

Flood Investigation Reports – Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010

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This blog has been written by [The Flood Hub People](#).

When flooding affects a community, residents understandably want immediate answers. Why did it happen? Who is responsible? And what will be done to prevent it from happening again? Flood Investigation Reports play an important role in providing clarity.

Background

As a result of widespread flooding in 2007, the government commissioned an independent public review, The [Pitt Review \(2008\)](#) to examine all aspects of flood risk management in England. The Review made 92 recommendations covering improvements to flood forecasting and warnings, prevention, emergency response, resilience and recovery.

Actions

The Government accepted the Review's recommendations and introduced the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 (FWMA) in response.

Before the FWMA, flood management was often disjointed. Different organisations worked in isolation, there was no legal requirement for collaboration and the findings of flood investigations were rarely made public. Because flooding can result from multiple mechanisms and sources, this lack of coordination made it difficult to understand why incidents occurred.

The FWMA created a new, more joined-up approach by setting out clearer roles and responsibilities for Risk Management Authorities (RMAs).

Risk Management Authorities

Under the FWMA, the following organisations are classed as RMAs:

- Environment Agency – responsible for managing flood and coastal erosion risk on main rivers and the coast, regulating reservoir safety and providing flood forecasts and warnings in partnership with Met Office.
- County Councils and Unitary Authorities – designated as Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs).
- Highways Authorities – responsible for highway drainage and roadside ditches under the Highways Act 1980.
- District and Borough Councils – responsible for minor watercourses.
- Coastal Protection Authorities – district and unitary authorities that manage coastal erosion risk.
- Water and Sewerage Companies – manage the risk of flooding from their infrastructure, including water supply and sewerage networks.

LLFAs have a key role in coordinating local flood risk management and lead on managing flood risk from surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses. To support this duty, the FWMA requires all RMAs to:

- Co-operate with one another.
- Work in alignment with the National FCERM Strategy and local flood risk management strategies.
- Share information to support planning and decision-making.

Flood Investigations

Section 19 of the FWMA requires LLFAs to carry out a flood investigation after a 'significant' flood event, where necessary and appropriate. An event is typically classed as significant when:

- Five or more properties experience internal flooding, and/or
- Critical infrastructure or key community assets (e.g., major roads, hospitals) are disrupted or damaged.

The purpose of a Section 19 Flood Investigation Report is to determine:

- What happened – a timeline of events leading to the flooding.
- Who was affected – including the number of properties flooded.
- Which RMAs were involved – and what responsibilities they hold in relation to the event.
- What actions have been taken or are planned – by each relevant authority.

To build an accurate picture, LLFAs work closely with affected communities, gathering eyewitness accounts and local knowledge. Once completed, the report must be published and shared with the RMAs involved.

Why Flood Investigation Reports Matter

After a flood, communities often feel anxious and want quick answers. However, Section 19 reports can take time to prepare due to their complexity, the data required, and the need for coordination across multiple organisations.

A Flood Investigation Report should:

- Provide a clear understanding of the causes of flooding.
- Highlight any 'quick wins'.
- Set out realistic recommendations for future action.
- Help RMAs plan more effectively for future flood events.

Most importantly, a Section 19 report should be seen as a starting point, not the final solution. Before long-term improvements can be made, the cause of the flooding must be fully understood.

Sources: Legislation.gov.uk, National Archives, Cabinet Office, DEFRA

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