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# Floods and Coasts

Submission by Pupils to Parliament to the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs, for their

## **Floods Call for Evidence**

***Local factors in managing flood and coastal erosion risk and Property Flood Resilience***

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*Views collected by independent consultation with school pupils*

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. Pupils 2 Parliament is an established project gathering school pupils' views for submission to Government Department and national body consultations, and to Parliamentary Select Committee inquiries. Pupils' views are collected and faithfully reported independently, neutrally and without bias. We have permission from the Clerks of both Houses of Parliament to use the term 'Parliament' in our name.
2. Our aim in this report is to provide primary and direct evidence of children's views and thinking on a number of the key issues and priority options raised in the Call for Evidence.
3. The report gives the views of 71 school pupils, aged from 8 to 11, from two primary schools: Presteigne Primary School, Powys, and St George's CE Academy, Clun, Shropshire.
4. We surveyed pupils online, and they sent their responses individually and directly to Pupils 2 Parliament. 13 younger children were helped by their parent or carer to operate the computer and type in their answers. To keep the children's views separate from the adults', the adults were asked to give their own answers separately from their child's.
5. As part of the online survey, we gave the children unbiased explanations of the issues behind the questions, based on information in the Call for Evidence.
6. This report, including quotations from pupils, may be freely quoted in relation to the inquiry.

## **The children's experience of flooding and coastal erosion**

7. We asked the 71 children about any experience they had of flooding or coastal erosion. Six of the 71 children said they had experienced flooding in their houses. Five of the six described the flooding for us. One of their houses had flooded through rain coming through the roof, another had flooded with water from heavy rainfall, one with water from a failed tap, another flooding came from a blocked drain, and one told us that flood water from their garden had run into their porch but not further into the house.
8. We heard how one household had defended their house using blankets against the door. The children told us the effects of flooding in their own houses. Household pets had been stranded outside, floors had become slippery with water, there was general "mess", and carpets had been lost after being spoiled by floodwater.

9. In terms of seeing coastal erosion, very few (only 4) of the children had lived by the sea, but 27 children told us they had seen coastal erosion for themselves – for example, places where land had fallen into the sea, perhaps from a cliff.

### **Flood resilience at the children's own homes**

10. We asked if any of the children's homes, whether or not they had previously experienced flooding, had special precautions against flooding. Very few did.
11. Six children wrote that the main protection against flooding was that their house was built on a hill – but one of these said "we live on a hill so the water can't get us – but our porch flooded once".
12. Three more saw the way their house was built as giving it a good defence against flooding. One said their house has "thick and strong walls", another that their "roof is brick", and another that "it has a step which is about 25 centimetres high".
13. Four children described special protection measures at their houses. One wrote that "it has wooden barriers around it and a drain in the middle", another that they have a drain by the side of the building, and a third that they have "sand barriers" ready to use. The fourth wrote that "daddy made the river bed bigger": the father of this child confirmed this, writing as an adult that they had made the river bed deeper around the house.

### **Building flood defences where flooding has happened in the past**

14. One of the key factors in deciding where flood and coastal erosion defence work should be focused, is whether the area has previously been flooded or suffered from coastal erosion. We asked the children whether or not they agreed that defences should be prioritised in places where flooding or erosion has happened before.
15. The children strongly agreed with prioritising defences where flooding or erosion has happened before, voting in favour of this by 49 votes out of 68 votes cast. Only four children voted against this being the priority; the others were not sure.
16. We asked the children why they had voted as they did. Their main reasoning for prioritising places that have already suffered flooding or coastal erosion can be summed up by the child who wrote; "because that is the place it would most likely happen again". Another reason given was that money would be wasted if defences were put where flooding or erosion had never happened; "it would be a waste of money".

17. Those who wrote that they were not sure told us they saw arguments both for and against this priority. "Because some places get flooded all the time, but others that have never been flooded before have bad floods"; "if it has happened before it is most likely to happen again when there is loads of rain, but I also think that some places where it has not happened before but could happen should have defences as well".
18. One child summarised the dilemma; "if a flood happens somewhere it doesn't mean it's going to happen again in that area. It can be a lot of money to put defence everywhere where a flood has happened. But if you don't put defence in you can get devastated by what happens".

### **Building flood defences in areas affected by poverty**

19. We asked the children whether they thought the economic factor of poverty should give an area a priority for location of flood and coastal erosion defences.
20. The children gave very strong support to using poverty of an area as a factor, voting for this priority by 57 votes with only 2 against, with 9 saying they were unsure.
21. Examples of reasons for supporting local poverty as a factor were: "because if it did come they would have to pay for the damage again"; "I choose that because the people can't do it but the government can". The general reasoning was that areas of poverty would be more seriously affected by flooding or erosion if it happened, because it would be more difficult for those in poor areas to recover afterwards. One child wrote of the need for better insurance in areas of poverty.
22. One of the children who voted against giving priority to areas of poverty gave their reason for opposing this prioritisation: "no, because it wouldn't be fair for the other places that got flooded".

