Museum emergency preparedness and response:

A research report for Museum Development North

February 2024

Contents

Executive summary

- In March 2023 Museum Development North West [MDNW] commissioned S.G. Lingard Consultancy ['the consultant'] to review the current position with museum emergency networks in the North West and to make recommendations for the future. The project reported in August, with 14 recommendations.

- In October, MDNW commissioned the consultant to carry out further research, covering the Museum Development North East [MDNE] and Museum Development Yorkshire [MDY] areas, to inform planning for the forthcoming combined Museum Development North service. This involved an online survey of museums across those two regions, on a consistent basis with the earlier project. This was carried out in November and December 2023.

- **Fifty-three organisations took part, representing 98 museums: 30 in the North East and 68 in Yorkshire & the Humber. This is a good response to a survey of this type**. Given the diversity of the sector, only a near-total sample could be definitive, however, and care should be taken when considering the results in the context of local areas or individual cases. It should also be noted that there was little evidence from South Yorkshire, and any special considerations that relevant to museums in that area are not represented in the results.

- **The survey found that emergencies and disasters of varying kinds are common - most museums can expect to face at them least occasionally. Water related issues are the most common**, though of varying severity. This is broadly similar to the picture found in the North West.

- **Most organisations who have experienced emergencies have called on support from external sources. The local council, neighbours outside the sector and the police were the most common.** The types of support varied, with hands-on-help from outside the organisation being the most common, followed by access to emergency equipment then advice.

- **Risks to collections and buildings are increasing, especially from water-ingress. This is exacerbated by growing problems with buildings maintenance, partly caused by cuts to funding.**

- **The level of preparedness for emergencies varied**. A large majority of museums had emergency plans in place, but a significant minority thought they weren't kept fully up to date. Only a minority of plans outlined the strategic level response and recovery activities that would be needed following an emergency. One third of respondents said that their plan wasn't fit for purpose, overall, or they weren't sure.

- **Almost 60% of respondents said they or colleagues had received relevant training, though much of it was some time ago.** Coverage was patchy and dependent partly on individual experience rather than organisational policy.

- **More than three quarters of respondents had access to emergency equipment**, some of them from multiple sources.

- The project found **a broadly consistent picture across the North East and Yorkshire & the Humber**, though with differences relating to the historic operation of the Yorkshire Rapid Response Network [RRN]. Previous research found that that **the RRN was effectively dormant**. This suggests that **some of the survey results in Yorkshire & the Humber could have been different if the current position was widely known**.

- **The project results are also broadly consistent with those from the North West**, with only minor differences, explored in the conclusions to sections 3, 4 and 5. The 14 recommendations from the earlier report remain relevant, though there are differences of emphasis relating to decisions about the future of the RRN and general support needs.

1. Introduction

1.1   There is growing anecdotal evidence that museums in the UK are experiencing more emergencies and more severe emergencies than they used to, many of them related to flooding. It is widely accepted that this is partly related to climate change.[1] Museum Development services are keen to gather evidence about this, to inform future decision making. In March 2023 Museum Development North West [MDNW] commissioned S.G. Lingard Consultancy ['the consultant'] to review the position with emergency networks in that region and to make recommendations for the future. This was done by gathering evidence about museums' experience of emergencies and support needs, through interviews and an online survey.[2] The results were presented in a report in August.[3]

1.2   The key findings from the North West project were that: emergencies and disasters of varying kinds are a common problem that most museums can expect to face at least occasionally, with water related issues the most common; risks are increasing, especially from water, pests, and mould; the level of preparedness for emergencies varies; emergency networks have a mixed history, with most of them having ceased to operate; networks have rarely been activated to provide practical support during emergencies; and despite their relative lack of use, the concept of a network remains popular. The report concluded with 14 recommendations, organised in five related themes: evidence, awareness, skills, networks and resources.

1.3   From April 2024 the Museum Development services in the North West, North East and Yorkshire & the Humber will come together as Museum Development North.[4] In this context, staff were keen to extend the evidence gathered from the North West project across the north. In October 2023, MDNW commissioned the consultant to carry out a survey of museums in the North East, Yorkshire & the Humber, on behalf of Museum Development North East [MDNE] and Museum Development Yorkshire [MDY]. Collectively, the Museum Development bodies are referred to as 'the client' in this report.

1.4   The current project focused on gathering evidence about museums' experience of and preparedness for emergencies. It was intended to be a supplement to the earlier report, looking at both the North East and Yorkshire & the Humber together. The consultant carried out the research broadly as planned in the period November-December 2023, with minor adjustments.

1.5   This document is the project's final report. It is organised as follows.

- Section 2 explores the research carried out.
- Section 3 looks at the incidence and nature of emergencies in the recent past.
- Section 4 examines museums' experience of emergencies.
- Section 5 looks at museums' preparedness for future emergencies.
- Section 6 explores emergency networks and related support.
- Section 7 provides an overall conclusion.

1.6   The report presents the results for both the North East and Yorkshire & the Humber together, except where there were significant points of difference between the two regions. Presenting the results separately throughout would have been very repetitive, and given the small absolute numbers involved might have made it possible to identify individual museums. Comparison is made with the results from the North West on any points where it appears relevant, often in footnotes. As with the North West report, all responses have been used anonymously.

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[1] This was discussed in the North West report, supported by relevant links. The National Trust has since published a report setting out the adaptations it needs to make to address climate change, available here.
[2] It was not about conservation or the technical aspects of salvage.
[3] Lingard, Stephen, "Museum emergency networks and support needs, a research report for Museum Development North West", August 2023.
[4] See the pinned post at: https://museumdevelopmentnorthwest.wordpress.com/.

2. The project research

2.1   The consultant and the client discussed the project at an inception meeting in October. They agreed a research framework, attached as an Appendix. The main research method would be an online survey, as they are a good way to gather data and information at scale, efficiently and consistently. The survey questionnaire was based on that used for the North West project, with minor changes.[5] It asked for respondents' name, role title and the name or their organisation, in the interests of understanding how representative the respondent group was of the sector in the project area. The introduction made it clear that responses would be used anonymously, however, to encourage frankness. No quotations have been attributed, and other steps have been taken to ensure that individual cases can't be identified.

2.2   There is no single definitive source as to the number of museums in the project area, but the Mapping Museums project found that there were 92 in the North East and 225 in Yorkshire & the Humber, giving a total of 327.[6] Almost two-thirds of them were Accredited, and one third unaccredited. The Annual Museum Survey 2023 [AMS] covered more than 200 Accredited museums and those 'working towards' Accreditation in the project area, as set out in the table below.[7]

Region	Accredited	Provisional	Working towards	Totals
North East	57	5	4	66
Yorkshire & the Humber	126	11	11	148
Totals	183	16	15	214

2.3   Cross referencing this with Arts Council England data shows that almost all Accredited museums in each region took part.[8] The AMS data provided also includes each museum's governance type, location, whether it is part of a multi-site group, and its approximate visitor numbers (though they weren't available for every museum).[9] This provides a good, up-to-date source about the number and nature of Accredited and 'working towards' museums across the project area, adding detail to the more basic data about the overall museum population available from the other sources. It has been used as the main source about the museum population in the North East and Yorkshire & the Humber, for this project.

