



# **GUIDANCE FOR RESPONSE TO SEVERE WEATHER**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The past has shown us all that there is no greater force than that of nature itself. Throughout history there are stories of severe weather phenomena, sometimes with catastrophic consequences. Climate change experts have warned us to expect more extreme weather events in the years to come and the best advice is to prepare for this.

Here in Mid Sussex we have seen for ourselves the disruption that can be brought about by extreme weather conditions. The storms of 1987 and 1989 caused damage and disruption on an unprecedented scale. More recently we have seen widespread flooding in some parts of the county. During the winter of both 2008/09 and 2009/10 we experienced disruption due to heavy snowfall. Severe weather events can have a lasting effect on communities and it is important that we work together to learn from previous events, so that we prepare properly for those that we expect in the future.

Severe weather can strike anywhere at any time. Whilst improving technology means that forecasting accuracy is getting better, there will always be an element of risk involved. Even when forecasts are made there will often be little time to react. Prompt action will help to minimise the impact the incident has on our community and maximise the effectiveness of the responding organisations.

Much work has been done by the Environment Agency in respect of Flood Warnings and in line with government instructions; new guidance has been published. The Council's Emergency Plan provides additional guidance and detail regarding the response to incidents in the Mid Sussex District.

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 places a statutory duty on the Council to plan and prepare for incidents that may have an adverse effect in the community. The guidance in this document has been prepared to communicate how Mid Sussex District Council will respond (in partnership with the community) during severe weather events.

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## **SECTION 1 – RECEIPT OF WARNINGS**

The National Severe Weather Warning Service is provided by the Met Office and designed to give the emergency authorities and the public the best possible advice regarding impending severe weather. Advice is normally emailed either as an early warning or, when confidence is sufficiently high that the conditions will result in considerable inconvenience to a large number of people and danger to life, as a flash warning.

Early warnings are typically issued 12 to 48 hours prior to the onset, but this period can be longer. Flash messages are issued up to six hours in advance, although by their very nature many are often based upon actual reports of severe weather.

The distribution system in place at Mid Sussex is set out below:

### **Mid Sussex District Council**

The Mid Sussex Emergency Planning Group meets at least four times a year and will review the planning and preparation for severe weather in the year ahead at each September meeting.

#### **Stage 1**

Severe weather warning emails from the Met Office are received by the Emergency Planning & Outdoor Services Manager. These warnings are then forwarded to: Management Team, Business Unit Leaders, Waste & Outdoor Services, Customer Service & Communications, the business community and key contractors.

The Emergency Planning & Outdoor Services Manager will liaise with the Chief Executive on the Council's initial response in both service and communication terms.

The Council's Customer Services & Communications Team will inform the public via the Council's website and the customer contact centre. The Portfolio Holder, relevant Ward Councillors and local partners (e.g. Town & Parish Councils) will be informed as appropriate.

### **Dissemination of Information (Mid Sussex DC)**

#### **Stage 2**

Key officers will work together as liaise with local partners to prioritise immediate preparatory work and advise Management Team as necessary. Prior to an anticipated severe weather event, any preparatory work undertaken by the Council will be communicated to our partners and the community.

#### **Stage 3**

Depending on the circumstances of the event, officers will decide on the level of response, including implementation of business continuity plans as appropriate. The exact nature of the Council's response will be communicated to our partners and the community.

#### **Stage 4**

A post event debrief will be held and a report prepared.

## **SECTION 2 – USEFUL WEATHER FORECAST WEBSITES**

The Internet is a good source of up-to-date weather forecast information. There are many providers of weather information and two of the more prominent examples are listed below:-

**[www.met-office.gov.uk](http://www.met-office.gov.uk)**

Provides monthly, 3 day and flash warnings of severe weather by region or cities.

**[www.bbc.co.uk/weather](http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather)**

BBC on line weather centre provides a detailed weather forecast by regions and towns.

## **SECTION 3 – INITIAL ACTIONS AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY**

The following actions will be considered depending on the severity of the warning:

- Consider calling essential staff in early, before the weather makes this impracticable;
- Consider sending non essential staff home early – they may not get there if delayed;
- Consider diverting certain staff to work with local partners close to their homes to provide assistance and avoid unnecessary journeys. (Mutual aid).
- Consideration will be given to declaring a major incident in advance as directed by the Sussex Resilience Forum;
- Consider temporary suspension of non-essential services;
- Where possible, re-deploy contractors (e.g. grounds maintenance, street cleaning) to undertake emergency duties (e.g. snow clearance) as agreed between the contractor, the Council and its local partners.
- Consider additional resources that may be required including four wheel drive vehicles and additional protective clothing;
- Put emergency rest centre(s) on stand-by;
- Work with local partners to identify priorities and joint action plans for remedial work
- All decisions taken will be shared with our community partners.
- Consider the need for a Humanitarian Assistance Centre (one stop shop) to assist the community.

