

Funding black hole caused by new flooding laws, warn councils

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Councils across England and Wales have warned of a funding black hole being created by new flooding laws which will give them responsibility for managing flood risk in their area.

The Draft Floods and Water Bill will give councils the lead role they have been calling for in managing surface water in their area. This will see town halls coordinating water companies, the Environment Agency and other local partners to make sure drainage systems work properly and homes are protected.

In its response to the consultation on the Bill, the Local Government Association, which represents over 350 councils in England and Wales, criticised the Government's calculations and rejected the suggestion that local authorities will be able to fund the new role through savings they make by spending less clearing up after floods. The LGA also warned that more needs to be done to ensure additional training courses exist so councils can get the expert engineers, inspectors and planners they need to manage local drainage systems.

Cllr Paul Bettison, Chairman of the Local Government Association Environment Board, said:

"Climate change could mean extreme weather such as flooding happens much more frequently in coming years. If households are to avoid the impact of potentially devastating downpours, better management of local flood risk is essential.

"Councils, water companies, the Highways Agency, the Environment Agency and landowners all need to cooperate to make sure drains are working properly. Town halls are ready to take the lead on improving flood risk management but it should be clear that they will have the funding they need to properly protect people's homes.

"Improving local flood preparedness and ensuring we do not see a repeat of the devastating floods that occurred in the summer of 2007 is a big priority. Investment now will save the taxpayer more in the future and help create scores of new jobs. There will need to be additional training courses to develop the new skills needed to manage local flood risk.

"The government needs to take another look at its calculations. When councils spend money clearing up after floods it comes from budgets for other services, so it is wrong to say that councils can pay for this new role by cutting spending on flood clear up."

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