2.4   The project survey was completed 53 times, including by one large organisation that has sites in both regions. For the purposes of the table below this was counted twice, once in each. Almost all the responses were from fully Accredited museums, with just three from those "Working towards Accreditation" and none in any other category. The responses included 15 from organisations with multiple museums, giving a total of 98 museums represented overall.[10]

Region	Responses	Museums represented	Museums in the region*	Response as %
North East	14	30	66	45.5
Yorkshire & the Humber	40	68	148	45.9
Totals	54*	98	214	45.8

Two of the respondents were in the Accreditation system, but had not taken part in the AMS so are not included in its totals. Had they been included, these numbers would have been slightly higher, and the percentages very slightly lower.
**Includes one organisation counted twice, once in each region

[5] These were: adding a question and amending another to explore the strategic level of response to emergencies; minor amendments to the wording of some questions; and correcting several typos.

[6] This was 12.8% of all museums in England. "Mapping Museums 1960-2020: A report on the data", Candlin et. al., second edition, 2022, p.49. Available at: https://museweb.dcs.bbk.ac.uk/static/pdf/MappingMuseumsReport2020_SecondEdition2022.pdf.

[7] The published versions are at: https://southwestmuseums.org.uk/museum-development-england-annual-museum-survey-2023-reporting/.

[8] The Arts Council England data on Accreditation status is available to download from www.artscouncil.org.uk. The October 2023 lists were examined for this project, and were found to have only minor differences from the AMS data, which was assembled some months before. This does not materially affect this report.

[9] Staff at MDNE and MDY provided the consultant with access to working spreadsheets from the AMS giving detail about the demographics of participating museums in their area.

[10] Most of the multi-site groups operate in a single sub-region or county area, but there are exceptions.

2.5 There were several responses from every sub-region in the project area, apart from South Yorkshire.[11]

2.6 Other key points from the respondent demographics are set out below.

- Two thirds of the responses were from independent museums. The other categories represented were English Heritage, local authority, National Trust, university and 'other' (including a cathedral and a National Park Authority).
- Ten respondents were, or were part of, an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.
- All museum sizes, as measured by visitor numbers, were represented, from 'micro' to 'largest'.[12] There were no significant differences between the respondent groups in each region, in this respect.
- There were a few instances of responses differing on points of detail from the AMS data, such as size (measured through) visitor numbers, type or Accreditation status. The responses have been used as submitted.
- Two of the responses came from organisations that had not taken part in the AMS 2023.

2.7 Given the number of museums across the two regions, 53 responses representing 98 museums is a good response.[13] The sector is diverse, however, in terms of geography, size, governance model, Accreditation status and other factors. Unaccredited museums were greatly under-represented in the results, and it is likely that museums who have faced emergencies would be more likely to take part. That notwithstanding, the participant group is of sufficient size and diversity to provide a meaningful insight into the issues facing museums in the project area, their experience and perspective.

2.8 Most of the individuals who completed the survey work in a variety of managerial, conservation and curatorial roles, with some in governance positions. This is illustrated by the word cloud.

2.9 All respondents from the North East stated that they were involved in emergency planning in their organisation: eight said it was part of their role description and six said they helped out. Ninety per cent of respondents from Yorkshire & the Humber said they were involved in emergency planning as part of their role description or by helping out. One respondent said they are not involved, and the remaining three selected 'other'.

Conclusion

2.10 **The research provided useful insight on the key research questions**, based on a good response from the sector, from around both the North East and Yorkshire & the Humber. The only partial exception to this is South Yorkshire. It should be noted, however, that the sector is diverse in many respects; some museums that did not take part will have different experiences, or face distinct issues of their own. Only a near-total sample could be considered fully representative.

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[11] The large organisations with sites in both regions referred to above has sites in South Yorkshire, but this was the only sense in which that area was represented in the results.

[12] It is difficult to be definitive as to how representative the respondent group is in terms of size, as: a) some of the survey responses differed on this point from the reference source; and b) the reference source data itself is incomplete. The best that can be said without disproportionate examination is that the sample is useful in this respect, in that in includes multiple responses from museums of each size in each region.

[13] The North West survey attracted 35 responses, representing 60 museums; 55 of these were Accredited, representing 37% of the Accredited museums in the region.

2.11   The research framework included the possibility of using interviews as an extra research method, with museums to explore the experience of and preparedness for emergencies, and with representatives of emergency networks to add detail to that gathered in the previous project. Circumstances didn't arise in which the former was necessary; several attempts were made to arrange an interview with a someone with knowledge of the former network in the North East, but each fell through; and an email exchange with a representative of the Yorkshire Rapid Response Network [RRN] found that nothing of substance had changed since the interview for the previous project.

3. The incidence and nature of emergencies

3.1   Twenty-nine of the 53 survey respondents (almost 55%) from around both regions reported that they had experienced an emergency or disaster in recent years.[14] They included 11 of the 15 multi-site groups to respond, so the proportion reporting emergencies would likely have been larger if the sites had responded individually.

3.2   The 29 were asked to select from a list of common emergencies which had occurred, choosing as many as applied.

Type of emergency or disaster	% of respondents reporting that type of emergency	Total
Excessive heat / cold related	13.8	4
Fire	0	0
Flood: rising water from below	44.8	13
Flood: leak from above	72.4	21
Insect infestation	27.6	8
Mould infestation	34.5	10
Theft and vandalism	20.7	6
Area-wide emergency that affected the locality as a whole	13.8	4
Other	27.6	8

3.3   Emergencies relating to water were the most common, whether leaks, rising water or area-wide floods. Infestations and theft/vandalism were next most common.

3.4   The eight respondents who selected "other" mentioned a range of incidents, including: wind damage; a traffic accident that caused damage to a fence; cyber crime; discovery of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete; a roof collapse; and frost damage.