## **SECTION 4 – COMMAND AND CONTROL**

If the prevailing or expected conditions indicate the likelihood of severe disruption to the local infrastructure, consideration will be given to the formation of a Strategic Co-ordinating Group and this could be by way of conference calls / e-mails. The group will normally convene at Council or Police Headquarters, but in the event of a more localised problem, alternative venues may be considered.

Depending on the nature of the severe weather event, Members of the group may include:

- Police;
- Fire Brigade;
- Ambulance;
- West Sussex County Council;
- Local Councils;;
- Environment Agency;
- Health Authorities;
- Utility & Telecoms Companies;
- Business Groups;
- Military;

Key managers / staff will be called out and rest centres activated as required. Logistics and support facilities, including communications will have a key role to play and will be adequately staffed to reflect the expected demands. If a major incident is declared, the Council will implement its emergency plan as appropriate.

## **SECTION 5 - INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC**

The Council's Customer Service & Communications team will work with the Chief Executive and Emergency Planning & Outdoor Services Manager to provide public information relating to a local severe weather event. The objective should be to provide a fast, accurate and regular flow of co-ordinated information and to ensure that events are projected in a positive light.

District Council actions to be considered will include:-

- Establish an information service and links to other support services via the website;
- Establish a media centre with remote access to press liaison officers from the main organisations involved;
- If no media centre is convened, to co-ordinate press releases with other agencies;
- Maintain contact with local radio and TV;
- Establish which representatives of the local authorities will be present at press briefings and the frequency of those briefings;
- Maintain contact with Members, local partners and business groups.

## Key Messages:

- Try to minimise public movement (Go In, Tune In, Stay In), avoid non-essential journeys – Provide details of road closures, school closures and public transport currently running;
- Essential journeys – if journeys have to be made, be prepared. Take shovel, mobile phone, warm/waterproofed clothes, sleeping bag, hot drink and food – what to do if stranded i.e. stay with the vehicle. Let others know of your plans;
- Emergency services are likely to re-prioritise their response to calls;
- Give details of local community arrangements being made;
- Where there is sufficient warning, give advice on stocking up with food, candles etc. Messages must be carefully considered to prevent panic buying etc.;
- Advice on surviving cold weather conditions;
- Minimise usage of telephone systems to prevent overload. Regular press appeals may reduce demand on the networks;
- Promote the Helpline number(s) through Website, Help Points and Customer Contact Centres.

## Helplines

Where possible, a multi-agency Helpline will be established to handle the majority of public enquiries about the incident.

In addition, the Council may consider:-

- Operating an automated message system through the Customer Contact Centre
- Providing an website information, on-line forms and email address to handle incident enquiries

## Aid to the Commercial Sector

All organisations are advised to develop their own business continuity plans to take account of severe weather events. In extreme circumstances, it may be possible for the local authorities to provide assistance to organisations that are deemed essential to the community and local infrastructure

Following an incident, the Council will provide advice and assistance to local businesses, to support the economy and assist community recovery for example through the creation of a local Humanitarian Assistance Centre (one-stop shop).

## **Self Help**

Members of the community may wish to take action to assist in the response and recovery phases of severe weather incidents. There has been concern from the public over their legal position when undertaking such tasks in the public realm close to their properties. Government advice states that individuals will not be held liable for taking action, providing they have not made the conditions more hazardous than they were beforehand.

## **SECTION 6 – ISOLATED OR VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES**

Special consideration will be given to vulnerable or isolated members of the community. All tiers of local government should work together to identify those most at risk and prioritise response work to meet their needs.

Communicating with these communities may be difficult if the conditions affect power supplies or the telecoms network. The following alternatives may assist:

- Council representatives to visit the most vulnerable residents;
- Leaflets or letters;
- Neighbourhood Watch;
- Business or community groups;
- Raynet and other local amateur radio groups.

## **SECTION 7 – Community Recovery**

The Council will consider the formation of a multi-agency Humanitarian Assistance Centre (one-stop shop), which could provide the following services:-

- Information service to provide the community with consistent and accurate information throughout the recovery period;
- Advice on health, safety and welfare issues e.g. food and water supplies, planning journeys;
- Negotiation with insurance and utility companies on behalf of those requiring advice on benefits, child support, council tax and appeals etc.
- The maintenance of inter-agency links.

