Museum emergency networks and support needs,

a research report for Museum Development North West

This report was prepared by Stephen Lingard of S.G. Lingard Consultancy for Museum Development North West in August 2023, based on research carried out during March-July 2023. It is a final version, following consultation with the client.

Thank you to Kaye Hardyman and everyone at Museum Development North West, and the many contacts in and outside the region who have contributed to the project.

Stephen Lingard, BA (Hons), MA, MMRS
Director
S.G. Lingard Consultancy
ste@sglingard.com

Contents

Executive summary

- In March 2023 Museum Development North West 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. Together they agreed a plan setting out key research questions and how they would be addressed, centred on gathering evidence about museums' experience of emergencies and support needs. The data gathering involved: interviews with key contacts inside and outside the North West; an online survey that attracted representatives of 35 museums and museum groups in the region; and desk research. It provided useful insight on the key questions.

- **Emergencies and disasters of varying kinds are a common problem that most museums can expect to face at least occasionally**. **Water related issues are the most common**, though of varying severity. Museums handle most emergencies without lasting damage to their collections or buildings. Many incidents disrupt operations and/or have financial consequences, however. A minority of them have significant consequences, such as damage, and even the temporary closure of sites. The most serious incidents reported involve water ingress to a site combined with a flooding emergency in the wider area, limiting the capacity to implement emergency response plans. These tend to be in places very close to rivers or streams.

- **Most emergencies result in museums calling on support from outside their organisation**. Specialist providers such as Harwell Restoration were the most commonly quoted, then a range of other sources. Advice is the most common form of support, then various types of emergency and practical help. More than half of those who had experienced emergencies said that additional support would have been helpful.

- **Risks are increasing, especially from water, pests, and mould**. This is a long-term issue, linked to climate change; the risk to some museums, especially those close to rivers and streams and/or those with particular buildings issues, could threaten their viability. Increased risk is also an immediate issue, in that many sites have maintenance backlogs and staff shortages, and emergencies can occur at any time.

- **Some museums feel that they have been able to mitigate their exposure to risk**, through carrying out repairs or other measures. This illustrates that individual circumstances are vital for a meaningful risk assessment, going beyond area-based assessments and broad projections.

- **The level of preparedness for emergencies varies**, in many respects:
  - Emergency plans are in place for the Accredited museums (and some of the others), but not everyone feels they are fit for purpose. Unaccredited museums do not necessarily have plans in place, but face many of the same risks.
  - **Training is very useful, but coverage is patchy** and dependent partly on individual CVs rather than policy.
  - **A large majority of museums have access to at least basic emergency equipment**, though larger and/or more expensive items such as pumps, generators and dehumidifiers are less commonly available.
  - Some museums have contractual support arrangements with Harwell Restoration, and/or other partners well placed to provide appropriate support (for example, local authority archive services); others do not, however, and would have to improvise solutions as necessary.

- **The consultant reviewed the recent history of emergency networks in the North West, North East, Yorkshire, the East Midlands, the West Midlands, Edinburgh and Wales**. They had existed in all of these places at some point, though the details varied over time and by place, in terms of organisation, membership, geography, funding, staffing and the services they provided. There were common features, however:
  - All of the networks have their origins 10 years or more ago, in a time when the sector was generally better funded and staffed, and staff turnover was slower than it has since become.
  - **All of the networks have experienced significant pressures due to changes in the operating environment and the sector itself**, as staff involved in each network's early years moved on, budgets reduced and the nature of employment in the sector gradually changed. Most of them have changed significantly in response, by changing their model, reducing functions or even ceasing to operate. At the time of writing, there are no functioning emergency networks in the North West and North East, and the

one in Yorkshire is in flux, pending decisions as to its future; the network in the West Midlands is focused on salvage kit; and only the one in the East Midlands is functioning to a plan, following a considered evaluation and conscious changes to its model several years ago.