3.5   Twenty-four of the 53 respondents reported that they had not experienced any emergencies in recent years. These were from around both regions, of various types, and largely representing single sites – only four for the 11 multi-site groups said they had not experienced emergencies.
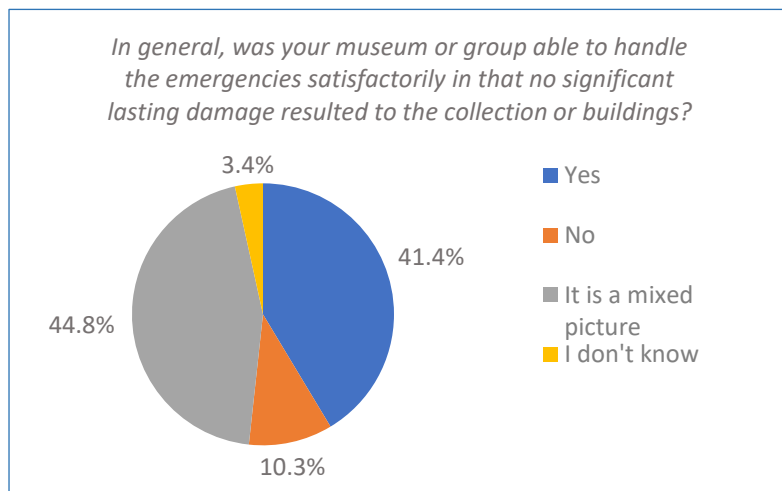
Conclusion

3.6   **The survey evidence shows that emergencies and disasters of varying kinds are a common problem - most museums face at them least occasionally. Water related issues are the most common**, of varying severity. This is broadly similar to the picture found in the North West.

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[14] The regional breakdown was 64% in the North East and 52% in Yorkshire & the Humber. Given the relatively smaller absolute numbers involved in the North East, it isn't possible to say if the difference is significant.

4. The experience of emergencies and perceptions of risk

The impact of emergencies

4.1   The 29 respondents who said they had experienced emergencies were asked about their impact. The results are presented in the pie chart below.

In general, was your museum or group able to handle the emergencies satisfactorily in that no significant lasting damage resulted to the collection or buildings?

- Yes
- No
- It is a mixed picture
- I don't know

3.4%
41.4%
44.8%
10.3%

4.2   Forty-one per cent reported that they had been able to handle emergencies without significant lasting damage. These were from around both regions, and mainly micro to medium sized independent organisations managing single sites. One comment indicated that an element of luck was involved, as the emergencies had all "occurred either during opening hours or shortly before opening and were therefore discovered quickly and dealt with before real damage could be done". Another said "our buildings are checked and monitored frequently, our maintenance team are quick to repair issues or seek professional advice".

4.3   Almost 45% of respondents said "it was a mixed picture".[15] These were from around both regions, and of various sizes and types. Most of the comments they made related to managing the impact of various forms of water-ingress. Though major damage had been avoided, the workload was ongoing, and in some cases increasing. Several mentioned increasing incidences of insect and mould infestations. One commented that the changing nature of work in the sector had affected emergency response.

> *"Now many staff work at home for much of the week there are less people to help in an emergency, on a weekend the venues are often staffed by casual staff who do not really know the buildings or have any buy in to the venue. Quite often objects either on open display or in cases get overlooked in the flood response as the staff on duty do not feel they have the authority to access the cases / move the objects....it is a symptom of how things have changed due to redundancies and the reliance on zero hours staff and collections staff working from home much more."[16]*

4.4   Ten per cent (three respondents, all in Yorkshire) said they had not been able to handle the emergencies satisfactorily so that no lasting damage had resulted to the collection or buildings.[17] The damage was all related to water ingress. The most serious was due to flooding from a nearby river, and had been addressed by significant capital works and improved warning measures. The others related to damage from leaks from above.

Sources of support in emergencies

4.5   Respondents who reported having experienced emergencies were asked if they had received support from outside their organisation, and if so from where. Seventeen did so, with the results provided in the table below.

Source of support	% of respondents reporting using the source of support	Responses
The Fire Service	11.8	2
The police	23.5	4
Neighbours and local partners outside the museum sector	29.4	5
The local council	47.1	8
Another museum or museum group	11.8	2

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[15] This was 20% in the North West.
[16] From a representative of a museum group with multiple sites.
[17] The equivalent for the North West was 8%.

A private sector collection services provider, such as Harwell Restoration	11.8	2
A museum emergency network	5.9	1
English Heritage	5.9	1
The National Trust	0	0
Other	17.6	3

Note: respondents were invited to select as many options as applied.

4.6   More respondents said they received support from the local council than any other type of support. These included both individual museums and multi-site groups, in both regions. Three of the eight were in one local authority area, a city. Respondents reported receiving support from a range of other sources of support, as set out above. The three "other" sources were technical contractors and a specialist organisation from outside the sector. Three respondents who said they received support indicated that at least some sources of it were from outside their region.[18] There were no significant differences between the results for the two regions.[19]

Types of support received

4.7   Respondents were asked to indicate from a list of options the types of support they received, selecting as many as applied. Fifteen did so, and the results are set out in the table below.

Type of support	% of respondents reporting having used the type of support	Responses
The emergency services attending a site	17.6	3
Access to emergency response equipment	23.5	4
Access to facilities elsewhere, such as freezers or storage	11.8	2
Hands on help from people outside your organisation	35.3	6
Advice	23.5	4
Other	23.5	4

Note: the percentage relates to how many of those who answered this question selected each option.

4.8   "Hands on help from outside" the organisation was the most common form of support, followed by "access to emergency response equipment", "advice" and "other". All four respondents who selected "other" provided information about it: three were forms of technical support from the local council, and one was "access to investment". There were no significant differences in the balance between the types of support reported by respondents in the North East and Yorkshire & the Humber.

Additional support that would have been helpful

4.9   Almost one quarter of respondents who had experienced an emergency said that different or additional forms of support would have helped reduce its impact or duration. Most of the substantive comments about this related to building maintenance and related investment. This contribution below from a multi-site group is representative.

> *"It would help if budgets for building maintenance were not cut so much. It is vital to have ongoing…maintenance especially around the roof and clearing guttering…Mandatory building maintenance associated with electrics, fire doors etc. still takes place but due to the ongoing budget cuts…non-essential maintenance has stopped…the damage is much worse than if it had been dealt with earlier. This is…a symptom of the economic situation."*

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[18] All three were in Yorkshire. Two of the three specified the sources of support: specialist contractors and Harwell Restoration (based in Didcot, Oxfordshire).

[19] There were only minor differences between these responses overall and those from the North West survey: two respondents reported using Harwell or a similar provider, compared to eight in the North West; and a single respondent reported using a museum emergency network, compared to none in the North West.
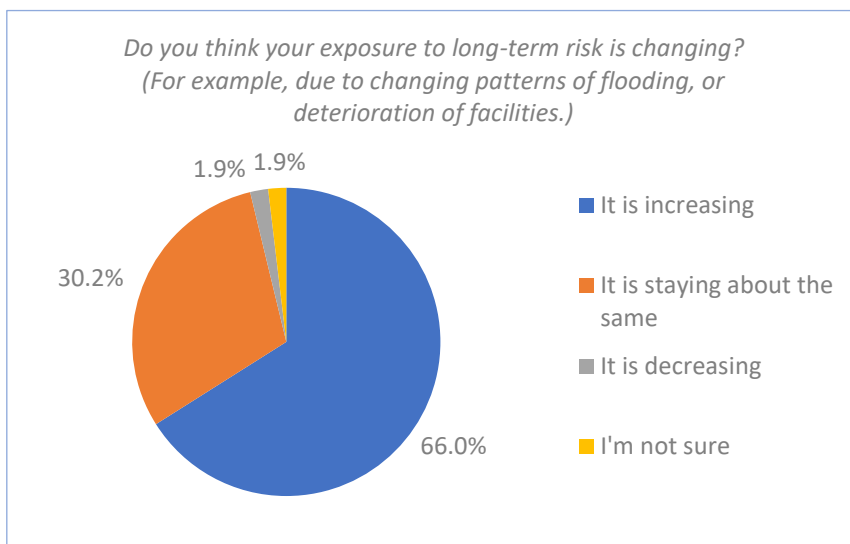
4.10   Other comments included:

- "Conservation support for the expanding and contracting objects."
- "In general, a framework of support and advice seems sensible."
- "Support with finding emergency funding for such things and reliable building services."

