

Local Resilience Forum 2017 Interviews

Committee on Climate Change: Adaptation Sub-Committee

Interview methodology and response summary

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 Client Name: Committee on Climate Change: Adaptation Sub-Committee
 Project Manager: Mark Crouch
 Author: Julianne Cox / Mark Crouch

Jacobs U.K. Limited

New City Court
 20 St Thomas Street
 London SE1 9RS
 United Kingdom
 T +44 (0)20 7939 6100
 F +44 (0)20 7939 6103
 www.jacobs.com

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1. Introduction

1.1 Objective

In preparation for the second Statutory Report to Parliament, the Adaptation Sub-Committee of the Committee on Climate Change invited experts from Local Resilience Forums (LRF) to a 30 minute telephone interview to share their views and experience in managing climate-related emergencies and discuss the needs of the emergency planning system. A notice was posted on the gateway bulletin and emails were issued to LRFs across England. Interviews were undertaken with individuals from within the LRFs who volunteered to take part.

In total, 17 telephone interviews were undertaken with members of LRFs from across England.

1.2 Interview methodology

A standard questionnaire was developed with a mix of open-ended and fixed response questions. The questions were designed to yield as much information about the LRFs capability to respond to severe weather emergencies as possible. The interviewees were not issued with a copy of the questionnaire prior to the telephone interview. All of the interviewees were asked the same questions and asked to choose answers from the same set of fixed responses. The interviewees were then asked to expand upon their fixed response with justification, explanation and any further background information.

1.3 Number and geographical coverage of the responses

Table 1 below shows the geographical coverage of the responses received from the Local Resilience Forums, showing a geographical spread across England representing regions with varying weather related risks.

Table 1 Geographical coverage of interviews

Region	Number
Northwest England	3
Yorkshire and Humber	2
West Midlands	2
East Midlands	3
South West	1
South East	5
East of England	1
Total	17

2. Interview responses

The findings have been summarised, drawn from across the interviews and across multiple questions and synthesized into themes reported below. The interview questions are contained in Appendix A and the closed responses to questions are shown in graphs where relevant.

2.1 Types and (relative) frequency of events experienced

Flooding has been the major weather event most frequently experienced over the last few years by the interviewees. Certain counties are more susceptible to seasonal flooding due to location (e.g. adjacency to coast or river leaving them exposed to coastal or fluvial flooding). However, most interviewees have also experienced some flooding due to severe weather events in the last few years such as sudden tidal surges and large storms (e.g. Storm Eva and Storm Doris), with pluvial flooding also impacting regions across England. One interviewee reported that 800 properties were flooded in a community in their region, highlighting that some residents are still displaced from their homes due to ongoing remediation works.

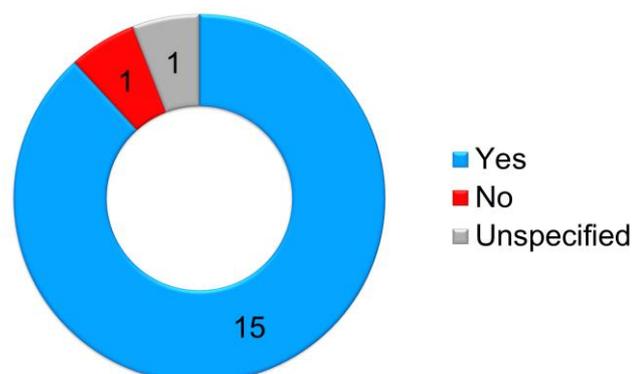
Interviewees consistently stated that their LRFs' remit was not limited to any particular type of severe weather emergency, but highlighted that their LRF would have a greater focus on events that are considered to be the greatest risk for their region. Several interviewees highlighted that the Community Risk Register would be used to determine these risks, based upon the likelihood and severity of the consequences for that community. An interviewee stated that although their LRF plans for other severe weather events, flooding due to its likelihood and consequences is their biggest risk.

Other weather events that LRFs respond to include: heatwaves, heavy snowfalls/ice and significant cold weather events. Whilst most of the LRFs have plans in place during the occurrence of these events, there is a perception that prolonged weather events can result in difficulties for some of the LRFs.

