



Issues or Crisis Management



Entry title:

***Washed Out Festivities:
Christmas & Valentine's Storms & Floods***

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Brief and Objectives

December 23rd, 2013. The UK weather situation was severe, with a number of Environment Agency warnings at the highest level, meaning a danger to life.

Major storms hit Bournemouth. Many roads were blocked due to surface water flooding and fallen trees. Homes were flooded when the River Stour - the most unpredictable in the south west¹ - burst its banks on 25th December at approximately 4am. An entire park home site was evacuated, and many residents had nowhere to go.

Valentine's Day 2014. A huge storm hit the town, with a major tidal surge battering the coast overnight, along with spring tides bringing river flooding to homes, as well as the Bourne Stream and famous Gardens. Strong winds brought down trees across the borough. Almost 400 of Bournemouth's iconic beach huts were damaged beyond repair.

In such unpredictable conditions, people look to the local authority to protect them, to defend public property and to safeguard the area.

We defined our objectives as:

- To be highly effective in providing advice & information to residents on how to stay safe & protect their homes (to exercise our statutory "warning & informing" duty).
- To enhance the Council's reputation by demonstrating a response that is over & above that expected from the local authority by our residents.
- To increase membership of our social media communities by offering a quality 'go to' information service.
- To create a sense of pride amongst residents for how the town as a collective had responded both during and after the event.
- To demonstrate the potential and value of social media to our colleagues across the organisation.
- To ensure a significant share of coverage that reflected positively on the Council, in relevant media.

Strategy and tactics

For both incidents, our key underlying messages were:

¹ Source: Environment Agency, stated during Iford Bridge Residents' Meeting, 3rd February 2014

- We have planned and prepared for incidents like this
- We have a 24hour response
- We have enough resources to deal with the situation

Our approach was to focus primarily on digital media - our social media channels (Twitter and Facebook in particular), local media organisations' digital channels, and our website, with a homepage feature updated frequently throughout both incidents.

Tactically, we actively sought and created rich content to help build up a picture of the nature of the events across the town, but at the same time linking this to our objectives and key messages.

We also targeted our local newspaper, whose social feeds are vital during incidents such as this - both to support our statutory "warning & informing" duty, and to act as objective third party support. By cross-referring, sharing and copying content, we could collectively provide a quality information service to local people, combining our duty to help them keep safe with content that would engage and interest people's natural curiosity.

We proactively provided pre-recorded audio to our local & regional commercial radio stations, giving frontline staff accounts of situations encountered and efforts on the ground. This not only got us on air quicker and ensured coverage was on-message, it saved our staff time in doing numerous media interviews, so allowing them to continue to respond to incidents.

Implementation

Throughout both incidents (23/12/13 - 03/01/14, and 14/02/14 - 18/02/14), we deployed a team member to capture images that showed not only the extent of the weather's impact, but that also demonstrated the Council's quick and effective response, in order to fulfil the objectives.

Overnight on 23rd December, on Christmas Day morning, and overnight on 14th February, we were able to demonstrate our staff going above and beyond their usual duties. We Tweeted video footage of staff assisting with flooded site evacuation, photos of colleagues setting up a rest centre for those residents whose homes were flooded but had nowhere to go, of front line staff being interviewed live on Sky News, of staff organising Christmas lunch at the rest centre, and of displaced residents dancing & singing Carols in the rest centre - demonstrating the Council doing all they could to give people the happiest Christmas they could have, in the circumstances.

Likewise, during the Valentine's Day storms, we proactively sought rich content, both creating it ourselves and commissioning it from colleagues out on the ground.

During both incidents, our social media activity provided a backbone of content for our local paper's coverage both through their own social activity & embedded on their website.

For both incidents, we extended our social media coverage beyond the 'response' phase, further demonstrating ongoing support for residents and clean-up efforts once the weather had subsided. This further enhanced local people's goodwill towards the Council, as it demonstrated an effective recovery stage and so showed the organisation's commitment to dealing with all resultant issues from the storms.

Also during the recovery phase, we were able to show colleagues the benefit of good incident communications - resulting in extensive positive resident feedback as a result of an excellent response by many areas of the Council.

Throughout, we ensured we never lost sight of the purpose of our communications activity - as set out in the objectives above.

Research, planning, measurement and evaluation (outcomes and outputs)

In terms of our social media reach, this can be summarised as:

Facebook: From 22nd December to 2nd January, we gained an additional 726 community members.

Christmas Eve Storms 2013

- 39,544 people saw our posts
- 1,030 people 'Liked' our updates
- 180 people 'shared' our status updates

Iford flooding evacuation: Christmas Day 2013

- 16,042 people saw our posts (on Xmas Day!) on Facebook
- 364 people 'Liked' our updates
- 78 people 'shared' our status updates

Valentine's weekend 2014 storms:

We gained an additional 308 Likes in three days. During this time, we posted to Facebook 50 times.

Our most popular posts were:

- Video of Bourne Stream as Bournemouth Gardens flood
 - 44k reach
 - 1,048 likes, comments and shares
 - 17,954 clicked on the post to read more
 - 9,759 watched the video
- Post with images asking the public to avoid the seafront
 - 34k reach
 - 1,422 likes, comments and shares
 - 10,511 clicked on the post to read more
- Post with images about Central and Lower Gardens closed due to flooding
 - 14.3k reach
 - 562 likes, comments and shares
 - 4,996 clicked on the post to read more

Twitter:

- Our number of followers over the weekend rose by 277
- We tweeted 101 times
- We retweeted 87 public information messages
- There were hundreds of retweets of the Council posts - including regular Retweets by Bournemouth Daily Echo who used many of our posts on their live news update on the web site.

Media coverage & feedback:

Proactively advised by a regional News Editor that, of twenty councils on his patch, Bournemouth was by far the best responder (see evidence pdf for email screen grab). During the Christmas storms 12 Echo articles featured Bournemouth Council, with 83% positive the rest neutral. Audio was covered 30 times from 23rd December until the start of January including Sky News coverage and BBC South Today, highlighting the response of the Council.



During the Valentine's Day storms, 17 media articles were secured, with 76% positive tone and 24% neutral, alongside 23 radio clips highlighting the Council's response, many using audio provided by us.

Budget and cost effectiveness

Budget: £zero

Staff time only.