

Lessons learned from the floods of summer 2007

In August 2007, the government commissioned an Independent Review led by Sir Michael Pitt in order to learn lessons from the summer floods. Extensive qualitative research conducted by GfK NOP Social Research provided the Review with insights into the experiences of those directly affected by the flooding. Research amongst affected householders, businesses and farmers highlighted a lack of preparedness, particularly amongst householders, for the advent of flooding. In addition, it described the ongoing hardship which many continued to suffer several months after the flooding took place.

The research challenge

Widespread flooding affected Yorkshire and the Humber, East Midlands and West Midlands in late June 2007. Heavy rain from Friday 20 July 2007 caused further floods which affected much of Central, Southern and Western England. In the aftermath of the flooding, Sir Michael Pitt was asked by Ministers to conduct an independent Review of the emergency, to create recommendations that would help minimise the impact of future flooding. Areas for investigation by the Review included flood risk management, emergency response, and delivery of information and support to those affected.



As part of the information-gathering process to inform the Review, primary research was required amongst those who had experienced the flooding at first hand. Some of those directly affected by the floods were likely to suffer ongoing distress and, for this reason, the research design had to take into account the sensitivity of the subject matter. In addition, the potentially keen public and media scrutiny of such a high-profile Government Review meant that there was a requirement for a very robust and comprehensive programme of research that would stand up to possibly hostile interrogation.

Why GfK NOP?

- Our experience of designing robust research programmes that can reliably be used as part of a high-profile Government Review.
- Our specialisation in delivering qualitative research that can explore highly emotive topics sensitively, whilst providing focused and actionable results. Previous topics have included child maintenance, terrorism, race and gender equality and congestion charging.
- Our ten-strong team of full-time dedicated qualitative researchers enables us to meet the demands of a large, scale project to the highest standard of quality.

- A qualitative researcher with an expertise in research amongst farmers was added to further strengthened the project team.
- Our network of recruiters local to the affected areas allowed us to build trust in the research process amongst potential research participants.

What we did

We conducted Qualitative research in each of the areas worst affected by the flooding, as well as a sample of areas affected on a lesser scale. On top of this, we held thirty group discussions across the affected areas, as well as focus groups amongst business people and householders in each location covered by the research. In addition, twelve in-depth interviews were carried out with affected farmers.

In addition to investigating views and attitudes towards the emergency response at the time of the floods, our approach allowed us to gather people's experiences, and to explore in detail the impact that the flooding had on their lives.

We also produced a five minute DVD for the Review, incorporating clips of business people, householders and farmers describing their experiences of the floods and their aftermath. This proved especially effective in illustrating the core messages direct from respondent to our client.

The research design was fully inclusive, as even those who were excluded in the research recruitment were provided with an invitation to contribute to the wider Review by other means.

Benefits

The qualitative research brought the findings vividly to life, in a way that was instantly memorable to the audience, by producing:

- detailed descriptions of the experiences of those affected by the flooding, quoted in their own words. These verbatim accounts provided accurate, evocative reports to add to the Review's evidence base.
- a DVD showing clips of those interviewed, which was invaluable in bringing the research findings to life for a wider audience.

In addition, the inclusive research design meant that awareness of the Review was substantially increased amongst those affected. Even where they were unable to take part in the survey, all of those who were approached by the recruiter were provided with an invitation to contribute to the Review by other means. This increased the number of people responding to the Review overall.

Overview of organisations

The research was commissioned by Central Office of Information, on behalf of the Cabinet Office Civil Contingencies Secretariat.

Central Office of Information

The Central Office of Information (COI) is the Government's centre of excellence for marketing and communications. COI works with government departments and agencies to produce information campaigns on issues that affect the lives of every citizen - from health and education to benefits, rights and welfare.

Cabinet Office Civil Contingencies Secretariat

The Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) sits within the Cabinet Office at the heart of central government. They work in partnership with government departments, the devolved administrations and key stakeholders to enhance the UK's ability to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies.

GfK NOP Social Research

GfK NOP Social Research is a leading primary research partner to public sector organisations in the UK providing both quantitative and qualitative research services to all major government departments as well as non-governmental organisations. We frequently work in partnership with a range of academic institutions and consultancies to supply outputs that incorporate specialist sector knowledge and recommendations. We combine first class research experience and public policy knowledge to deliver robust data that is used to inform policy development, spending decisions and communication strategies. ■

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