- o **Networks have rarely been activated to provide practical support during emergencies**, with museums managing problems in house, or through their own local or personal networks. Some networks have not been activated at all in this capacity.
- o **Networks providing salvage kit is no longer effective**. Though there is anecdotal evidence that some museums accessed the salvage kit arranged by networks some years ago, none of the networks that still provide this service had data about its usage. Some of the consultees said they had not heard of the kit being used for years, and that some of it was probably out of date.
- o **Training is an important and valued function.** Every network has provided access to training, and reports continuing steady demand for it. In the case of the East Midlands, the network is effectively a training programme.
- o **Fostering personal networks is key**. Every network has provided opportunities to 'network' with others. Most have used a mixture of formal and informal means, with the balance shifting toward the latter over time. Many of the consultees stressed the importance of networking.
- o **Relying on volunteers to operate networks is no longer practical**. Many networks began with staff employed by museums operating them in a voluntary capacity, as an informal part of their job, with their employer's agreement. As time has passed, this has proved increasingly difficult, resulting in network posts becoming vacant. Those relying purely on volunteers have struggled to maintain their services and some have ceased to operation. In 2023, none of the networks considered in England have paid staff, though those in the East and West Midlands are overseen by their respective Museum Development team and have access to some resources. The network in Wales is coordinated by Welsh Government employee.
- o **There are advantages to being as inclusive as possible.** There are many examples of emergency preparedness and response having involved people and organisations outside the Accredited museums sector, whether that be unaccredited museums, archives, libraries, and freelancers, along with unrelated businesses and neighbours. Many of these have informal relationships with either a local museum or with the sector in general, and some face similar emergency issues – especially archives and libraries.
- o **The concept of a 'network' is popular.** Those involved in managing networks across all of the areas considered said that their members liked having a 'network', whether they used its functions or not. This appeared to be because aside from how they used it, they found its existence comforting, in that they felt there was somewhere they could turn for help if needed.

- The report concludes with **14 recommendations, organised in five related themes: evidence, awareness, skills, networks and resources**. They are set out in Section 7.

1. Introduction

Background

1.1   There is a lot of anecdotal evidence that in recent years museums in the UK have experienced 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] The North West of England has suffered from several high-profile weather events, including flooding and storm damage in late 2009 and December 2015. Museums in Cumbria were affected particularly badly, along with parts of Lancashire, with some impact elsewhere.[2] There is also growing body of anecdotal evidence that smaller-scale emergencies are increasing, involving various types of water ingress, pests, and other hazards; this is exacerbated by reduced staffing and resource levels, which themselves have contributed to building maintenance issues.[3]

1.2   Museum Development North West [MDNW] and partners felt that 'a true understanding of current and future flood risks was lacking as well as knowledge on how to improve the resistance and resilience of buildings for the future'.[4] In 2016 they commissioned BRE and Harwell Restoration to carry out research at 20 Accredited museums across Cumbria. This assessed the flood risks, taking into consideration climate change projections, and 'gave museums the chance to review emergency plans'.[5] It concluded that seven museums were at high flood risk, and three at medium.[6] BRE were then commissioned to carry out full flood risk assessments at four of those at high and medium risk, including providing reports to each setting out mitigation steps for each.[7]

1.3   Museum Development teams in the North remained concerned about the risk more generally, and wanted to gain a better understanding.[8] In 2021 they worked with a placement student who compiled a dataset using existing sources to assess the risk of flood and other climate related hazards for museums across the three regions. The sources included a National Trust climate hazards map, and a flood risk map produced by Climate Central.[9] The project concluded that 'the majority of museums in Northern England were under threat from multiple types of climate change'. It set out which museums in each region were at greatest risk from the various hazards, and provided a detailed spreadsheet presenting the data.[10] It found that 20 museums in the North West were forecast to be beneath the annual flood level by 2030, and that others would be encircled.

The current project

1.4   Since the above work was carried out the MDNW team has received several enquiries from museums about the emergency support available in the region, including whether there are any emergency networks. Though such networks have been established in the past, none of them have been active for some years. The team decided to look at this again.

---

[1] This is an international issue, affecting by heritage sites and museums in many countries. See: https://worldheritageuk.org/climate-action/; https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2003/mar/12/highereducation.artsandhumanities; https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/25/climate/smithsonian-museum-flooding.html; https://news.artnet.com/art-world/museums-flooding-climate-change-2004221; and https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/25/ancient-books-in-northern-italy-frozen-to-salvage-them-from-flood-damage.