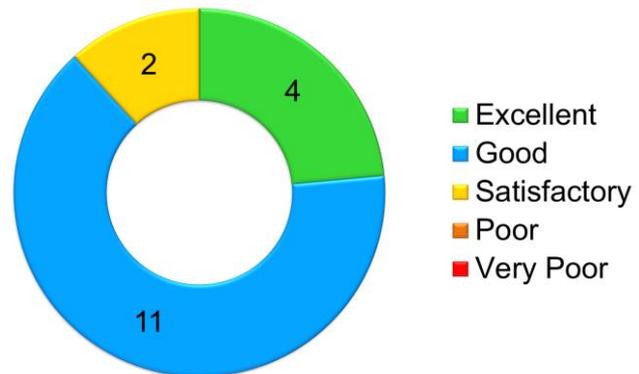
2.2 Reported / perceived capability

All but one of the interviewees stated that there had been sufficient capability to respond to past weather events (Question 2), and 15 out of 17 rated their LRF's capability to respond to weather emergencies either 'excellent' or 'good' (Question 3). However, 11 of these 15 interviewees also highlighted limiting factors in their ability to respond, either stating that they plan around the available resources (5/15) or that they dealt well with past emergencies but would struggle with larger or more prolonged events (6/15). One of the 15 responders stated that they have sufficient strategic or tactical capability but would struggle to provide assistance at household level.

Question 2: "If you experienced a severe weather event in the last few years, do you think there was sufficient capability/capacity available to manage this incident(s), including via mutual aid?" (N=17)



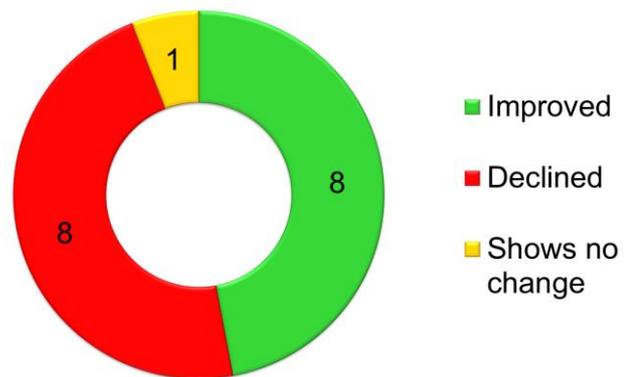
Question 3: “How would you rate your Local Resilience Forum’s capability to respond to weather emergencies?” (N=17)



Although interviewees indicated that the LRF they represented were able to efficiently and effectively manage the severe weather emergencies over the last few years, 7 interviewees (41%) expressed concern about the ability to sustain a prolonged response or recovery, primarily due to perceived reductions in staff numbers and other resources. Some interviewees noted that their LRF would have struggled to respond to weather emergencies had the ‘worst case scenario’ been realised.

The responses to Question 4 display a split view on how the capability of their LRF has developed over the last few years, with 8 (47%) stating their capability had improved, 8 (47%) stating it had declined and one (6%) stating it had remained the same. 5 interviewees (29%) expressed concerns that budget cuts experienced across the agencies have the potential to undermine the emergency response systems. However, a couple of interviewees have stated that despite the reduced number of resources, the staff are now better at coordinating and responding to events and that are able to make better use of the resources available. This may partially explain the mixed response to Question 4; that interviewees felt their capability and understanding may be growing, but capacity and resources to respond may be decreasing.

Question 4: “Please select the answer that applies to your LRF: Over the past few years, the level of capability of the LRF has: (1) Improved (2) Declined (3) Shows no change” (N=17)

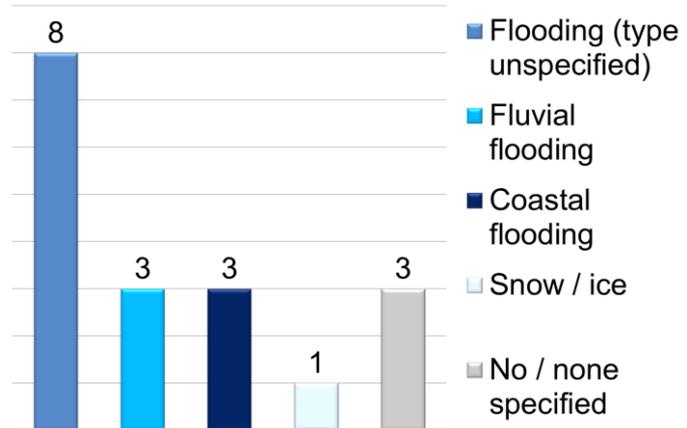


13 interviewees (76%) noted that the quality of the response to a severe weather event is dependent on the staff being adequately skilled to provide the response required, and concerns were expressed about the loss of experienced and skilled staff members across the partner agencies and Local Authorities due to budget cuts. One LRF has sought to overcome this by using the community voluntary sector to plug the resource gap.

