

## **City of York Council - Sandbag Policy**

Property owners can check whether their property is in an identified flood zone by referring to the Environment Agency website: [www.gov.uk/prepare-for-a-flood](http://www.gov.uk/prepare-for-a-flood) or by telephone: 0345 9881188.

If your property is in a designated flood zone, sign up for the Environment Agency's flood warnings service which issues warnings by email, text message, and automated telephone voice messages.

You should also prepare a plan so that everyone in your property knows what to do once flood warnings are issued.

Don't rely on someone coming to tell you personally that a flood warning has been issued, as this will not normally be possible.

**Be informed, be prepared, take action!**

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## **Whose responsibility is it to prevent my house from flooding?**

It's the responsibility of every property occupier or owner to protect their property against floodwater wherever it comes from - for example: rivers, flash flooding caused by excess rain, etc.

It's not the responsibility of the local authority to provide sandbags for use by individual occupiers of residential or commercial premises.

However, we will offer what assistance we can to residents, where resources are available and in accordance with the priorities set out in this policy. We may also assist commercial premises but there may be a charge for this.

Sandbags are not the only, or even necessarily the best, protection against floodwater. There are numerous other products on the market which can offer protection from flooding. We're not able to endorse any specific product, as it's up to the customer to decide whether a specific product is suitable for their needs.

You can find advice on other ways of [protecting your property from flooding on the National Flood Forum](#) website.

## **Our strategic aim**

As the extent of flood prevention works cannot be predicted in advance of a flooding event, we need to prioritise the distribution of sandbags according to the level of threat to infrastructure and key installations within our authority's area. It is therefore essential that we have a clear policy governing the supply of sandbags to the public during a major flood event.

The aim of the plans, and the works listed within them, is to prevent or mitigate the effects of flooding on the City of York as a whole.

Therefore, we may make decisions or set priorities which maximise the effect of that prevention or mitigation.

Consequently, key installations and public infrastructure will be given priority over individual residential or commercial properties.

## Sandbag Policy

In keeping with our strategic aim, we'll give priority to the use of sandbags as shown below:

### Priority for sandbag use

1. Repairs to existing flood defences, whether permanent or temporary
2. Temporary defence works, as identified in the City of York Flood Plan, to prevent flooding to large areas of the city affecting both residential and commercial properties. This includes works to protect areas not previously identified but which become known during a particular flooding incident and which meet these criteria.
3. Key installations\* – Utility installations, hospitals, schools, communication centres, council buildings (e.g. residential homes) and operational emergency services premises
4. Critical transportation routes and other essential roads
5. Individual residential or commercial properties

\*It will remain, in the first instance, the responsibility of the owners or operators of these installations to protect their own property.

This policy will apply to flooding, whether caused by breaches of main rivers, breaches of permanent or temporary flood defences or flash flooding caused by excess rain.

### Public supply

Subject to availability, and the above priorities, sandbags from the council's stock will only be made available to members of the public in the following circumstances:

- when temporary works have been constructed and flood waters are not anticipated to rise above existing defences
- where there is an **immediate** threat to individual properties, with the condition that this does not jeopardise the ability of the council to achieve its strategic aims

The facility offered to the public will be kept under constant review during any incident and may be withdrawn at any time if stocks reduce to a level where the council would be unable to meet its strategic aims.

We may levy a charge for the provision of any sandbags or for assistance in constructing sandbag defences to premises other than those listed priorities set out under our 'Policy' above.

## **Sandbags will not be available for collection by the public from the council's depot at Hazel Court.**

### **Council assistance to residents**

The level of assistance which the council is able to offer individual residents will depend on resources available at the time, the demands on that resource owing to the situation we are confronting, and an objective view of the needs of the resident.

For example:

- **Case A** - it may only be necessary to supply a number of sandbags to an able bodied householder
- **Case B** - an elderly or disabled resident may require assistance in the building of their sandbag defences as well

### **Pre-positioned stocks**

After discussion with parish councils, in certain areas, it has been agreed that a stock of sandbags may be pre-positioned in those areas for distribution in the event of a flood.

This pre-positioning of stocks uses council resources and is therefore imperative that these stocks are wisely and appropriately used.

Consequently this action will only be agreed where requesting parish councils submit a completed action plan (see annex A). This plan will show, amongst other things:

- how and where the sandbags will be stored
- contact details of those responsible for the storage and distribution of the sandbags
- how the filling and distribution operations will be staffed
- how both the fact of the stockpile and the restrictions on its use will be communicated to local residents

- security of the stockpile in times when there is no flooding
- which streets they intend to deploy the filled sandbags to
- how used sandbags will be disposed of

In return, the council will undertake to:

- supply an agreed and appropriate quantity of unfilled sandbags
- train members of the parish council in the correct way to fill and lay sandbags
- deliver a stockpile of sand at an agreed trigger river level
- supply 2 operatives to deliver the sand and remain in the area to assist

## **Disclaimer**

The council will do its best to deliver sandbags to those requesting them, but will not be held responsible for any damage caused by a delay or failure in that delivery nor for any failure of sandbagging to prevent water entering a property.

It is emphasised once again that it is the responsibility of the owner or occupier of a property to protect it against flooding.

Further information on flood protection can be found on the GOV.UK web site: <https://www.gov.uk/prepare-for-flooding>.

## **Limitations of sandbagging**

Sandbags will not totally prevent floodwater encroaching into property and householders/occupiers of 'at risk' properties should always remove articles to a safe location above the anticipated flood level.

Those building sandbag flood defences should also be aware that sandbags are exceptionally heavy, and therefore there are health and safety considerations in their manual handling.

Advice as to the [most effective method of building sandbag defences](#) can be found on the Environment Agency website.

## Disposal of sandbags

The responsibility for the safe and legal disposal of sandbags after a flooding event remains with the owner or occupier of the property. Filled sandbags must not be placed in wheelie bins for disposal as waste collections are not meant for this sort of bulky item.

**Note:** Residents could be liable for a statutory notice if they choose to dispose of sandbags in this way. Failure to comply with a notice can result in a fixed penalty ticket for £100 or a court appearance with a maximum fine of £1,000.

Where possible, used sandbags should be split and the contents spread over gardens and the bag itself placed in your household waste.

City of York Council Environment, Transport and Planning may, on request, collect sandbags for disposal - however a charge may be levied for this service.

It is **not** recommended that sandbags be kept and re-used as they may have been contaminated by flood waters.

## Responsibility for our sandbag policy

This policy is the responsibility of the Director of Environment, Transport and Planning who may delegate its operation on a day to day basis to an officer(s) of his/her choice.