[2] See: https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2009/11/01-12-2009-cumbria-floods/; and https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2016/01/06012016-northern-museums-assess-flood-damage/.

[3] In a statement following a recent high-profile case of theft from the British Museum, the Museums Association explicitly linked 'systematic underfunding of the sector over the past ten years' with a weakening of some anti-theft procedures. See: https://www.museumsassociation.org/our-statement-on-theft-from-museums/.

[4] 'Summary of Flood Risk and Defence Review 2016/17', Museum Development North West, 2017.

[5] MDNW, 'Summary', Ibid.

[6] BRE Report P104480, 2017.

[7] 'Flood Resilience Review: E-Publication Document', BRE, Report Number P107796-1003, 2019.

[8] 'Climate change is happening which will cause a threat to many museums. We are not sure which museums are at risk now and in the immediate future.' From 'Climate Change and Museums – Understanding the Known Hazards', a project commissioning note on behalf of MDNE, MDNE and MDY, 2021.

[9] https://national-trust.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=a44672bb34c4491a909034d0eed76583; and Climate Central | Land projected to be below annual flood level in 2030. Reporting on the implications for the North West included: https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/cop26-parts-north-west-could-22052446.

[10] 'Analysis of flood risk and climate hazards to museums in Northern England', author unknown, 2021.

1.5   In March 2023 MDNW commissioned S.G. Lingard Consultancy ['the consultant'] to review the current position with emergency networks in the North West and to make recommendations for the future. They agreed a plan setting out key research questions and how they would be addressed, refining the approach set out in the initial brief. This centred on gathering evidence about museums' experience of emergencies and support needs. It is not about conservation or technical aspects of salvage. The consultant carried out the research broadly as planned in the period April-July, with adjustments according to changing circumstances.

1.6   This document is the project's final report, presenting the results of the work and recommendations for the future. 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 recommendations.
- Appendix 1 lists the direct consultees.
- Appendix 2 provides links to relevant resources.

Sections 3 to 6 present the main evidence, in each case starting with the survey results then evidence gathered from other sources. There is a degree of overlap, as many of the topics covered are related.

2. The project research

2.1   At the inception meeting the consultant and MDNW discussed the context for the project, including an outline of support provision in the North West. They reviewed the brief and proposed methodology, and noted that the research should draw its conclusions from the evidence gathered, avoiding building a preference for particular solutions into the methodology. They agreed that it should seek insight on several specified key points, set out in a research framework, and that the detailed project design should be informed by input from some key contacts with an interest in the topic. The consultant held meetings or calls with each of them in April and May. The research framework is provided below.

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.	Museums survey	Interviews & desk research
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.	Museums survey	Interviews & desk research
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.	Museums survey	Interviews & desk research
Existing & recent emergency networks in the NW and nearby regions.	Their key features, the extent to which they are used, their strengths and weaknesses, and potential applicability in the NW.	Interviews & desk research	Museums survey
Potential model/s for the future in the NW, part 1: establishing proposals	N/A	Derived from analysis of the previous research	
Potential model/s for the future in the NW, part 2: refining proposals to recommended model	Views of potential users.	Consultation with key contacts.	N/A

2.2   Though the research framework covers the incidence and experience of emergencies, and points relevant to risk assessment, it was not intended to include developing a comprehensive catalogue or map, as that would have required far more capacity than was available. It was, however, intended to provide a meaningful insight into these topics. Three research methods were agreed: desk research; interviews with key contacts; an online survey of museums in the North West. More detail is provided below.

Desk research

2.3   The desk research involved examining a range of sources relevant to the key research questions. The MDNW team and some of the interviewees provided or suggested some of the sources, and the consultant found others. They included: guidance and resources intended for practitioners; an evaluation report of an emergency network in the East Midlands; meeting notes; a range of organisation websites; and news articles. The desk research began at the project inception stage, and continued throughout the project as new sources emerged.

Initial interviews with key contacts in the North West

2.4   The consultant carried out informal interviews with key individuals suggested by MDNW, to further explore topics raised at the inception stage and to inform the design of the online survey. Representatives of the following organisations took part: Bolton Museums and Galleries; Harwell Restoration; the National Football Museum; and Manchester Museum. A list of those interviewed throughout the project is provided int the Appendix 1.