Perceived preparedness for different types weather events

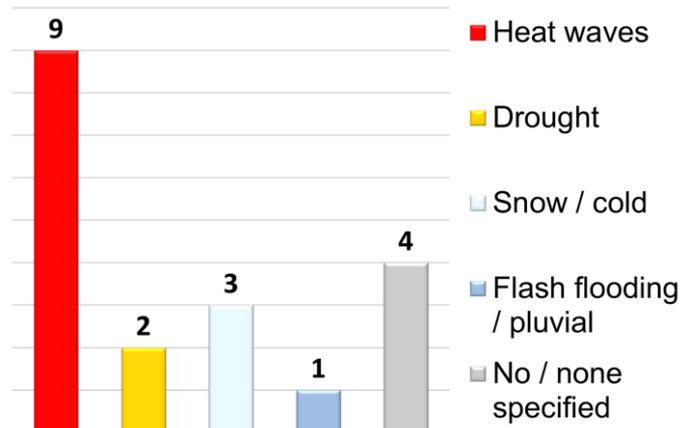
14 (82%) interviewees stated that they felt better prepared for particular types of weather events, and all 14 of these interviewees reported feeling more prepared for floods than other events. The reason given for this was that flooding was invariably considered to be the greatest risk in their region. In some areas, the frequency of responding to flooding events meant they felt well practiced in the response required. One interviewee stated that it is “routine business” for them now and another highlighted the advanced information sharing and associated plans were a key part of the preparations.

Question 9: “Are there any particular severe weather events that you feel more prepared for? (N=17, multiple responses permitted)



13 (76%) interviewees identified severe weather events they were less prepared for. In general the interviewees felt less prepared to deal with the events to which they have never responded before, or were considered lower risk. Heat waves, particularly for prolonged periods, were identified more than any other event, with interviewees also identifying droughts and prolonged cold weather that bring snow and ice. One highlighted flash flooding as an issue due to the lack of accuracy in predicting the timing and location of occurrence.

Question 10: “Are there any particular severe weather events that you feel less prepared for? (N=17, multiple responses permitted)



Several interviewees felt that the strategies and approaches they adopted meant they were prepared to deal with all types of severe weather, as the same basic principles apply. One interviewee highlighted the three basic strategies they apply to any weather related event:

- 1) Redeploying assets in advance of the weather event.
- 2) Removal of people from danger.
- 3) the protection of the national and local infrastructure.

Having successfully applied these strategies before the interviewee believes that this will greatly improve responses in such situations.

The interviewees identified a range of tools and external resources that LRFs use to help assess capacity and determine the relevant response to the severe weather events. The Met Office’s positive role in facilitating LRFs preparedness and response to severe weather emergencies was highlighted by a majority of the interviewees. Interviewees identified a number of Met Office services that help LRFs to prepare for and respond to emergencies efficiently and effectively, including severe weather warnings and tidal alerts. Flood warnings

and maps issued by the Environment Agency and the flood forecasting centre were also referenced by interviewees as important tools that enable LRFs to prepare for severe weather emergencies.

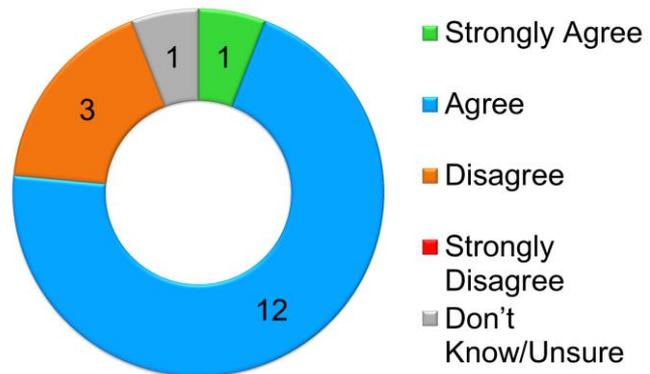
One interviewee made reference to the development of the *Flooded Properties Act*, which is being developed by the EA and DEFRA and may be useful in improving situational awareness of flooding for LRFs. While another referred to Resilience Direct¹ and its potential to help with the task of information sharing and mapping, and also with improving situational awareness for LRFs.