Helping others

4.11   Respondents were asked if their museums had provided help to another museum during an emergency. Four – all multi-site groups – reported having done so.[20] Three examples were given: lending pumps and other materials to nearby during an area-wide flood; providing storage for another nearby museum; and going to another museum to help in person. Eight respondents weren't sure if their organisation had helped others. One said that the museum is a member of the RRN, but current team weren't aware of help provided to other members in the last five years.

Long term risk

4.12   Respondents were asked if they thought their exposure to long-term risk was changing. All 53 answered the question, as per the adjacent pie chart.

Do you think your exposure to long-term risk is changing? (For example, due to changing patterns of flooding, or deterioration of facilities.)

- It is increasing — 66.0%
- It is staying about the same — 30.2%
- It is decreasing — 1.9%
- I'm not sure — 1.9%

4.13   Two thirds of respondents thought that long term risk was increasing. They were from organisations of different types and sizes, around the two regions. They made a lot of comments, covering a range issues. Two linked issues stood out, as illustrated by the word cloud below.
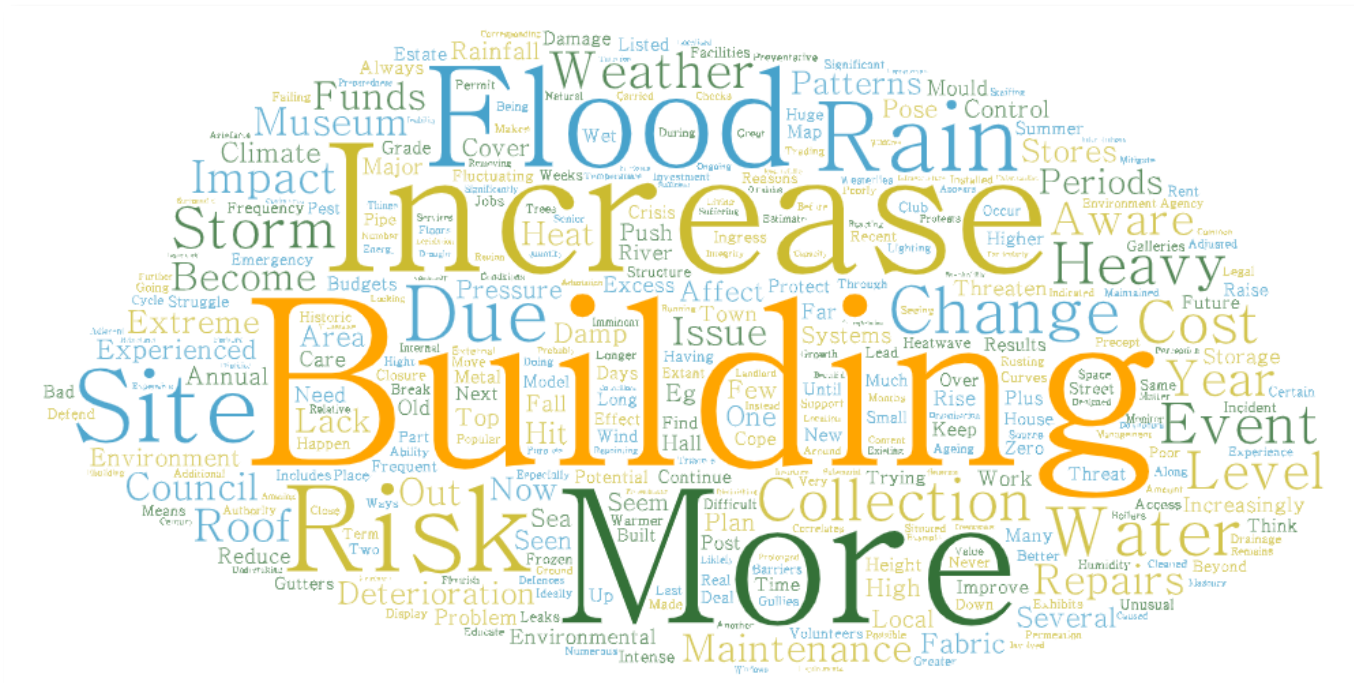
4.14   There is a common theme of increasing rainfall and decreasing maintenance budgets. The quotations below are illustrative.

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[20] This is similar to the results of the North West survey, in that all those who reported having provided help were also multi-site groups.

- "More rain, more water ingress, lack of preventative maintenance. Results in closure of galleries….exhibits…are in storage."

- "We are experiencing more days of heavy rain which is affecting our buildings across the site. We are trying to access funding to do some major repairs on the fabric of the building, which is becoming increasingly damaged by water permeation and rusting metal. Trying to protect our collection from damp is becoming increasingly difficult, even in summer months due to us experiencing what seems like a major increase in rain."

- "There is a level of deterioration of the building particularly the floors. As the…Council are our landlord repairs are severely impacted by diminishing council budgets."

- "Deterioration of the building, and more frequent storms. Water ingress through windows is becoming more common*."*

4.15   One respondent pointed to an important external factor: "flood barriers have now been installed in [a nearby street]. We are now at higher risk of flooding as the water will be pushed to this area."

4.16   Just less than one third of the respondents said that they thought their long-term risk was staying the same. Those who had previously said they had not experienced an emergency in recent years were disproportionately represented in this group.

4.17   Only one respondent said that they thought the long-term risk to their museum was decreasing, due to substantial recent work on flood defences and planning by the local council and Environment Agency. This is similar to the results in the North West, where recent targeted works or external factors were the main factors cited in support of assessing risk as stable or decreasing.

4.18   Respondents were asked if their organisation has begun to address the long-term challenges at a strategic level: 35 answered, of which 22 said "yes'". These were from different types of museum, spread around the two regions. Many of the responses suggest that the organisations involved are meaningfully engaged with the topic, as illustrated by the points below.[21]

- A respondent from a large multi-site group summarised its organisation-wide integrated approach to planning for disasters and emergencies. The topic is on its top-level risk register and is being examined by a dedicated working group, supported by research to inform future planning.