Online survey

2.5   The Mapping Museums project found that in 2020 the North West had 242 museums;[11] of these, 150 are Accredited, Provisionally Accredited or Working Toward Accreditation.[12] The survey was designed to accommodate all museums in the region, as all perspectives are relevant. Gathering data from so many organisations individually was not practical. An online survey provided means to do so efficiently at scale, and on a consistent basis that supported thorough analysis. The consultant designed the survey to address topics derived from the research framework, informed by input from the initial interviewees, standard good practice, and experience from previous projects. The introduction for respondents stated that their input would be used anonymously, to encourage frankness.

2.6   The survey was completed 35 times; when adjusted for responses from multi-site groups, 60 museums were represented. The table below sets out which part of the region they were from.

County area	Percentage	Museums
Cheshire	15.0	9
Cumbria	20.0	12
Greater Manchester	18.3	11
Lancashire	25.0	15
Merseyside	21.7	13

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

- A large majority of respodents were from fully Accredited museums. Just five were from museums outside the Accreditation scheme.
- The respondents included the following museum types: independent; National; National Trust; local authority; and university.
- All museum sizes, as measured by visitor numbers, were represented, from 'Micro' to 'Largest'; museums with more than 50,000 visitors per year were over-represented.
- Most of the individuals who completed the survey work in a variety of managerial, conservation and curatorial roles, as illustrated by the word cloud.

- Almost three quarters of the respondents stated that emergency planning and response is part of their role description; the remainder said that it was not part of their role description, but that they helped out, or responsibility had fallen on them over time.

2.8   Given the number of museums in the region, this represents a good response to an online survey intended for a specialist group. The sector is diverse, however, in terms of geography, size, governance model, Accreditation status and other factors. Smaller and unaccredited museums were under-represented in the results, and it is likely

---

[11] '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.
[12] Slide 10 at: https://southwestmuseums.org.uk/museum-development-england-annual-museum-survey-2022-reporting/.

that museums who have faced particular issues with emergencies would be more likely to take part. That notwithstanding, the participant group is of sufficient size and diversity to provide meaningful insight into the issues facing museums in the North West, their experience and perspective.

Interviews with key contacts outside the North West and/or national organisations

2.9   The research framework included reference to regions outside the North West as potential sources of good practice. MDNW also made it clear that the three museum development teams currently covering the North of England were collaborating to submit a joint bid to provide one overall service from 2024/25, and that the current project could help inform aspects of that. The consultant carried out informal interviews with representatives of: Museum Development organisations and emergency networks in the North East, Yorkshire, the East Midlands, and the West Midlands; the Welsh Government Museums Archives and Libraries Division; the Edinburgh Collections Response Network; English Heritage; and the National Trust.

Consultation with MDNW and key contacts

2.10   The consultant provided MDNW with a note summarising the survey results and emerging conclusions on 31 July, then discussed in an online meeting on 3 August. This provided further insight to shape the final report, shared in draft form on 21 August. The consultant and MDNW discussed this version on the 22nd, before providing a final draft on 28 August. This resulted in a number of minor corrections, addressed in a final version on 31 August.

Conclusion

2.11   **The research provided useful insight on the key research questions, and was proportionate to the resources available**. 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. It should also be noted that though the content relating to the experience in other regions is based directly on the relevant interviews and specific desk research, it was not intended to provide a comprehensive picture.

3. The incidence and nature of emergencies

3.1   This section sets out the evidence about the incidence and nature of emergencies gathered during the project.

The survey results

3.2   Almost three quarters of survey respondents (26 of 35) reported that they had experienced an emergency or disaster in recent years, some of them several incidents. (Given that these respondents included all five of the multi-site groups to respond, this would likely be a significantly larger proportion if the sites had responded individually.) The 26 who said they had experienced an emergency or disaster in recent years were asked to select from a list of common emergencies which had occurred, selecting as many as applied.

Type of emergency or disaster	Percentage	Total
Excessive heat / cold related	11.5%	3
Fire	7.7%	2
Flood: rising water from below	50.0%	13
Flood: leak from above	73.1%	19
Insect infestation	26.9%	7
Mould infestation	23.1%	6
Theft and vandalism	23.1%	6
Area-wide emergency that affected the locality as a whole	15.4%	4
Other	19.2%	5

Note: the percentage relates to how many of the 26 selected each option.

