Guidelines in setting up a community based Flood Action Group

Forming a community-based flood action group who work on behalf of the wider community is proving effective in West Sussex with already 21 groups in existence. They represent a voice for their community with the aim is to work in partnership finding ways to reduce flood risk with the Agencies and Authorities.

There is no set format for Flood Action Groups, it can be a theme based group linked to an existing group or local residents wanting to set up a community group. Members include residents and businesses that have been affected or experienced flooding. A common format that has previously worked includes having a small core group who meet on a regular basis who liaise with Agencies and Authorities and link with the wider community.

Examples of activities include
- Identify through a Flood Action Plan areas that have localised flood issues and actively get involved in reducing flood risk.
- Engage with agencies and authorities around routine maintenance to help reduce maintenance and plans for potential works.
- Be involved in discussions on the future of flood risk in their town or village.
- Organise activities to monitor localised flooding such as ‘flood watchers’ or ‘Flood Wardens’ within the community.
- Create wider awareness of the flood risk within the wider community.
- Help reduce the impact on the community should a flood event occur e.g. organising flood defenses such as sand bags.
- Help support the recovery process should a flood event occur e.g. signpost etc.

How do we set up our new core group?
There are many ways the group can be structured: you may like to adopt a constitution or be more informal.

A constitution shows the group has a mandate and elected officers to represent their community. It will also be necessary if you intend to raise funds as it is needed to open a bank account on behalf of the group. Basic needs would be someone to chair the group, someone to write down what happens (a secretary) and someone who looks after any money (a treasurer).

The core group should embrace representing the wider community and keeping them regularly informed of what is happening.

Do you need to get others on board?
Once you have established the core group, consider whether you want or need others to help. If you have the time, expertise, energy and commitment to do everything yourselves you can get going.

Alternatively, if you need organisers and volunteers you could spread the word through social networking in various different formats e.g. social media, advertising in local newspapers or newsletters, different types of notice boards in locally used services and word of mouth.
**Write a constitution**
This is basically a document that sets out the rules for you or your group to help make it clear to everyone involved what you intend to do.

As you are not a registered charity or a limited company, there are no legal rules about what your constitution should say.

Once you have written and agreed it, it then becomes the ‘governing document’ of your group, and it should set out clearly how you intend to run your group.

A good constitution can help to resolve disputes and enable new members to participate fully in group activities.

If you are going to apply for grant funding, this document will show funders that you are well organised.

For groups, it may also be worth documenting the following within your constitution:

- The person in charge
- A first aider
- A designated person in charge of Health & Safety
- Agree how the committee will work processes for decision making/resolving disputes
- The identified roles and who holds them within the group

**Consider opening a bank account**
You may need to agree and record a way of handling money for the group or activity.

Not only will this protect the person responsible for holding the money but it will also protect the group money itself.

A suggestion is to open a separate bank account. Banks, like any other business, are fighting for your custom and have many products and services on offer. It is worth shopping around to find the deal that best suits your needs.

**How to approach tackling the local flood issues?**
This is about producing a Flood Action Plan logging areas that have flood issues in the area. The group can then use this in a number of ways including planning activities, as a basis for dialogue with agencies and authorities etc.

How to put a Flood Action Plan together:

- Issues: Collate all the concerns of the community into groups and locations onto the Flood Action Plan. There will be a lot of common themes and issues.

- Responsibilities: Identify who could be responsible this could be an agency, local authority or a resident/landowner through riparian duties.
• Potential Solution: As a group if you can suggest a potential solution you feel would reduce the risk of flooding, this does not need to be technical at this stage.

• The group’s action: Log what activity the group has undertaken about this issue so far.

• Update: This is to show progress.

**Flood Watchers/Wardens - How they can help:**
It is also desirable to have some ‘flood watchers’ or flood wardens, these are often the dog walkers/walkers in the community either from within your group or from the wider community.

They are useful in keeping an eye out for blocked drains/culverts, tree branches in rivers, and anything else that may cause a flood risk, and reporting them to the appropriate authority and back to the group.