- "The Board recognises the risks and has added them to the risk register. A costed ten-year maintenance plan…has been drawn up and…repair grants have been secured, covering approximately 60% of the work identified….Business planning now includes the need for external collections storage and improved environmental control for material on display. Caring for fabric of the building and the collections are amongst our highest priorities in our Forward Plan and a programme of volunteer training is underway."

- "Issues are reported to the Board and discussed at regular Board meetings. Forward planning is discussed from the ground up at both monthly team leaders' meetings and quarterly Board meetings."

- One independent museum said it was working actively with the Environment Agency on its new flood alleviation scheme.

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[21] Several respondents who said that their organisation had begun to address long-term risk at a strategic level gave examples of short-term or operational actions in the comments. It may be that the proportion of respondents acting fully strategically, at board level, in risk management and investment planning, is smaller than the survey suggests.

- Another independent said that its strategic leaders "recognise that budget every year is being allocated to repair work which could be avoided with better strategic planning. They are factoring this into business and strategic planning going forwards."

4.19   Some respondents from local authority museums who said they were beginning to address long-term risk mentioned broader budgeting and planning issues that were beyond their direct control. Examples are given below.

- "We need support and a plan from the local authority about how they are going to tackle long term maintenance."

- One respondent said they continually raise the problems with the relevant part of the local authority, but had "no say over spend…or the direction of their work." It was proving difficult to get the museum onto the work programme.

4.20   A small number of responses mentioned broader aspects of managing long-term risk. For example:

[There is an] "*awareness at leadership that there is a salvage and recovery element of emergency planning and also business continuity…e.g. ability to process payments is an essential part of the museum operation but not always in the forefront of our thoughts on emergency planning.*"

4.21   More than one third of respondents said that their organisation had not begun to address long-term risks at a strategic level, or that they weren't sure. One said that the staff awareness of the long-term issues had increased, and they had begun to think about adaptation plans, but they hadn't yet been approved and it was unclear if they had been recognised at Board level. Another said that the organisation had a new emergency plan, but that it didn't address the buildings issues. A respondent from a university said that it wasn't clear how risk assessment informed strategic investment.

4.22   One respondent pointed out the difficulties of accessing grant funding for building maintenance issues:

"*Grant funding…is set up by grant giving bodies in a way that ignores the basic requirements of museum collections, and looks to always have a public output. Fixing a roof or installing heating in a building will in the long-run give the public improved access to collections, if they have long-term preservation, but this isn't always recognised and short-term gains are always preferred over the long-term strategic requirements.*"

4.23   A respondent from a museum that is part of a large multi-site organisation said: "We know the issues, they are reported by site staff every time they occur. Incident reports go to the central team…Surveys have been carried out…but no action has been taken…due to a lack of funding."

Short term risk

4.24   Respondents were asked what they thought were the biggest short-term risks to their collections. All 53 answered. The word cloud illustrates the results.

4.25   Thirty-six respondents mentioned water-related issues.[22] Of these, 28 said this was their

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[22] The equivalent in the North West survey was 30 of 35.

biggest short-term risk, in some cases jointly with related issues.

4.26   Fifteen mentioned buildings maintenance issues and/or the difficulty of providing an appropriate environment.

4.27   Six respondents who mentioned water related issues also mentioned fire, though as a lower risk. Another six respondents also mentioned fire, some of them acknowledging that the risk was low but potential impact high. One mentioned recent building surveys having identified electrical issues (now being addressed); another mentioned "malicious fire setting".

4.28   Other issues included: mould (mentioned by four respondents); theft (four); vandalism (four); protests or activism (three); and a lack of volunteers (three). Two respondents mentioned risks posed by contractors working on or in facilities, including caterers blocking drains. One said they thought that communication was the biggest risk, as though they were responsible for the collection a third party operationally controlled the building – the respondent relied on the third party to notify them when incidents occurred, and it hadn't always been done in a timely manner.

4.29   One respondent noted the potential wider impact of emergencies: "the risk is to our operations and ability to open to the public (and therefore to earn income) rather than there being a threat to the museum's collections".

Conclusion

4.30   **The impact of emergencies varied.** Museums handled many of them without lasting damage to their collections or buildings. Many incidents disrupted operations and/or had financial consequences, however, and a small minority had significant consequences. These generally involved water ingress, with the most serious incidents relating to flooding from rivers or streams.

4.31   **Most organisations who have experienced emergencies have called on support from external sources. The local council, neighbours outside the sector and the police were the most commonly quoted.** The types of support varied, with hands-on-help from outside the organisation, advice being the most common, followed by access to emergency equipment then advice. Almost one quarter of respondents said that additional support would have been helpful.

4.32   **Risks are increasing, especially from water-ingress, exacerbated by maintenance issues.** One respondent said:

> *"Lack of buildings maintenance, creating poor storage and display environments. The short-term risks are roof leaks when it rains because gutters haven't been cleared out regularly. The other issue is damp storage environments, creating mould and deterioration of museum objects. Some stores are up to 80% RH in the autumn and spring, while others suffer from being too hot in the summertime."*

4.33   **A small number of museums feel that they have been able to mitigate their exposure to risk**, through carrying out repairs or other measures.

4.34   **Though the broad picture about the experience of emergencies and perception of risk was the same across the two regions covered by this project and the North West, there were four notable differences**:

- fewer respondents reported having been part of area-wide flooding than did so in the North West;
- though water related incidents were reported as the single biggest short-term risk, a lower proportion of respondents mentioned this than in the North West;
- fewer said they received support from a specialist provider, such as Harwell Restoration; and
- fewer said that additional support would have been helpful when emergencies had occurred.

5. Preparedness for emergencies

5.1   This section sets out the evidence gathered about the steps museums have taken to help avoid or mitigate emergencies, including emergency planning, training, equipment and support arrangements.

Emergency plans

5.2   Fifty one of the 53 respondents said their organisation had an emergency plan or plans in place; one of the two who said they did not was an Accredited museum, and the other was Working towards Accreditation.

5.3   The 51 respondents with emergency plans were asked if they were kept up to date, in that they were amended to reflect changing circumstances: 82% said "yes", 12% "no" and 6% "I'm not sure". Almost all of those who said "no" or "I'm not sure" were from smaller independent museums. Three quarters were from the North East. Several respondents commented about their plan, some expressing significant concern. One from a small independent museum said: "the plan, in my opinion, is useless and needs a complete rewrite." Another said "the current plan is very outdated". Others recognised it was an ongoing task: "our plans are kept up to date but are not yet changing significantly to reflect circumstance…more to do...."; and "our plan is adequate and covers the usual assessment of threats and preparedness, but I believe we should now consider including environmental threats, which we have not in the past."

Does the emergency plan outline the required strategic level response and recovery activities needed beyond collections salvage?