The other tools and resources that were identified by interviewees include the National Risk Register, community risk register, the National Flood Resilience Review and in-house experience gained from responding to past events.

2.3 Access to information

As can be seen in the response to Question 7, 13 out of the 17 interviewees agreed or strongly agreed that their LRF has sufficient information on the vulnerability of local infrastructure to extreme weather events. However, when asked “for what type of infrastructure could information be improved?” (Question 8), 8 of the same 13 interviewees reported that information could be improved with respect to utilities (4/13), telecommunications (2/13) or both (2/13). One of the 13 responders also stated that whilst they have sufficient information about local infrastructure, they lacked information on how disruption to national infrastructure could affect them. Therefore, the results for Question 7 could be misleading, as many of those stating they were satisfied with the information available went on to identify information deficits.

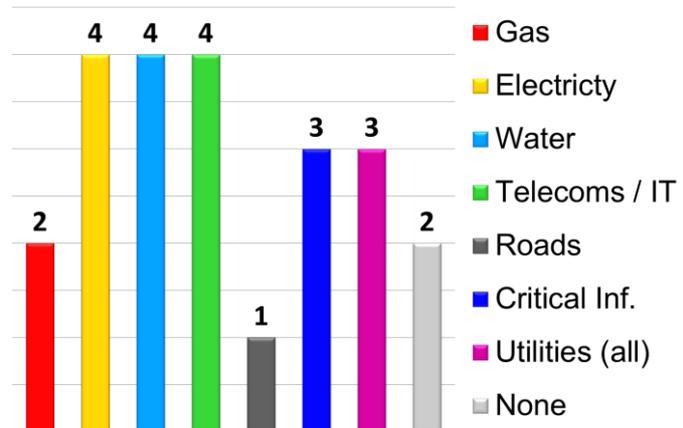
Question 7: “Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: My LRF has sufficient information on the vulnerability of local infrastructure to disruption from severe weather to respond effectively.” (N=17)



When responding to Question 8, although some interviewees reported that their LRFs have good relationships with utility and telecommunication providers, they also reported reluctance from some of these companies to share information about their infrastructure due to commercial sensitivities. 3 interviewees also specifically mentioned that restricted access to data on Critical National Infrastructure was a barrier. A few interviewees reported that the utility companies do not prioritise engagement efforts with LRFs, while one interviewee noted the absence of meaningful engagement on the part of utility companies and the difficulties experienced getting different utilities to engage with each other. Telecommunications were mentioned by 4 interviewees as being particularly challenging to engage with. On the whole, there was a perceived need to develop stronger connections between LRFs and other stakeholders (both public and private) so that there is a meaningful exchange of information and engagement.

¹ Resilience Direct, 2017. *Ordnancesurvey.co.uk*. [Online]. [30 March 2017]. Available from: <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/business-and-government/case-studies/resilience-direct.html>

Question 8: “For what types of infrastructure could information be improved?” (N=17, multiple responses permitted)



There were some positive examples given of good information sharing and collaboration with utilities and infrastructure. One interviewee gave the example of their LRF working closely with Highways England and the local highway department to develop a plan for diversion routes on one of the major roads that experience flooding and highlighted the good collaborative nature of this relationship. Others noted that while access to information was improving, it remained a work in progress.

Interviewees highlighted the following as the type of information that would be helpful to their LRF:

- Impacts that compromised infrastructure could have on vulnerable communities;
- Information on Critical National Infrastructure, which they are not privy to;
- Consequences associated with compromised infrastructure;
- More information about the economic losses associated with severe weather events;
- Recovery times for compromised assets; and
- Case studies showing data about the interdependency and failure of infrastructure, which could help LRFs to respond to emergencies.

