is an important part of a holistic approach to flood risk management. There are several initiatives that could serve as delivery vehicles for natural flood management, including the new Environmental Land Management scheme, and a catchment-based approach requires join-up between these policies to ensure that natural flood management interventions are appropriately targeted and incentivised. We recommend that the Government should scale up natural flood management, whilst ensuring that the measures are appropriate to local conditions and form part of a catchment-based approach. The new Environmental Land Management scheme provides an opportunity to do this. (Paragraph 131)

The Government has been clear that paying farmers for measures such as floodwater storage forms a key part of its plans. Any measures which call on farmers and land managers to allow their land to be used in this way must ensure proper recognition for the public goods provided. The Government should ensure that natural flood management schemes will involve farmers and land managers at every stage of identifying, designing and implementing a scheme. The Government should also ensure that land managers are paid appropriately for the public goods provided, and that financial assistance and technical advice for long-term maintenance are provided. Any scheme must also include clarity on liability should a flood occur. (Paragraph 134)

The Government is committed to natural flood management. As with all flood and coastal erosion risk management measures, this is subject to robust analysis and modelling to ensure that the right measures are in the right places. To support this, the Government Policy Statement made a commitment to doubling the number of Government funded projects which include nature-based solutions for flooding and coastal erosion; and made enabling more resilient places through a catchment-based approach a key focus.

There are a wide range of delivery mechanisms for natural flood management. Government examples include its £5.2 billion investment programme, £200 million Flood and Coast Resilience Innovation Programme, and £640 million Nature for Climate Fund. In 2017 the Government announced a £15 million natural flood management programme to further develop the evidence base around working with natural process to reduce flood risk. This programme supported 25 large catchment scale projects and 33 smaller community projects and is now coming to an end. The evaluation is underway and will influence future policy and delivery.

We are working with stakeholders to determine the specific land management actions that will be paid for under our new schemes that reward farmers and land managers for producing public goods. *The Path to Sustainable Farming: An Agricultural Transition Plan 2021 to 2024*³¹ sets out examples of the types of actions that we envisage paying for under the schemes, including natural flood management. We have also recently published more details on the first phase of piloting the Sustainable Farming Incentive, including the actions we will pay farmers to take to manage their land in an environmentally sustainable

31 <https://www.gov.uk/Government/publications/agricultural-transition-plan-2021-to-2024>.

way. Local Nature Recovery will pay for actions that support local nature recovery and deliver local environmental priorities, making sure the right things are delivered in the right places. Landscape Recovery will support the delivery of landscape and ecosystem recovery through long-term, land use change projects, including projects to restore wilder landscapes in places where that is appropriate, large-scale tree planting and peatland restoration projects. All three schemes will contribute to natural flood management.

Farmers and land managers are key to developing natural flood management schemes. We are launching the Sustainable Farming Incentive and Local Nature Recovery scheme pilot from the end of this year and in 2022 respectively. The pilots will build on the work of our ongoing tests and trials, which involve around 3,000 farmers and land managers across England. Tests and trials focus on potential individual parts of the future schemes, whereas piloting will test pilot versions of the schemes from start to finish.

Engaging with people

Conclusion and Recommendation 34 & 35: We have listened with great concern to evidence that local communities feel disengaged and ignored in decisions relevant to flood risk. It is clear that, where risk management authorities do engage with local people, this engagement is often not perceived as meaningful or impactful. Communities must not be treated as groups who have things done to them, but as vital delivery partners in the Government's approach to building resilience. While involving people in decisions that affect their lives is an end in itself, we have also been impressed by the evidence from Flood Action Groups about the positive practical benefits that meaningful engagement with local people can bring. In pursuing its ambition for flood resilience, the Government must ensure that the benefits of meaningful engagement are maximised. *The Government should work with the voluntary sector to develop guidance for all risk management and planning authorities on how to meaningfully engage with local people.* (Paragraph 142)

The Government should review the institutional arrangements for community engagement in flood risk management, to identify best practice and opportunities for more effective approaches. The Government should also commit to ensuring that risk management authorities are resourced and supported to carry out meaningful engagement, including making funding available to the voluntary sector to build capacity in other organisations. (Paragraph 143)

The Government recognises the crucial and valuable role of the third sector, flood action groups, community leaders and volunteers, in enabling communities to become more resilient to flood and coastal erosion risks.

Community engagement is therefore part of the Government's proposed reform to local flood risk management planning. The Government will work with communities and the third sector to ensure that future local flood risk management planning includes meaningful community engagement, building on and promoting best practice examples across the country. The Government expects all risk management authorities to undertake community engagement.

The Government has committed to reviewing the role of the voluntary sector to improve their capacity and capability to help local communities in the event of a flood.

As part of delivering the National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy, the Environment Agency is reviewing information resources available directly to flood groups and communities. Following this analysis, the Environment Agency will work with communities to create the most appropriate and effective resources.

The Environment Agency is also reviewing the engagement skills and associated training resources required to work with communities and in partnership with others. This review will result in a five-year plan to train staff as appropriate. The training materials will be made available to lead local flood authorities working with communities.