- Yes — 38.0%
- A bit, but it could be better — 48.0%
- No — 8.0%
- I'm not sure — 6.0%
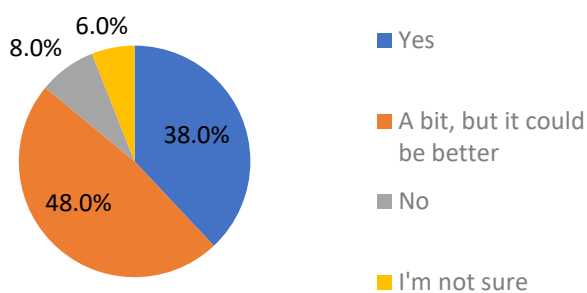
5.4   The 51 respondents with emergency plans were asked if they outlined the required strategic level response and recovery activities needed beyond collections salvage.[23] Fifty of them answered, as summarised in the adjacent pie chart.

5.5   The most popular response was "a bit, but it could be better", with 48%. These were of various types and sizes, from around both regions. All of those who answered "yes" were from independent or local authority museums, some of them multi-site groups, from around both regions. Pertinent comments from respondents who gave either of these answers are given below.

- "We have a business continuity plan in addition to the emergency response guidelines."

- "We have a collections salvage plan and high-level strategic emergency plan but the links between the two could be better. Of course many incidents do not involve collections risk. We have had gaps at senior level but as these are filled we will continue to improve our planning."

- "We used Reaccreditation as a spur to rewrite our Emergency Plan and Disaster Response to include working with the emergency services before a diasster occurs, public relations in the event of an emergency, activating an emergency response team, and business recovery."

- "Our emergency plans mainly cover collections salvage, but also briefly outline the response from the wider council, safety of staff, communications, infrastructure such as IT etc. The emergency plans also sit alongside wider council Business Continuity Plans."
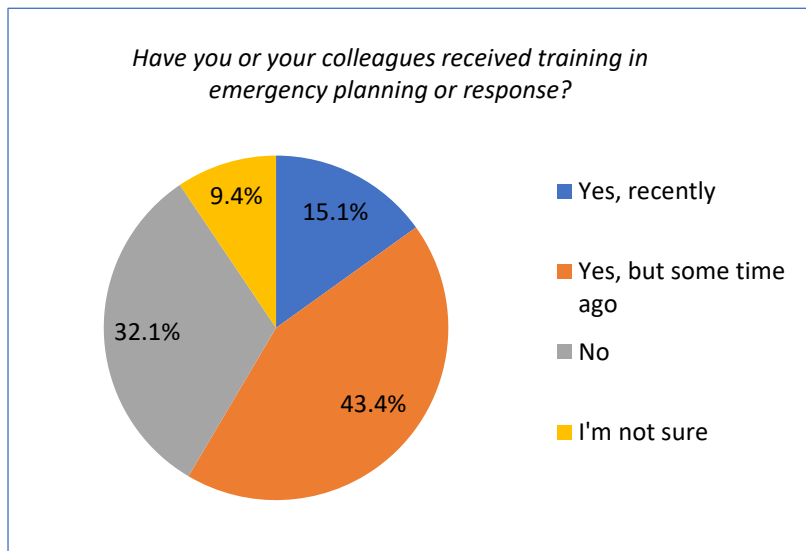
5.6   Four respondents said "no", their emergency plans did not outline the required strategic level response. Their comments indicated that either their plan was focused on the immediate and short-term response, or was outdated and not useful.

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[23] This question was introduced for this survey, following consultation with the client.

5.7   The 51 respondents with emergency plans were asked if they thought their plan was fit for purpose, overall. Two thirds said "yes", and one third said that they think their emergency plan is unfit for purpose, or they aren't sure. A small minority raised serious concerns about their plan.

Training

5.8   Respondents were asked if they or their colleagues had received training in emergency planning or responding to emergencies. The chart below presents the results.

Have you or your colleagues received training in emergency planning or response?

- 15.1% — Yes, recently
- 43.4% — Yes, but some time ago
- 32.1% — No
- 9.4% — I'm not sure

5.9   More than 58% of respondents reported that they or their colleagues had received training in emergency planning or response. Of these, more than two-thirds of the training was 'some time ago'.[24]

5.10   Almost one third of respondents said they or their colleagues had not received any training on this topic. All but one of these responses came from single-site independent or local authority museums. Those that had previously reported that they had not experienced emergencies in recent years and considered their exposure to long-term risk was staying the same were disproportionately represented in this group.

5.11   The training referred to included sessions arranged or delivered by Museum Development teams, the RRN, Harwell, in-house conservation staff, English Heritage, the local Fire Service and insurance providers. Training events varied in length from a half day to three days, with some multi-session programmes.

5.12   The topics covered in the various training included: emergency planning; salvage and recovery; emergency measures for on-site utilities; operating flood defences; flood recovery; working with the fire service (including table-top exercises); full-scale practical exercises; identifying unusual behaviour; and a range of more general topics related to operating a museum, some of which are relevant to emergencies.

5.13   The length of training varied from short sessions (for example on the use of specific pieces of emergency equipment) to multi-day courses (covering a range of topics). Those who had taken part in training were positive about it, and especially where it included practical element, as illustrated by the comments given below.

- "There was some great training previously by Museum Development, which included actually salvaging from a container that had fire and smoke damage material in it. It was the most valuable training I have had, as it enforced certain points and enabled me to imagine how I would deal with a disaster."

- "I undertook training…a number of years ago which was extremely helpful and very hands on. It was a 1 day course looking at different emergency concerns such as responding to flooding, fire and pest outbreaks etc... It was very comprehensive and definitely influenced our approach to the emergency plan at the time."

- "I completed training by the Rapid Response Network on salvage of collections, particularly paper and archival collections…. I found it very useful from a practical, in-the-moment perspective."

5.14   Some of respondents referred to recent and/or regular training, but others said it had taken place as much as 15 years ago. Larger organisations (such as those operating multiple sites) were more likely to provide training,

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[24] Comments indicated that some of the training was a few years ago, and in some cases as long as 15 or more years ago. Several respondents said that the training was in previous roles elsewhere. One said that "in my current role (2 years) there has been no training regarding emergency planning."

and more training, than smaller organisations. A respondent from one of the multi-site groups made an important point about the changing dynamics of emergency response, and how it affects the usefulness of training.

> *"There are far fewer staff on site at any one time now, repeating [the standard] training would not be beneficial, emergency response always seems to fall to the same groups of staff, often it is the front of house staff who have to deal with the situation with support from conservation, the conservation staff work across all of [our], we are not always available to help immediately due to other work commitments."*

5.15   As in the North West, some of the respondents who had taken part in training had done so with previous employers. The level of training in any given team is at least partly down to individual CVs rather than an organisation's policy, as people move on more quickly than used to be the case.