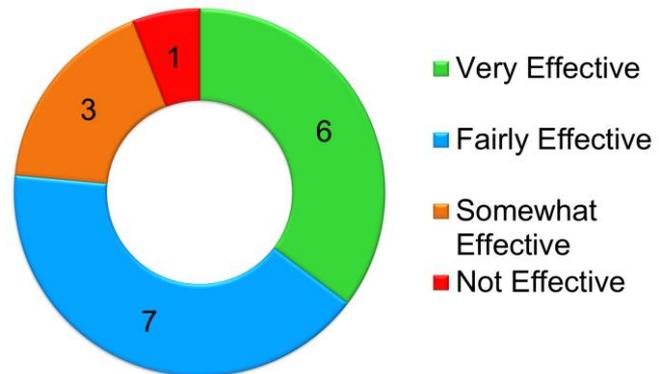
According to one interviewee, learnings from past events are captured differently across the country and it would be useful if debriefings could be captured in a standardised way so that learnings from past events can be improved.

In terms of availability of information available for extreme weather, the majority of the interviewees are happy with the level of information that is currently provided by the Met Office and the EA around the forecasting and modelling of floods. However, some interviewees felt that weather events can be highly unpredictable thus further improvements can be made to the accuracy of the data provided.

2.4 Policy framework

In responding to Question 12, the majority (76%) of interviewees answered that the Civil Contingencies Act was either “fairly effective” or “very effective” as a framework for managing emergencies. Some interviewees stated that the Act provides a good framework for preparing for emergencies and has improved resilience in the UK. It was also suggested that the Act provides a platform for LRFs to develop their own response plans. Only a small proportion felt that the Civil Contingencies Act was “not effective” or “sometimes effective” and that it was in need of substantial revision.

Question 12: “How effective is the Civil Contingencies Act as a framework for managing emergencies?” (N=17)



Despite the positive feedback on the effectiveness of the Civil Contingencies Act, 11 interviewees (65%) felt there was still room for improvement. Probing into the interview responses some common themes emerge, with interviewees reporting the following:

- A lack of clarity in the Act in how it defines responsibilities and expectations of the various agencies and the role of the LRF.
- A degree of interpretation within each LRF area in terms of how it implements its procedures to meet the requirements of the Act.
- LRF responses are not consistent and standardised; and there is “little rigour in quality assuring” how LRFs respond as they are currently self-assessed with no external audits.
- Vagueness around the requirements for cooperation and information sharing.
- A suggestion that the Act promotes an approach in the UK that is about emergency management and it doesn’t always encourage this to link in to the wider risk reduction agenda.

4 interviewees (24%) highlighted that they would like to see the responsibility of Category 1 and 2 responders to be better defined within the Act and to include the enforcement of some form of accountability when the requirements of the Act are not fulfilled. It was noted that interviewees had experienced the failure of some Category 2 responders to share the necessary information in advance of a severe weather event, which can hinder LRF planning efforts. Not all interviewees supported this viewpoint, as another interviewee stated that they believed that guidance documents do set out the expectations and indicators of good practice for responders, and clarify the duties of Category 1 and 2 responders.

Various interviewees also suggested the following improvements to the policy framework:

- Producing national guidelines by collecting good practice guidelines from LRFs who already developed effective methods of responding to particular weather events.
- Updating the policy framework taking into account the debriefing learnings of recent events that have occurred locally and around the world (the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks were given as an example).
- Develop a mandated civil resilience framework that also includes training standards.
- Increased consistency to the way mutual aid is managed, with the suggestion that a single national modular approach to mutual aid would be beneficial.

2.5 Other issues emerging

Preparing for climate change

A common theme among the responses provided by interviewees was the need for positive action to manage the risk to the UK from the impacts of climate change. Several interviewees suggested that climate change adaptation planning is needed and should be prioritised. One interviewee suggested that adaptation should be built into new infrastructure to manage the impact of climate change in the future, while another highlighted the need for long term investment in flood defences.

Interviewees felt it important that the resources that have been developed over the years should not be lost or diluted, particularly the services that provide intelligence during severe weather events such as the flood forecasting centre. It was suggested that the Local Authorities and LRFs should continue to collect and share data on the resource impacts of severe weather events. One interviewee noted that efforts by local authorities to help ensure the UK is prepared for the impacts of climate change have become less coordinated and receive less priority, partially due to budget cuts.

The need for communities and the wider public to be aware of the long term risks of climate change was highlighted by 5 interviewees (29%). Recognising that the capabilities and capacities of LRFs are limited, some interviewees felt it important for the relevant communities to be engaged and have input into community planning. The issue of community resilience and the need to empower communities to use local resources and knowledge to help themselves during an emergency was mentioned by 4 interviewees (24%). An interviewee suggested this awareness raising exercise should be supported by continuing research into the public mind-set, risk appreciation, and their perception of 'resilience'.

