

Engaging the voluntary sector in climate change adaptation in Bristol



Inside Bristol Youth Hostel where a workshop was held with voluntary and community organisations on climate change

1. Summary

In November 2015, a number of representatives of voluntary and community sector organisations in Bristol participated in a workshop to discuss the impacts of climate change on the services they provide to some of Bristol's most socially vulnerable people.

2. Background

Many organisations in the voluntary and community sector (VCS) do not have effective business continuity plans to protect them from disruptive events. Smaller organisations in particular often lack the resources required to minimise service disruption resulting from extreme weather such as floods or heatwaves for instance. Compounding exposure to extreme weather events, research shows climate change is particularly harming socially vulnerable people and areas (Lindley et al, 2015), which has implications for VCS groups working with such people. Bristol like many large cities, has concentrations of socially vulnerable people and faces a number of climate risks, including risks from overheating and flooding from different sources.

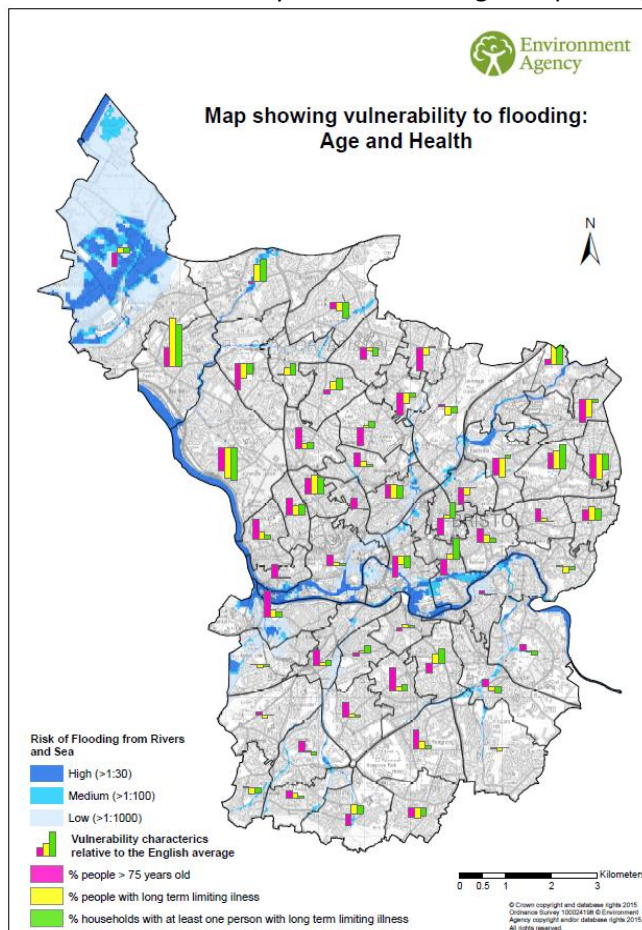
3. Activities

In light of these issues, the Environment Agency, Voscur (an umbrella organisation for the voluntary and community sector in Bristol) and Bristol City Council offered a free climate change adaptation workshop to VCS groups working in Bristol. The training session aimed to support VCS groups to:

- Understand how the projected impacts of climate change and extreme weather can affect continuity of service delivery;
- Understand how the consequences of climate change are likely to impact on vulnerable service users in Bristol;

- Identify the threats and opportunities arising from climate change;
- Develop five actions to build resilience to climate change;
- Understand how VCS and health and social care organisations can work in partnership to increase preparedness for climate change.

Bristol was chosen as a location for the workshop because of the interest among local VCS groups and the local authority in climate change adaptation, reflected in the city's status of 2015 European



Green Capital. In addition, exposure to flood risk and social vulnerability coincide in parts of Bristol, meaning the training session was rooted in 'real-life', local issues.

Using participatory and group learning techniques, the training session was structured around a number of themes related to climate change, business continuity and the concept of 'climate disadvantage' - the intersection between social vulnerability and exposure to climate risks. Evidence of the extent of climate disadvantage in Bristol was obtained from the [Climate Just map tool](#), vulnerability assessments by Bristol City Council and local intelligence from Voscur.

To support workshop participants in their learning, pre-prepared GIS maps (example shown left) showing different aspects of climate disadvantage were distributed to groups of participants, who were asked to consider the potential impacts of flooding and heatwaves on their services and the people they support.

4. Outcomes

The outcomes of the training session are evident from the results of an online survey filled in by training session participants after the event. All training session participants felt the objectives of the training session were met. In addition, the participatory element of the training session was also seen to be positive, with 69% in strong agreement that participation and interaction were encouraged. The training session produced positive outcomes for the partner agencies involved in the organisation of the event.

- Subsequent to the session a number of participants took up membership of the Bristol Resilience Network;
- The session enabled Voscur to gain an understanding of issues related to climate resilience in Bristol;
- Climate UK and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation received feedback on their research outputs, namely the concept of climate disadvantage and the Climate Just website.

In other survey findings:

- 10 respondents said the training session helped them to think about vulnerability in the context of climate change.
- 8 respondents said the training session supported the business case for action.
- 5 respondents said the training session provided tools and information to support adaptation to climate change.

5. Challenges

Survey results also reflect some of the challenges VCS organisations encounter in relation to climate change adaptation. 45% of respondents felt they were at a relatively elementary stage of preparing for climate change. Furthermore, 50% of respondent organisations felt preparing for climate change was ‘very difficult’.

A key challenge for facilitators was the accessibility and relevance of the subject topics covered during the training session: 15% of participants ‘disagreed’ that subject topics were relevant to their organisations. In addition, 53% of training session participants were ‘neutral’ on whether distributed materials – GIS map products, for example – were helpful. The reasoning behind the figures is not known.

6. Guiding principles

Organisations involved in the organisation and facilitation of the event (see 7) had four aims. The following points are relevant to facilitators who aim to support organisations to develop knowledge of climate change. The training session aimed to:

- Generate an evidence base on exposure to climate risks and social vulnerability in Bristol using the Climate Just map tool.
- Profile VCS groups’ actions with regards to climate change and service provision for socially vulnerable groups.
- Make known the relevance of climate change to strategic planning within the VCS.
- Provide a blueprint for future training sessions in other cities, with reference to the opportunities, successes and barriers to action relating to climate change and the VCS.

7. Partners

The training session was initiated by three agencies: the [Environment Agency](#), as part of its (since discontinued) Climate Ready support service; [Voscur](#), an organisation representing voluntary sector and community groups in Bristol; and the local authority, [Bristol City Council](#). Climate UK, alongside the three aforementioned organisations, played a role in co-facilitating the training session.

8. References

Lindley, S. (2015). *Climate change, justice and vulnerability*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

9. Contact details

For further information we encourage you to contact Voscur on 0117 909 9949.