5.16   Harwell Restoration is a significant provider of training for museums in both the North East and Yorkshire & the Humber, but seemingly to a lesser extent than in the North West.[25]

Emergency equipment

5.17   Respondents were asked if they had a store or stores of emergency equipment, and/or access to them. Thirty-two reported that they had their own stores; the museums were of different sizes and types, and in both regions, roughly in proportion to their number of respondents; 14 of them also had access to other resources, all but one of them in Yorkshire & the Humber. The proportion of respondents with access to other resources is much higher than was the case in the North West, and given its concentration in Yorkshire & the Humber may be connected to membership of the RRN. Eight respondents said they had access to partner resources only. Six of these were in Yorkshire & the Humber.

5.18   Twelve said they had no stores nor access to any, eight of them in Yorkshire & the Humber and four in the North East.[26] They were a mixture of independents and local authority owned, all but one of them fully accredited. One was on behalf of two sites in a larger group and the rest represented single sites.

5.19   Respondents who said their museum had a store of emergency equipment or access to one were asked if they considered it adequate to meet the most common emergencies. The results are set out in the adjacent chart.

5.20   The proportion of respondents who said "yes" was much higher than in the North West (46.2%), and the "no" much lower (30.8). This applied across the North East and Yorkshire & the Humber.

Do you consider the store of emergency equipment adequate to meet the most common emergencies that might arise?

- Yes 75.0%
- No 5.0%
- I'm not sure 20.0%

Support arrangements

5.21   Respondents were asked if their museum or group had a contract with a specialist provider of emergency support, such as Harwell Restoration, directly or as part of a broader arrangement. They could select as many options as applied. All 53 answered this. Thirty-one respondents (58%) said they did not have such a support arrangement in place.[27] Most of these were from independents or local authority museums, but three were from larger organisations with multiple sites. Nine had their own support contract and 10 were part of a broader arrangement (one of which also had their own support contract), three weren't sure and one said "other". Comments indicated that several of the respondents in the MDY are who said they had a support arrangement of various types were referring to membership of the RRN.

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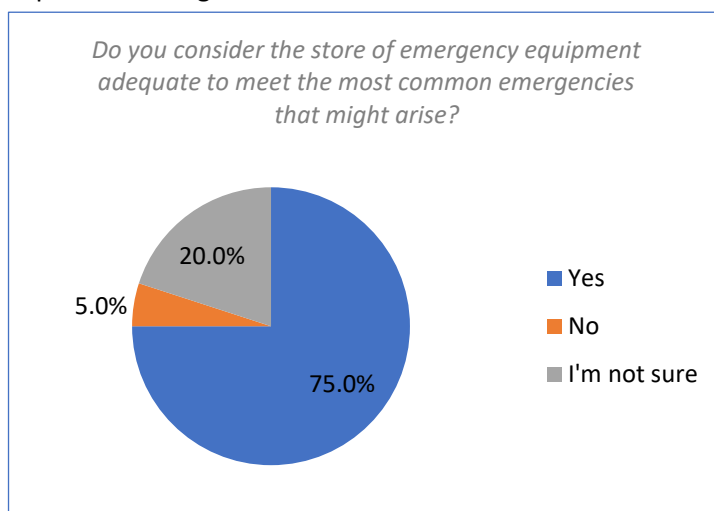
[25] Four of the 29 respondents who provided information about the training they or colleagues had taken part in said it was delivered by Harwell. The equivalent figures for the North West were nine of 28.
[26] This is a slightly larger proportion than was found in the North West.
[27] In the North West it was 34%.

5.22   Respondents were asked if their museum had any other emergency support arrangements in place, with museums or other partners. Just over one half reported that they did.[28] Thirteen of the 24 positive responses in Yorkshire & the Humber referred to membership of the RRN.

5.23   The other positive responses illustrated different types of relationship and support, summarised by the points below.

- A representative of a local authority multi-site group said they " are named on other organisations' emergency plans…we will help when and where we can. We are also part of [the local authority's area-wide] emergency plan, our buildings are safe havens should an emergency occur." A respondent from a smaller museum in the area referred to being able to call on help through this relationship.

- Three other local authority respondents referred to support arrangements with other parts of their authority.

- Two responses referred to being able to call on support through other members of a National Portfolio Organisation or World Heritage Site.

- Several responses referred to specific facilities, such as a nearby organisation agreeing to provide emergency storage space, and a local dairy offering the use of freezers.

5.24   Seven respondents weren't sure if their organisation had any informal support arrangements. One commented that they were a member of the RRN, but that "it seems to be dormant". Twenty respondents said they did not have any other support arrangements in place.

5.25   Only 20% of respondents said their museums had arrangements in place to provide support to other museums. Most of these were multi-site groups, at the larger end of the respondent group. Four of these in Yorkshire & the Humber said the arrangement was through the RRN. Others mentioned reciprocal arrangements with specific local museums, or standing offers to others in a general area.

5.26   Fifteen per cent of respondents weren't sure if their organisation had arrangements in place to support others. Two of these said there used to be agreements but they haven't been discussed for some years. Sixty four percent said they had no such arrangement, but many expressed willingness to support others. One said they would like to explore setting up an arrangement and another that there were no other museums nearby to support.

5.27   Almost 70% of respondents said that their museum had liaised with the local Fire Service about emergency planning. Those that said they had not tended to be from smaller museums, although two respondents from of multi-site groups that said they weren't sure.

5.28   Local authority museums were asked if they were part of a joint approach to emergency planning with the archives service and/or Register office. Only four of 11 said yes.

5.29   A small minority of respondents in both regions reported having no emergency stores, contract with a specialist support provider or support arrangements with other partners. These appear to rely exclusively on informal contacts and improvisation. They were all independents, most of them small, but two of them large.

5.30   Fifty-seven per cent of respondents considered that their insurance provision is adequate to meet its exposure to risk. Almost all of the others weren't sure. This mirrors the position in the North West.

Additional support needs

5.31   All of the respondents answered the questions about additional support needs, which asked if they needed any of a list of types of support.

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[28] This was broadly the same across the two regions, and the North West.

Potential form of additional support	Yes	Maybe a little	No, we have what we need	N/A
Access to more emergency response equipment	10	27	14	1
Practical help during emergencies	20	25	7	1
Specialist training	32	17	3	1
Specialist advice	28	17	7	0
Template policies and forms	15	15	21	1
A discussion network	17	25	8	3

5.32   Several features of this are worth noting, some visible in the above headlines and others background details, summarised below.

- There appears to be varying levels of unmet need for all six support options, with most for practical help and specialist training and advice, and least for access to emergency response equipment.

- There are three notable differences between these responses and those to the North West survey:

  o A lower proportion of respondents said "yes" they needed access to more emergency response equipment than did so in the North West, with many more saying "maybe a little" and "no, we have what we need".
  o Proportionately fewer respondents said "yes" they needed template policies and forms than in the North West, and many more "no, we have what we need".
  o Interest in a discussion network is lower among these respondents than was the case in the North West.

