



Northern Ireland Audit Office

## ***MEDIA RELEASE***

### **The Rivers Agency: Flood Prevention and Management**

#### **Report to the Northern Ireland Assembly by the Comptroller and Auditor General**

**13 September 2016**

A report published today by Kieran Donnelly, the Comptroller and Auditor General reveals that whilst the Rivers Agency's actions in preparing for and implementing the EU Floods Directive have been effective, more can still be done to improve flood prevention and management in Northern Ireland.

Mr Donnelly said **"Flooding is a natural process than can be devastating to those affected. It is important that when public money is spent on flood prevention and management it is done so wisely."**

**"I welcome the Rivers Agency's actions in effectively implementing the EU Floods Directive and am pleased that the relationships between those responsible for responding to flooding incidents are strengthening. However there is still room to improve the systems for preventing and managing flooding in Northern Ireland."**

**"My report recommends that work is needed to ensure that the Flooding Incident Line, the main source of contact for those affected by flooding is improved, and that further work is undertaken to ensure that new flood defence assets are completed on time and within budget."**

#### **Background**

Flooding is a natural process that cannot be entirely prevented or controlled. There are an estimated 46,000 of Northern Ireland's 830,000 properties within an area likely to be flooded once in 100 years.

To reduce the risk of flooding the Rivers Agency manages a culvert network of 400km; 107km of engineered soft defences; 26km of sea defences; and monitors and maintains two tidal barriers. The Rivers Agency developed flood risk maps and models to identify areas at significant risk of flooding, which allows them to target their capital expenditure. The Rivers Agency has identified and worked with communities at risk of flooding to build flood resilience and put in place suitable flood warning and informing activities.

A number of other public bodies are involved in flood prevention and response, for example TransportNI, NI Water, local councils, the NI Fire and Rescue Service, the Department for Infrastructure and the Department of Finance.

**THIS STATEMENT IS ISSUED ON THE STRICT UNDERSTANDING THAT IT IS NOT FOR PUBLICATION OR BROADCAST BEFORE 00.01 hrs ON Tuesday 13 September 2016**

**Main Findings**

- The Rivers Agency's Flood Risk Management Strategy is in line with the EU Floods Directive requirements, and the developed Strategic Flood Map and Detailed Flood Maps are fit for purpose.
- The River's Agency's flood maps are useful for development planning, promoting and designing resilience measures, and flood defence project prioritisation. The River's Agency has made these maps available to the public, allowing them to check if they are in a flood prone area, the risk and range of a potential flooding event.  
(<https://mapping.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/FloodMapsNI/index.aspx>)
- There are effective structures, guidance and protocols in place to allow stakeholders to collaborate during flooding incidents which are routinely tested to identify improvements. Improvements to the weather warning arrangements within Northern Ireland will mainly benefit river flood warnings.
- The Flooding Incident Line continues to be improved but the call abandonment rate, which peaked in 2012 at 27 per cent, remained high at 16 per cent in 2015. There is therefore scope to improve the performance of the Flooding Incident Line.
- Each year the Rivers Agency commits around £80,000 to improve resilience to flooding, especially in areas subject to repetitive flooding. The Rivers Agency also developed the business case for the £1 million Homeowner Flood Protection Grant Scheme, launched in January 2016, aimed at residential properties located within high-risk flood areas unlikely to benefit from publicly funded flood solutions, within five years of their application.
- Over the last five years, the Rivers Agency has invested nearly £33 million in the construction of new flood defence assets. However, the majority of projects finished either late, over budget or both. Rivers Agency has made recommendations on how to improve their delivery and value for money. However, it will take a number of years to determine if these recommendations will reduce cost overruns and time delays.

**THIS STATEMENT IS ISSUED ON THE STRICT UNDERSTANDING THAT IT IS NOT  
FOR PUBLICATION OR BROADCAST BEFORE 00.01 hrs ON Tuesday 13  
September 2016**

**Notes for Editors**

1. The Comptroller and Auditor General is Head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (the Audit Office). He and the NIAO are totally independent of Government. He certifies the accounts of Government Departments and a range of other public sector bodies. He has statutory authority to report to the Assembly on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and public bodies use their resources. His reports are published as Assembly papers.
2. As from 9 May 2016 responsibility for the Rivers Agency moved from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to the Department for Infrastructure.
3. This report is available on the Audit Office website at [www.niauditoffice.gov.uk](http://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk). The report is embargoed until 00.01 hrs on 13 September 2016.
4. Background briefing can be obtained from the Audit Office by contacting Denver Lynn (028 9025 1063) or Roger McCance (028 9025 4312).