Need for standardised responses to weather emergencies and need for regional coordination

Several interviewees highlighted that the coordination of response and recovery could be further improved by ensuring the standardisation of LRF performance to avoid variations in the response and recovery. Several also felt there was a need for more regional coordination between LRFs, and potentially for a national level response from a properly funded team.

There was a perceived need for greater cross sector working between LRFs. A few interviewees also highlighted the importance of LRFs taking opportunities to learn from the experiences of other countries to develop their understanding of risks and also best practice guidance.

Limited resources

Budgetary constraints were highlighted by several interviewees, particularly those from local authorities:

- Having to do more with less was a common theme, with interviewees highlighting how their remit had increased to cover multiple regions but with smaller teams
- An interviewee suggested that the resource of emergency planning should be protected at a national level, because local authorities have so many other activities that may be given priority given their financial constraints

Appendix A. Interview questions

No.	Question	Prompt questions
1	How many severe weather events has your Local Resilience Forum responded to in the last few years? Please provide details about the severe weather event(s) over the last few years	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Floods (river, surface water, coastal) which have been prominent in the last few years? 2. Very hot days in the last few years? 3. Prolonged dry weather issues? 4. Snow/ice? 5. Windy conditions? 6. Do they see their remit as being limited to/focused on certain types of events?
2	If you experienced a severe weather event in the last few years, do you think there was sufficient capability/capacity available to manage this incident(s), including via mutual aid?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Who helped? What did they help with? 2. Where was capability lacking? 3. How could capability be improved? 4. What lessons has the LRF learned from these events that could be applied in the future?
3	How would you rate your Local Resilience Forum's capability to respond to weather emergencies? Please explain your answer. (1) Excellent (2) Good (3) Satisfactory (4) Poor (5) Very poor	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What tools does your LRF use to assess the capacity needed to respond to severe weather events? 2. If your LRF uses national tools such as the National Risk Assessment scenarios, how do you apply these tools to your local environment? 3. Does your LRF use EA flood maps? If so, how are these translated into resources in your local environment?
4	Please select the answer that applies to your LRF: Over the past few years, the level of capability of the LRF has: (1) Improved (2) Declined (3) Shows no change	N/A
5	If you answered in Q4 that the capability has improved/declined, please provide the reason(s).	N/A
6	What are the biggest obstacles for your LRF to respond adequately to extreme weather emergencies?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Insufficient information? 2. Insufficient capability or capacity?
7	Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: My LRF has sufficient information on the vulnerability of local infrastructure to disruption from severe weather to respond effectively. Please explain your answer. (1) Strongly Agree (2) Agree (3) Disagree (4) Strongly Disagree (5) Don't know/ unsure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Floods (river, surface water, coastal) which have been prominent in the last few years? 2. Very hot days in the last few years? 3. Prolonged dry weather issues? 4. Snow/ice? 5. Windy conditions?

No.	Question	Prompt questions
8	For what types of infrastructure could information be improved (water treatment, IT, roads, electricity networks, etc.)?	1. What sort of information would be helpful, and where do you envisage getting it from? 2. Do you have good links to these organisations at present to provide this information?
9	Are there particular severe weather events that you feel more prepared for? Why?	1. Which events? 2. Why do you feel more prepared for these events?
10	Are there any severe weather events that you feel less prepared for? Why?	1. Which events? 2. Why do you feel less prepared for these events?
11	For what types of extreme weather events could information be improved?	N/A
12	How effective is the Civil Contingencies Act as a framework for managing emergencies? Please explain your answer. (1) Very effective (2) Fairly effective (3) Sometimes effective (4) Not effective	1. Do you think the policies that currently provide a framework for planning and responding to severe weather events could be improved?
13	Are there any other issues you believe should be brought to the attention of the Adaptation sub-committee?	
14	Optional question for interviewees from Local Authorities: How can we substantiate this lack of resources?	
15	Optional question for interviewees from Local Authorities: What is the budget line that your refer to?	
16	Optional question for interviewees from Local Authorities: How does your Local Authority itemise the money spend on responding to emergency events?	Where is this data about budget/spending available?