3.3   Four of the five respondents who selected 'Other' left comments that indicated the emergencies were related to water ingress, of varying types. Overall, it is clear that emergencies relating to water are by far the most common, whether leaks, rising water or area-wide floods. Infestations and theft/vandalism are next most common, then excessive heat or cold, with fire least common.

Other evidence

3.4   Interviewees provided broadly the same picture as the survey respondents: the incidence and severity of emergencies is increasing, with water and infestation issues a particular problem.

Conclusion

3.5   **The evidence suggests that emergencies and disasters of varying kinds are a common problem that most museums can expect to face at least occasionally. Water related issues are the most common**, though of varying severity. (Fire may be uncommon, but is often very serious and can be catastrophic.)

4. The experience of emergencies and perceptions of risk

4.1   This section sets out the evidence gathered about museums' experience of emergencies.

The survey results

The impact of emergencies

4.2   Respondents who said they had experienced emergencies were asked about their impact. The results are presented in the pie chart below. Forty per cent reported that they had been able to handle emergencies without significant lasting damage. These were from around the region, of varying sizes and types. All but one of the emergencies concerned related to water ingress, with the exception being theft and vandalism. Comments indicated that the incidents were relatively minor, and some included comparisons with more serious events elsewhere.

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

- Yes — 40.0%
- Yes, but other aspects of the operation and/or finances were affected — 32.0%
- No (please tell us briefly about the impact in the comment box below) — 8.0%
- It is a mixed picture (please tell us briefly in the comment box below) — 20.0%
- Other (please specify): — 0.0%

4.3   Thirty-two per cent reported that though they had been able to handle the emergencies without significant lasting damage, other aspects of the museum's operation and/or finances were affected. These were all in Cumbria, Greater Manchester and Lancashire, and of various sizes and types. All the incidents referred to involved water, from roof leaks, stormwater ingress or widespread flooding causing the closure of the building due to power and access issues. Two of the incidents happened out-of-hours, exacerbating the damage.

4.4   Twenty per cent said that 'it was a mixed picture'. Most of these were from multi-site groups, referring to multiple incidents of varying seriousness, across several sites. The comments were general, rather than cataloguing all the incidents, but several points were notable: almost all the events mentioned involved water ingress, of varying types; insect and mould are an increasing issue; and emergencies being exacerbated by increased pressures on staff and there being fewer volunteers than before the Covid pandemic.

4.5   Two respondents said that emergencies resulted in damage to collection items. One involved cellar stores flooding and another water and mould damage to attic stores that aren't climate controlled and are beneath a poorly maintained roof.

4.6   Museums handle most emergencies without lasting damage to collections. Many incidents disrupt operations and/or have financial consequences, however. A minority of them have significant consequences, such as damage to the collections and/or buildings, and temporary closure of sites. The most significant incidents reported involve water ingress to a site, combined with a flooding emergency in a wider area, limiting the capacity to implement emergency response plans. These tend to be in places very close to rivers or streams.

Sources of support in emergencies

4.7   Respondents who had experienced emergencies were asked if they had received support from outside their organisation, and if so from where. Twenty did so, with the results provided in the table below.
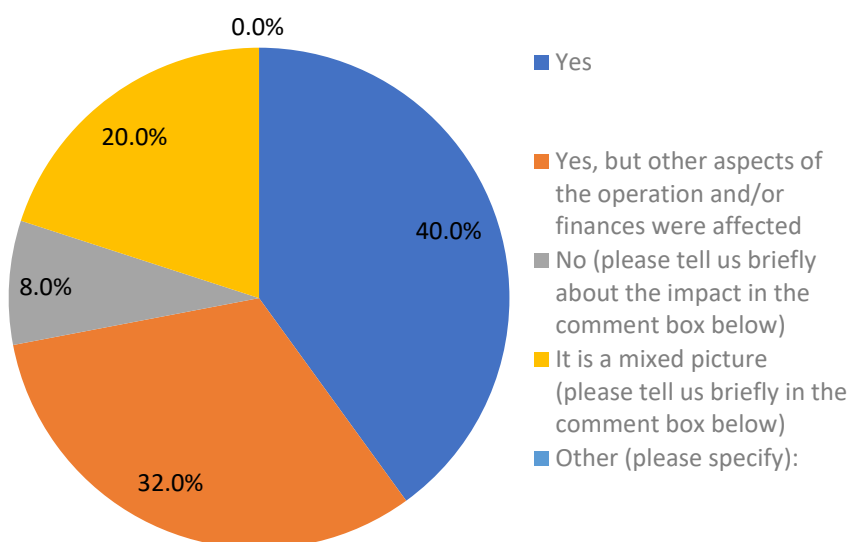
Source of support	Percentage	Responses
The Fire Service	15%	3
The police	15%	3
Neighbours and local partners outside the museum sector	10%	2
The local council	20%	4
Another museum or museum group	25%	5
A private sector collection services provider, such as Harwell Restoration	40%	8
A museum emergency network	0%	0
English Heritage	0%	0
The National Trust	5%	1
Other	35%	7