## SECTION 8 – EMERGENCY RESOURCES

Emergency Resource	Company	Phone	Out of Hours Phone	Email/Website
Floodbags, Grounds Maintenance	Grasstex	01403 823299	07623 960362	www.grasstex.co.uk
Tree Felling & Landscape Work	KPS Contractors Ltd.	0800 975 9555	0800 975 9555	office@kpscontractors.co.uk
Aboricultural Officer, Chainsaw, etc.	MSDC	01444 477004	01444 458166	parkspenspaces@midsussex.gov.uk
Park Rangers	MSDC	01444 477561	08456 008670 01444 257298	rangers@midsussex.gov.uk
4x4, Winch and Towing Vehicles	AGR	01273 833539	01273 833539	none
Grit (Non WSCC)	Piers Bryant	07765 146395	07765 146395	none
Building Safety Assessment	MSDC Building Control	01444 477570 01444 477571	01444 257298	bcinfo@midsussex.gov.uk
Building Works and Lifting Equipment	CPS Solutions	01444 459355	01444 257298	info@cps-solutions.co.uk
Securing Premises	RB Joinery	01444 246656	01444 246656	Info@rbconstructiongroup.com

## SECTION 9 – KEY EMERGENCY PLANNING CONTACTS

Organisation	Telephone	Email/Website
Sussex Police	0845 6070 999	contact.centre@sussex.pnn.police.uk
South East Coast Ambulance Service	01444 489445	enquiries@secamb.nhs.uk
West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service	01243 752492	wsfrs@westsussex.gov.uk
Mid Sussex District Council	01444 458166	enquiries@midsussex.gov.uk
Crawley Borough Council	01293 438212	comments@crawley.gov.uk
West Sussex County Council	01243 642103	www.westsussex.gov.uk
Environment Agency	0845 9881188	enquiries@environmentagency.gov.uk
South East Water	0845 602 1724	www.southeastwater.co.uk
Southern Water	0845 2780845	www.southernwater.co.uk
Sutton & East Surrey Water	01737 772000	www.waterplc.com
Burgess Hill Town Council	01444 247726	helpoint@burgesshill.gov.uk
East Grinstead Town Council	01342 323636	towncouncil@eastgrinstead.gov.uk
Haywards Heath Town Council	01444 455694	townhall@haywardsheath.gov.uk

## **SECTION 10 – PRIORITY AREAS FOR SNOW CLEARANCE**

West Sussex County Council assumes overall responsibility on snow and ice clearance on the public highway during severe winter weather.

### **A. Carriageways**

The objective is to keep as much of the road network as safe and free flowing as possible. If conditions deteriorate to the extent that the entire network cannot be kept open, a reduced network shall be adopted based on the following priorities:

Priority 1. Primary Roads, Approaches to Hospitals, Ambulance and other Emergency Services

Priority 2. County Distributors, District Distributors

Priority 3. Other carriageways according to the Area Office Divisional Managers' allocation of priorities

Priority 1 & 2 routes are published on the WSCC website and also held on the District Council's GIS mapping system.

Priority 3 routes will be subject to a 'Daily Decision' by WSCC and communicated accordingly.

### **B. Footways and Cycle-ways**

The Area Office Divisional Managers, or their authorised representatives, will instruct the Contractor to clear snow from selected footways, pedestrian precincts and cycle-ways, starting with those most heavily trafficked.

### **Local Arrangements in Mid Sussex**

The County Council have produced the 'Parish Pack' to communicate their approach towards dealing with severe weather directly with Town and Parish Councils, so that appropriate local arrangements can be made. Advice included in the Parish Pack recommends that Town and Parish Councils create and disseminate winter management plans so that local requirements and capabilities are known across all agencies.

Parish & Town Councils are primarily responsible for providing grit bins within their boundaries. These will be filled by the County Council prior to each winter. Parish & Town Councils will liaise directly with WSCC regarding the replenishment of local salt supplies during the winter months. In extreme circumstances, bulk supplies of salt will be delivered by the County Council to agreed locations, in order of priority.

Whilst Districts and Boroughs are not legally obliged to clear snow or ice from public highways, pavements, precincts and private roads, in the most extreme circumstances Mid Sussex District Council will work with local Town and Parish Councils and assist in the clearance of snow and ice, in agreed priority areas.