### **Building flood defences for towns rather than villages and small settlements**

23. We then asked the children whether they thought future flood and coastal defences should be prioritised to protect larger communities, such as towns rather than villages or smaller settlements.
24. Children voted by two to one for giving priority to protecting towns rather than villages or smaller settlements. The vote was in favour of this by 26 to 13. The main reason given was that giving priority to larger communities simply protected more people: "because it will save more people"; "there is more

people in towns”; “if it floods there more people may be harmed and businesses ruined”; “if it was me, I would try to help as much people as I can”.

25. One of the children described their economic reasoning on prioritising defences for larger communities; “because if the Government gave the money to the small villages there wouldn’t be enough money to spend on the big towns, but if they spent it on the big towns and still have enough money left over, they could spend it on the small villages or the houses which are in more danger”.
26. But there was a very strong vote of uncertainty over the choice between protection of towns versus protection of smaller communities. 25 children said they were uncertain about which should be prioritised.
27. Reasons given for definite uncertainty over this priority were mainly to do with fairness and equal need to be protected, wherever people live: “I think they should be fair and do both because people will still both be flooded”; “I think you need to protect small places as well as big places”, “both, it doesn’t matter how many people live there, we need to save people”; “I think all villages and towns should be equally protected”.
28. There was also a clear view that being defended against floods and coastal erosion is a human right; “I think everyone has a right to be safe and sound in their homes”.
29. Nevertheless, the children’s vote for prioritising defending towns was – just – more than the vote for uncertainty. Towns have “got more people to protect”.

## **Deciding the priorities for flood defences**

30. So far, the children had considered single priorities – but we now asked them to decide between the priority options in the Call for Evidence. We asked them to vote between giving priority to places where flooding or erosion has happened a lot before, to places where people are poor, or around small villages and small groups of houses. We also gave them a ‘don’t know’ option.
31. In this key vote on overall priority, the children voted very strongly that the Government should give priority for building the most flood and sea defences in places where flooding or coastal erosion has happened before. Just over half the children, 35 out of the 68 who answered, voted that this should be the overriding priority.
32. One child added an economic reason for prioritising places with a history of past flooding; “preventing flooding is better than always repairing the same damage”.

33. The children's second priority was building flood and sea defences to protect poorer communities. 21 out of the 68 children, just under a third, supported this priority.
34. When it came to choosing one priority over the other, only two children voted for smaller communities rather than towns as the priority.
35. Ten children wrote that they did not know which priority they wanted the Government to give.
36. One child proposed the frequency of past flooding that should be used in deciding on the priority to be given because of previous history of flooding: "they should put more money into putting the protection on where it has flooded more than 5 times, or twice very badly".
37. It is important to note that we had not asked the children about frequency in relation to the previous flooding priority, even though this is an issue raised in the Call for Evidence. But this child came up with that issue entirely on their own.
38. Some children linked prioritising frequently flooded places and the issue of poverty. One wrote that the Government should "spend the more money on places where the floods come because the people will have to spend more and more money and may become poor".
39. Another child argued that flooding and poverty together would be likely to lead to greater ill health. As a result of flooding, "poor people ... might get poorly".
40. There was also a proposal to prioritise poorer people and areas within the overall priority for places where flooding has happened before; "in places where flooding is common, prioritise the poorer areas".

### **Priorities for funding support for house resilience**

41. Finally, we asked the children to vote on the prioritisation of financial support for householders to install flood resilience measures in their homes according to levels of flood risk. We asked them to consider the balance between giving a lot of support to a smaller number of households at most risk, and sharing a smaller level of support among a bigger number of households by including those at lower levels of risk as well.
42. We asked them to choose between four options. These were giving support to people in houses which have never been flooded (so lots of people would get a very small share), giving support to people living in houses which might get flooded (with still quite a lot of people to share the money), giving support to people living in houses which are very likely to get flooded (with

fewer people sharing, so more support for each household), or giving the support to people living in houses which have been flooded before (resulting in fewer people getting a lot of support for protection against flooding in the house, but no help to make other houses which are very likely to get flooded secure from flooding).

43. The children rose to this challenge, and the great majority chose a level of risk to recommend for Government support.
44. Their two recommended risk levels for financial support were to give support to people living in houses which had been flooded before, and to people living in houses which had not been flooded before but are very likely to get flooded. Children supported each of these risk levels equally – with 22 children voting for each of the two risk levels.

### **My thanks**

45. I am grateful to the Heads of the two schools which took part in the consultation for this submission, to the members of staff of each school who facilitated their pupils taking part despite the challenges facing schools in recovering from closure during lockdown, and above all to the children and young people themselves for their thinking and views on this important subject.

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25<sup>th</sup> March 2021