Respondents were asked to select as many options as applied.

4.8   More respondents said they received support from a private sector collection services provider, such as Harwell, than any other type of support. These included both individual museums and multi-site groups, in every part of the region. (One group that had experienced emergencies said that it had a contract with Harwell but hadn't called on it so far.) Respondents reported receiving support from a range of other sources of support, as set out above. Those who selected 'other' gave examples, including: other parts of the organisation (local authorities and/or universities) including an emergency business continuity team; university students; the National Trust; and building surveyors and/or structural engineers. No one reported having called on a museum support network or English Heritage. Six respondents who said they received support indicated that at least some sources of it were from outside the North West region.[13]

Types of support received

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

Type of support	Percentage	Responses
The emergency services attending a site	25.0%	5
Access to emergency response equipment	35.0%	7
Access to facilities elsewhere, such as freezers or storage	30.0%	6
Hands on help from people outside your organisation	45.0%	9
Advice	55.0%	11
Other	10.0%	2

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

4.10   Advice was the most common form of support, followed by hands-on help from those outside the organisation, and access to facilities and/or equipment. Only one quarter of respondents reported having had the emergency services attend a site, but this reflects the diverse nature of incidents: emergency services will be called to almost all fires and many floods, but fewer other types.

---

[13] The survey did not ask respondents to specify the source, and only one did so – students from a university outside the region. It may be that some respondents were referring to Harwell Restoration, which is based in Didcot, Oxfordshire.

Additional support that would have been helpful

4.11   Slightly more than half of respondents who had experienced an emergency said that different or other forms of support would have helped reduce its impact or duration. The comments about this were varied, summarised as follows:
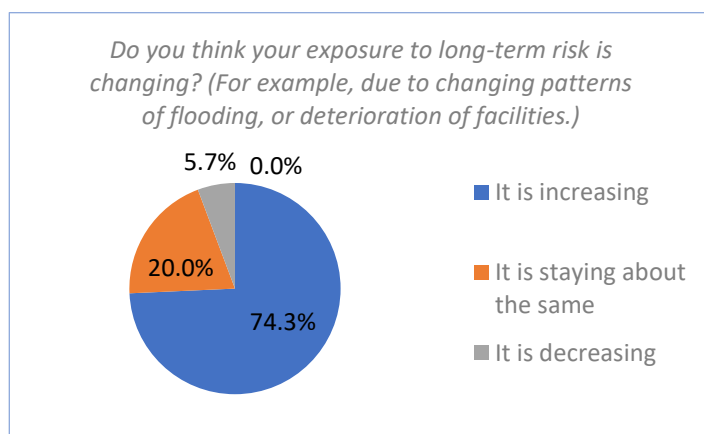
- 'While we have an emergency plan, staff arriving to find a leak were still quite unprepared'.
- Getting appropriate support for planning within an organisation isn't always easy.
- Some representatives of larger organisations with wider responsibilities reported difficulty in obtaining help from other teams outside the museum (though external support providers such as Harwell were very helpful).
- Specialist needs such as access to freelance conservators for particular collections, such as natural history.
- There is a need for more information as to the secondary impact of emergencies, such as those caused by high Relative Humidity.
- Several respondents mentioned a need for access to specialist equipment, such as 'a larger freezing facility in Greater Manchester', and an Archipress book vacuum packing system.
- Several respondents suggested improvements to procedures in their own museums, such as designating a salvage location on site (or in an off-site store), at which to conduct triage.
- Two respondents highlighted the extra problems caused by area-wide events such as flooding, during which access is difficult and staff and volunteers' homes would likely be affected. One said it would have been helpful to have a list of people nearby willing to help, who may not normally be involved with the museum.
- Three respondents mentioned that it would be helpful to have a network of trained staff to call on for help in the event of an emergency, and one said that having a network to exchange advice before problems arise would be good. This will be explored further in Section 6.
- On respondent said that improved building maintenance ('clearing of gutters/drains, maintenance of heating/ventilation systems') would have helped.
- A respondent from a historic building (outside the Museum Accreditation system) said that they can 'fall between the cracks when accessing collections advice and support', and need help with practical steps to put plans in place.

