

SANDBAG POLICY



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i. Document Control

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ii. Changes

Dated	Changes	Initials
April 22	Complete update of policy	IKS/AD

1. Terms of Reference

1.1 This policy has been produced to provide clear guidance on how Harrogate Borough Council (HBC) prioritises the distribution of sandbags as a means of protecting critical infrastructure and assisting residents. It clarifies what HBC will, and will not do in relation to the provision of sandbags during flood events.

2. Background

2.1 Flooding is a natural occurrence and can occur during periods of prolonged rainfall and during pluvial events. No drainage system or flood protection measure can protect and eliminate the risk of flooding during extreme storm events. We have developed a multi-Agency Flood Plan to identify and address some of those identified Fluvial and Pluvial risks.

2.2 HBC have no legislative duty to provide sandbags to residential or commercial premises to protect them from flooding. The council has however developed a policy where it will assist with the provision of sandbags on a prioritised basis predominantly to support vulnerable and community groups.

2.3 Whilst the usefulness of sandbags is acknowledged in helping to divert and direct flows, such as along a highway, it must be noted that they have severe limitations in application when faced with prolonged periods of high flow or static water. Additionally, sandbags are ineffective in protecting property from groundwater flooding or indeed where sewers cause flooding within properties.

2.4 Sandbags at best only have a 40% chance of successfully keeping water out of a property. With this in mind homeowners and businesses are encouraged to implement their own flood resilient measures by purchasing specifically designed flood protection products. HBC have worked in the past with residents who have been impacted by flooding in accessing flood protection grant schemes as and when they have been made available.

2.5 The non-profit charity, The National Flood Forum, provides advice on various products to enable residents to implement 'Property Level Protection' which includes a directory of products that have achieved BSI Kitemark status. Sandbags have not achieved this accreditation yet remain a 'fall back' position for many residents.

3. Sandbag Policy

3.1 This Policy identifies the decision-making process of when sandbags are deemed to be an appropriate method of flood defence. This will be a combination of elderly/vulnerable residents, community group support, location, asset ownership and severity of the flood event.

3.2 During times of inclement weather, HBC will make reasonable efforts to assist residents at imminent risk of flooding, but this is subject to resources available at the time of an event and the prioritisation of affected groups. No guarantee can be offered to residents that we can assist with flood incidents. If residents are concerned that they may be at risk of flooding, it is strongly recommended that they

consider implementing their own flood resilience measures in advance of a flood event.

3.3 As a council we have worked closely with our communities and have established several sandbag stores in key locations, in support of our Multi Agency Flood Plan and in partnership with the local Community Emergency Committee. These resources can be accessed by HBC staff for local deployment, but are generally under the direction of the local Community Emergency Committee, who may allocate or deploy sandbags in order to protect properties or life.

4. Providing sandbags

Sandbags will be provided on a prioritised basis subject to the following:

4.1 The living accommodation of the property is in immediate danger of flooding at the time of the call. For this purpose, living accommodation refers to internal living areas of domestic dwellings, but not gardens, outbuildings, sheds, garages, etc.

4.2 Elderly, and vulnerable residents shall be given priority; and steps taken to distribute sandbags to them

4.3 We will not deliver sandbags to residents on the basis of the threat of rain or flooding, for example if a severe weather warning is given or flood water is at the bottom of the garden.

4.4 Whilst we will make every effort to, there is no guarantee that we will be able to deliver sandbags to everyone in time to avoid flooding..

4.5 On delivery, it will be the judgement of the officer delivering the sandbags of how many will be required. This will be based on how many sandbags are needed to reasonably protect the property whilst ensuring the supply of sandbags is not unfairly depleted for other residents.

4.6 We will not generally collect sandbags, whether in a used or unused condition, following a flood event. It is the householders' responsibility to dispose of sandbags accordingly. Further disposal advice is given below.

4.7 We cannot accept any responsibility or liability for flooding, or any other related damages, caused directly or indirectly as a result of the use or misuse of our sandbags nor for any failure to deliver sandbags in advance of a flood. It is the responsibility of the resident to ensure sandbags are best positioned in a timely manner to prevent flooding.

4.8 Sandbags, if laid correctly, offer some protection against flood water entering a property or can divert water away from more vulnerable parts of your home. They can be effective when it is marginal as to whether water enters a house or not. However, in relation to large volumes of water they are largely ineffective. Other products are now available to buy commercially which offer a better standard of

protection. More information on such products can be found by visiting the National Flood Forum Blue Pages website [Opens in new tab](#).

4.9 Harrogate Borough Council WILL:

4.8.2 Elderly, and vulnerable residents shall be given priority; and steps taken to distribute sandbags to them. Subject to availability sandbags will be deployed at locations where there is an imminent risk to life or property. The decision to deploy sandbags shall be taken at the discretion of responding officers.

4.8.3 Collect sandbags from authority owned land and HBC managed public open spaces and dispose of them in an appropriate manner.

4.10 Harrogate Borough Council WILL NOT:

4.10.1 Deploy sandbags to private properties in advance of a flood event;

4.10.2 Deploy sandbags to commercial properties at any time before, during or after a flood event, unless deemed necessary under exceptional circumstances to protect adjacent residential and/or essential infrastructure from flood damage;

4.10.3 Collect sandbags from private land, residential properties (other than when deployed by HBC to elderly or vulnerable residents), or commercial premises; and,

4.10.4 Collect sandbags which have not been deployed by HBC.

4.11 Other use.

4.11.1 Sandbags may be released to deal with non-flood related issues on Council-owned assets that may have safety, cost, or reputational implications. An example of this may be using the sand from within the bags to deal with an oil spill at an HBC car park.

4.11.2 We may also release sandbags to the military to support their response to an incident outside of a multi-agency response. For example in 2020, sandbags were requested by the Army for area protection during a controlled demolition of a suspected WW2 hand grenade in Harrogate.

5. Mutual aid / Multi-Agency Support

We may release stock or deliver bags to our NYLRF partners during a multi-agency response or as part of a Mutual Aid package to support their response during an incident or other time of exceptional need. This may be during a declared major

incident, to protect life, or during a period of disruption that affects the organisation's normal ability to respond such as a BC incident.

6. Sandbag Guidance

6.1 Guidance on how to use sandbags can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sandbags-how-to-use-them-to-prepare-for-a-flood>

7. Alternative Flood Defence Products

7.1 A directory of property flood products can be found here:

<http://bluepages.org.uk>

8. Disposal of sandbags

8.1 Unused dry sandbags are not regarded as waste and can be reused. Sandbags will disintegrate with exposure to light or weather so they are not recommended for use after a long period of time. If you are unable to store full sandbags, please empty the dry bags and store the sand in a dry place or dig into your garden, keeping the bags so that they can be re-filled. Do not place full sandbags or sand in your household waste bin, although empty sandbags can be disposed of as normal.

8.2 When exposed to flood water, sandbags will have a tendency to absorb not only water but also contaminants such as sewage and oils. Wear gloves and wash hands thoroughly after handling used sand bags. Attempt to dry out sandbags as much as possible to reduce the weight and make them easier to handle. You should double wrap (e.g. with bin liners) exposed sandbags and dispose of them at your local Household Waste and Recycling Centre. Please inform staff that they have been contaminated with flood water.

8.3 You should not place full sandbags or the contaminated sand in the household waste bin. Do not allow children to play with the contaminated sand and do not dig it into your garden as this could present a health hazard.