

# Government takes action to manage surface water flood risk

The government has welcomed the completion of an [independent review aimed at reducing the risk of surface water flooding](#) across England and is taking immediate action to implement some of its recommendations.

This action will build on the recent publication of the government's long-term plan for managing flood and coastal erosion risk to create a more resilient nation.

Surface water flooding generally occurs after heavy thunderstorms or rainfall when the volume of rainwater is such that it does not drain away or soak into the ground. More than 3 million properties in England are at risk of surface water flooding and, like all flooding, it can cause devastation to communities. Due to the localised nature of such heavy rain, it can also be very difficult to predict.

The review, which was led by David Jenkins, Chair of the Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, looked at responsibility for surface water and drainage assets, and has provided recommendations on how to make these arrangements more efficient, straightforward and effective.

While the review will now be considered in full by ministers, the government is immediately accepting 12 of the recommendations. This will ensure better understanding of surface water flood risk by all authorities and a more coordinated and efficient approach across England.

Rebecca Pow, Environment Minister, said:

As our climate changes and we experience more frequent short bouts of heavy rainfall in future, it's important that government, local authorities, other public bodies, private businesses and individuals can all work together effectively to tackle the threat of surface water flooding.

The government is already taking action through our Surface Water Management Action Plan and aspects of our long-term flood policy statement, but David Jenkins' review provides important recommendations on how we can make further improvements into the future.

David Jenkins, who led the review, said:

This review has highlighted a number of ways in which the risks from surface water flooding may be more effectively managed, so that homes and businesses may be better prepared and protected.

I am pleased to learn that the government is taking immediate action to address some of my recommendations, including making responsibilities clearer and ensuring a more joined up approach across the country, and that it is giving further consideration to the rest.

As the review points out, clarity as to who is responsible for constructing and maintaining drainage systems is crucial in managing surface water flood risk. The review provides a range of recommendations to strengthen action across a range of areas to tackle surface water flood risk.

This includes recommendations which aim to improve clarity over roles and responsibilities, ensure flood investigation reports take into account the views of residents and businesses and that lessons learned are shared widely. It also recommends that better advice is made available to homes and businesses at risk of surface water flooding to help them improve their own protection and resilience.

Following on from the review the government will:

- support Local Planning Authorities' in receiving and understanding the appropriate expert advice on all sources of flood risk – including surface water – so that they can make the right decisions
- review statutory powers and responsibilities to ensure proper inspection and maintenance of privately owned flood assets
- ensure guidance is made available for local authorities investigating flooding, including better engagement with affected communities
- ensure a long-term approach to maintain our network of flood defences across the country, through a combination of investment and action by risk management authorities, government, riparian owners and wider beneficiaries
- assess whether updating the non-statutory technical standards for sustainable drainage systems could help provide for multi-functional benefit sustainable drainage systems and how the findings of research could inform future approaches to boost uptake of effective sustainable drainage systems and support the aims of the National Planning Policy Framework
- ensure guidance is made available for lead local flood authorities on maintaining a register of structures which have an effect on flood risk, helping to ensure a common and comprehensive approach to inspection and maintenance.

The actions that the government is taking build on our commitments in the Surface Water Management Action Plan which has seen £2 million invested since April 2019 to enable lead local flood authorities to update their flood risk maps – covering over 1600km<sup>2</sup>, which includes just under 225,000 properties and 2.7 million people at risk of flooding.

£1.2 billion is also being invested on a state-of-the-art supercomputer to improve severe weather and climate forecasting which will help to more accurately predict storms, while changes to how funding is allocated to flood

projects will enable schemes that seek to prevent surface water flooding to qualify for more funding.

The government is also taking action to tackle flooding from all sources, having last month set out its [long-term plan to tackle flooding and coastal erosion](#) with five ambitious policies and over 40 supporting actions to accelerate progress to better protect and prepare the country for future flooding and coastal erosion. The plan includes a number of commitments which will directly take forward a number of recommendations which have been identified in this review – and builds on our commitment to invest a record £5.2 billion in the flood and coastal defence programme in England from 2021 to better protect a 336,000 properties.

- Surface water flooding happens when rain from major storms overwhelms local drainage. Surface water flooding problems can be caused by what might sometimes seem small or rather mundane issues, such as a blocked grate over a drain, as well as more major ones like inadequate drainage arrangements for a new property development. It can be about maintenance of ditches, drains or sewers, and clearing of gullies and trash screens. About 3.2 million properties in England are at risk from surface water flooding.
- David Jenkins has been Chair of the Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee since 2015. He is by background a solicitor, having worked for a number of local authorities and for the local government ombudsman service. He is a former Chief Executive of Dorset County Council, and has conducted independent reviews for a number of other local authorities. David has served as Deputy Chair of NHS Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group, as President of the Dorset Association of Town and Parish Councils, and as a trustee and chair of a number of charities concerned with the arts and with education. He is a trustee of the Association of Drainage Authorities, a board member of the Somerset Rivers Authority, and a deputy lieutenant of Dorset.