Helping others

4.12   Respondents were asked if their museums had provided help to another museum during an emergency. Only four – all of them multi-site groups – reported having done so (for museums outside their group). Various examples were given, including of sending equipment and staff, free access to a specialist conservator for a day, help with triaging before Harwell arrived, and regularly providing telephone advice.

Long term risk

4.13   Respondents were asked if they thought their exposure to long-term risk was changing. All 35 answered the question, as per the adjacent chart. Almost three quarters thought that it was increasing. They made a lot of comments, covering a range issues. One stood out, as illustrated by the word cloud over the page.

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

5.7%   0.0%

20.0%

74.3%

■ It is increasing

■ It is staying about the same

■ It is decreasing

4.14   Some respondents linked the increasing long-term risk directly to climate change:

- *'Climate change is increasing the frequency of heavy downpours…the buildings cannot cope…warmer winters are resulting in more insect activity.'*
- *'…as weather patterns change with climate change, i.e. increasing strength of rainstorms, frequency of flooding, etc., highspeed windstorms etc., we are more likely to suffer a catastrophic roof failure of damage.'*

- [Our area has had] *'three floods in the last 20 years which were extreme compared to previous floods…The increasing frequency of these unlikely weather events is most probably a symptom of the climate crisis, and while the rising water has not yet entered the museum it is likely it will in the near future.'*

4.15   The minority of respondents who sad that their exposure was risk stable or decreasing did so because they have recently carried out mitigation works, area-wide flood measures have been introduced, or because they don't consider their sites especially exposed to risk.

4.16   Respondents were asked if their organisation has begun to address the long-term challenges at a strategic level: 25 answered, of which 15 said 'yes'. The following quotations are illustrative (from different museum types):

- '[There is an] *improved attitude to collection storage - but advocacy on this topic is continuous to ensure it remains on the…agenda.'*
- *'The board is very engaged with this issue. We are seeking reports to support future funding bids. A spreadsheet of maintenance issues is regularly reviewed a board level.'*
- *'As of 2022…*[we have] *a Preventive Conservation Strategy which identifies some of these risks.'*
- *'There is definitely more awareness of how the changing environment is affecting our management and care of the collections.'*

4.17   Some of these, however, went on to point out limitations and challenges: 'we are…some way away from mitigation'; 'at a high level, but not at a day-to-day operational level'; and 'funding restrictions often mean that responses are quite slow'. Seven respondents said they did not think that long-term challenges are being addressed, yet. One commented that the museum was part of a much wider organisation, and 'fell off the radar' in comparison to other functions. Another said:

'I think we are all aware that there will be issues coming up, and certainly individual members of staff caring for collections plan for emergencies when storing, displaying and preparing spaces more now, but I don't think it has been recognised as a long-term risk or planned for at a strategic level.'

Short term risk

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

4.19   Thirty of the 35 respondents mentioned water-related issues. Most of these said it was the biggest risk, though one said it was a lower risk

than mould and pests. Three of the respondents who did not mention water said that fire was their biggest risk.

Many of the 35 mentioned mould and pests, one pointing out that catastrophic damage can occur to organic objects in as little as two or three weeks.

4.20   Respondents mentioned buildings and facilities issues a lot, related to a range of potential risks. One said that deterioration to the building was itself the single biggest risk, as it threatened their ability maintain a suitable environment, further increasing the risk from other sources.

