

Background

During a flood event there are a range of ways you can make your property more resilient to flooding. In some cases, if used properly, sandbags can be used to divert flood water away from property or provide some protection for a short period of time. However, they are not effective at protecting property against deep flood water or where flood water sits against sandbags for a prolonged period. Sandbags are also difficult to handle and troublesome to dispose of.

If you think you are at risk of flooding, do not rely on sandbags as a way to protect your home or business. If you live or work in an area that may be at risk of flooding, you should make sure that you are prepared for this before the flood happens.

Responsibility

Council Responsibility

The council has no statutory duty to provide sandbags to the public.

Although the Council have no legal responsibility to provide assistance to the public during times of flooding, where possible, the Council may be able to provide a limited number of sandbags to properties in immediate danger.

However, in times of emergency the Council will be trying to protect the public at large and may not be able to assist a large number of individual homeowners who find their properties threatened.

During severe weather, the demand for this will be high and we highly recommend that residents make their own arrangements in advance if possible. Sandbags and sand can be purchased from most good builders' merchants and large DIY stores.

Cheshire West and Chester Council has considered the issues in relation to flooding and the impact it can have on the communities affected. As a result, sandbags may be provided on condition that the situation fits the criteria in this policy. Cheshire West and Chester Council **will not**:

- Provide sandbags for properties not at imminent risk of flooding.
- Provide sandbags to protect gardens.
- Provide sandbags for protecting outbuildings (including garages, whether integral or external).
- Provide sandbags for protecting non-habitable parts of any private dwelling.
- Provide sandbags for protecting commercial premises unless it is deemed to be a community facility e.g. hospitals, police and fire stations, residential care homes etc.
- Provide sandbags to protect utilities (e.g. water, gas, electric infrastructure) as this is the responsibility of the property owner.
- Provide sandbags as a precautionary measure unless there is a real risk of internal flooding within the next 2 hours.
- Guarantee the supply of sandbags to any premises. Residents are responsible to make their own arrangements before flooding occurs.
- Guarantee the effectiveness or adequacy of supply of sandbag products provided by the Authority.
- Accept responsibility for placement of sandbags, except at locations where the infirmity or disability of the sole occupant is an issue where known.
- Allow collection of sandbags from council depots.

Cheshire West and Chester will assist in the protection of critical infrastructure if the resources of the company are overwhelmed causing an impact on any of the priorities outlined in the allocation protocol. In these cases, the council will re-claim the cost of this provision from the company following the incident.

Property Owners Responsibilities

Property owners are solely responsible for the flood protection of their property. As a result, all such owners should assess the risk of flooding to their property and take the necessary precautions to protect their own property which may include installing physical flood protection barriers and joining the Environment Agency Flood Warning System. Where it is safe, householders should move valuable possessions and important documents upstairs and consider moving vehicles to higher ground.

Procedures

Provision of Sandbags

Sandbags will only be deployed having regard to the order of the following priorities provided stocks are available:

Primary Prioritisations for Allocation:

- To prevent loss of life or serious injury.
- To maintain access for emergency services.
- To assist in the protection of vital facilities within the community e.g. hospitals, police and fire stations, residential care homes etc.
- To protect Cheshire West and Chester Council business property that are required for the delivery of essential services.
- To protect key transport and main access routes.

Secondary Prioritisations for Allocation:

- To reinforce flood defences preventing the flooding of multiple properties.
- If a privately owned property (not including a garage, garden shed etc.) is at imminent risk of flooding i.e. within the next 2 hours and that the 'fabric' of a building is at risk as a result.
- Mutual aid to other responding agencies.

Control of Sandbag Provision

In a localised minor/major flooding event the decision to deploy sandbags may be taken separately outside the provision of sandbags criteria as above. In this case the decision will be made at the discretion of the Highway Service.

Where it is decided to supply sandbags then the number of sandbags delivered to any property will be based on the following:

Domestic Properties in imminent risk of internal flooding:

- 6 per door
- 3 per airbrick
- Up to a maximum of 18

Sandbag Stocks

To facilitate the council response, a stock of sandbags are kept in stock.

The Council does not maintain large stockpiles of sandbags for the protection of private residences for the following reasons:

- Sandbags have a limited shelf life.
- Sandbags provide limited protection in the event of a flood and often their correct placement is critical.
- Sandbags are most effective when placed prior to a flood event. In most cases it will not be possible to arrange transportation and placement of sandbags to prevent flood damage. This is due to the limited time available between warnings and the onset of flooding (in some areas no warning will be available).
- Cost of storage.

Delivery of Sandbags

The Council only has a small stock of sandbags, staff and vehicles that may be deployed to deliver them. Delivery may not be possible to all areas which are flooding. Council resources may be deployed elsewhere in the larger geographical area dependent upon the emergency situation. Priority help will be given to vulnerable people where these are known.

The Council will identify frequently flooded communities and will provide sandbags to store and manage on our behalf. These communities will be reviewed each year to account for schemes being delivered.

Collection/Removal of Sandbags

Any sandbags issued by the Council **will not** be collected by the Council following a flood event.