- Only one respondent said "no, we have what we need" to all of the options. The multi-site groups that responded all said at least "maybe a little" to one or more of the options, and most of them to several.

- Three single-site museums responded "yes" to all six options.

- Eleven museums or groups responded 'yes' to all six of the options. These included four Unaccredited museums.

- As in the North West, there are no strong patterns in the results in terms of museum types, sizes or locations: this suggests that the needs span those variables, or that other variables - such awareness and assessment of the risks and potential support needs – are at play.

5.33   Eight respondents added comments about additional support needs, all in Yorkshire & the Humber. Several of them added weight to answers individuals had given earlier in the section: two said it would be helpful to know more about existing regional support arrangements; one needed information about finding new premises; another said mentoring on "getting the overall plans in place and rolled out"; and another said "support is great and very helpful but always comes at a cost, we are currently installing better fire prevention measures and the expense is vast…funding for the support given is what we require."

5.34   Ten respondents added further comments, on a range of topics. The most pertinent are given below.

- "The Rapid Response Network were great - our communal equipment is hosted at [location name] and they were fantastic, helpful and listened to our emergency, making suggestions for equipment we might need that I might not have thought about initially."

- "I'm conscious that, to judge by its website, the RRN does not seem to have done anything since October 2021, so it is not clear how up-to date the information on its site may be."

- "Despite having a plan, we have never tested [it] and I now realise that this would be of great benefit."

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- "Grant funding bodies and the Arts Council need to be more aware of the issues museums face, in trying to run facilities with lack of funding and as such poor buildings maintenance. We all know what is needed to keep collections safe, but in many cases this is not possible with the way funding is always directed at public facing outcomes, rather than the basic requirements of collections care. No collections - no museum - no public outcomes!"

- "Our major issue is lack of suitable space to store emergency supplies and/or to carry out salvage processes and keep objects safe in the event of disaster. We also have a very small staffing base and issues with mobilising those staff onsite. Many of our collections would not be salvaged as they are not portable but are to be protected in situ."

Conclusion

5.35   **The level of preparedness for emergencies varied**, in many respects:

- **Emergency plans were in place for a large majority of respondents, but a significant minority considered that they weren't necessarily kept fully up to date**. Only a minority of respondents thought that their plan outlined strategic level response and recovery activities they would need. One third said that their plan wasn't fit for purpose, overall, or they weren't sure.
- **Almost 60% of respondents said they or colleagues had received relevant training, though much of it was some time ago.** Coverage was patchy and dependent partly on individual experience rather than organisational policy. One respondent raised an important issue about changes to working patterns in the sector reducing the ability to respond to emergencies, through increased working-from-home and the use of casual staff.
- **More than three quarters of respondents had access to emergency equipment, some of them from multiple sources – in many cases seemingly through Membership of the Yorkshire Rapid Response Network.** A significant minority, however, had no supplies nor access to any.

5.36   **The RRN featured in many of the responses from the MDY area, against several questions**: as a source of support in emergencies in the past; as a source of training received; and as a potential source of support in future emergencies. Though the survey didn't include a line of questioning about this as a topic in itself, collectively the answers suggest that the RRN continues to play a significant part in how museums in the area perceive their ability to respond to emergencies. No respondents from the North East mentioned a specific network in that region, making a significant difference between the two regions.

5.37   **Research for the previous project found that that the RRN was effectively dormant**, and had been for two years or more. Its leadership intended to explore options for the future with MDY. An email exchange with a representative of the RRN for this project found that this was still the case.

5.38   Only one survey respondent raised a question as to whether the RRN was still active**. Some of the survey results in Yorkshire & the Humber could have been a little different in some respects if the current position was widely known.**

5.39   Apart from the RRN issue, the broad picture about preparedness for emergencies the same across the two regions covered by this project. It was also very similar to that in the North West, as found by the previous research. There were two differences to note, however:

- fewer respondents to this survey mentioned unmet need for large items of emergency equipment such as pumps and dehumidifiers; and
- fewer respondents said they had a contract with a specialist provider such as Harwell Restoration.

7. Overall conclusion

7.1   The project has been carried out as intended, gathering evidence from the North East and Yorkshire & the Humber and analysing it against the research framework, setting the results out in this report. Together with the earlier report in the North West, it provides a consistent set of evidence to across what will be the Museum Development North area.

7.2   The project found a broadly consistent picture across the North East and Yorkshire & the Humber, though with differences relating to the historic operation of the Rapid Response Network, discussed in the conclusion to section 5, above. It should be noted, however, that given the diversity of the sector only a near-total sample could be definitive about differences between the two regions. In this case, the smaller absolute number of responses from the North East mean that although broad conclusions can be reached, they should not be taken as fully applicable to the region as a whole. It should also be noted that the evidence relating to South Yorkshire is thin, and any special considerations that relevant to museums in that area are not represented in the results.

7.3   The project results are also broadly consistent with those from the North West project. They show the same key points: the incidence of emergencies is increasing, many of them associated to water ingress and rising temperatures, exacerbated by growing buildings maintenance backlogs. The changing nature of work and employment in the sector is an important contextual point, related to broader economic and social factors. There are some differences between the results from the two projects, explored in the conclusions to sections 3, 4 and 5.

7.4   Though the online survey elements of the two projects were consistent, the North West project also included a section on emergency networks, in that region and elsewhere. The conclusions from that remain relevant, and the work was not repeated here. The North West report concluded with a series of 14 recommendations organised by the following themes: evidence; awareness; skills; networks; and resources. The consultant has reviewed these recommendations and found that they remain relevant. There are two points to note, however:

- Decisions about the future of the Yorkshire Rapid Response Network will affect the relevance of some of the recommendations to what is currently the MDY area. (Conversely, decisions about implementing the recommendations in the context of Museum Development North may influence the future of the RRN.)
- Similarly, the demand for some of the support covered by the recommendations (such as training and template forms) will not be equal across the North. Flexibility should be built into the design of the support programme.

Appendix: Project Research Framework

TOPIC	INSIGHT SOUGHT	METHOD 1	METHOD 2
The incidence of emergencies.	The number, location and nature of emergencies occurring, including establishing any patterns or trends.	Survey	N/A
Museums' experience of emergencies.	How museums have handled emergencies, including if and from whom they have sought support, what went well and what could have gone better.	Survey	Potential interviews
Museums' preparedness for future emergencies.	The extent to which museums are prepared to handle emergencies, including: risk management, training, emergency plans, links to potential support.	Survey	Potential interviews
Existing & recent emergency networks in the NE & Y	Their key features, the extent to which they are used, their strengths and weaknesses.	Previous report	Potential interviews & info from client
Regional differences and patterns	Any noticeable differences between the NE & YH, and with the results from the NW survey.	From analysis of the overall results, and comparison with the results of the previous project	
Recommendations for the future	Practical steps that could inform the design of services provided by MD North.	Analysis of the results	Consultation with the client