4.21   Several respondents mentioned the risk of theft and vandalism: one linked it to the location of a store, on an industrial estate; and a representative from a local authority museum said they were aware of three incidents this year in which members of the public threatened to damage council buildings.

Other evidence

4.22   Again, interviewees provided broadly the same picture as the survey respondents, with examples from their areas.

Conclusion

4.23   **Museums handle most emergencies without lasting damage to their collections or buildings. Many incidents disrupt operations and/or have financial consequences, however. A minority of them have significant consequences involving damage, and even temporary closure of sites.** The most serious incidents reported involve water ingress to a site combined with a flooding emergency in the wider area, limiting the capacity to implement emergency response plans. These tended to be in places very close to rivers or streams.

4.24   **Most emergencies result in museums calling on support from outside their organisation. Specialist providers such as Harwell Restoration being the most commonly quoted, then a range of other sources**. The types of support vary, with advice being the most common, then various forms of emergency and practical help. More than half of those who had experienced emergencies said that additional support would have been helpful.

4.25   **Risks are increasing generally, especially from water, pests, and mould**. This is a long-term issue, as climate trends are likely to continue; the risk to some museums, especially those close to rivers and streams and/or those with particular buildings issues, could threaten their viability. Increased risk is also an immediate issue, in that many sites have maintenance backlogs and staff shortages, and emergencies can occur at any time. A representative of a multi-site group said:

> *'I dread when we have heavy rain and always head to our museum sites to check on displayed and stores collections because of prior experience. And after having two leaks from burst pipes in our off site stores, which are not constantly manned, we have had the water turned off in two of our stores and the pipes lagged in the third to prepare for another very cold spell in the winter.'*

4.26   Some museums feel that they have been able to mitigate their exposure to risk, through carrying out repairs or other measures. This illustrates that individual circumstances are vital for a meaningful risk assessment, going beyond area-based assessments and broad projections.

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.

The survey results

Emergency plans

5.2   Thirty three of the 35 respondents said they had an emergency plan in place; the two who did not were from unaccredited museums. Almost two thirds of respondents from museums with emergency plans said that they were kept up to date. Of the others, several said that they should be or were scheduled to be updated, and some made suggestions as to how this could be done more meaningfully – for example, doing so after each emergency, not just in time for accreditation. Others said that staff changes had affected how up to date the plan was, and that responsibilities and contact details may or may not be current. One said that the plan was updated to reflect staff changes, but not changing risks.

5.3   Respondents with emergency plans were asked if they thought they were fit for purpose. The chart presents the results. Almost one half of respondents think that their emergency plan is unfit for purpose, or they aren't sure.

Training

5.4   Respondents were asked if they or their colleagues had received training in emergency planning or responding to emergencies. Just over 80% of respondents reported that they or their colleagues had received training in emergency planning or response. The chart below presents the full results.

Do you think the emergency plan/s are fit for purpose?

Yes 54.5%
No 15.2%
I'm not sure 30.3%
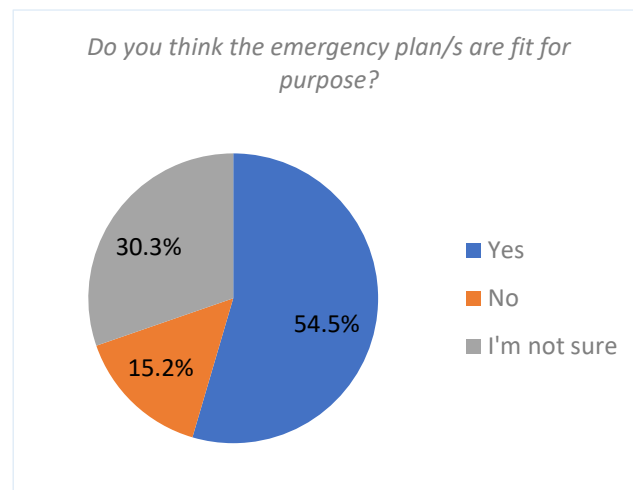
Have you or your colleagues received training in emergency planning or response?

Yes, recently 20.0%
Yes, but some time ago 60.0%
No 8.6%
I'm not sure 11.4%
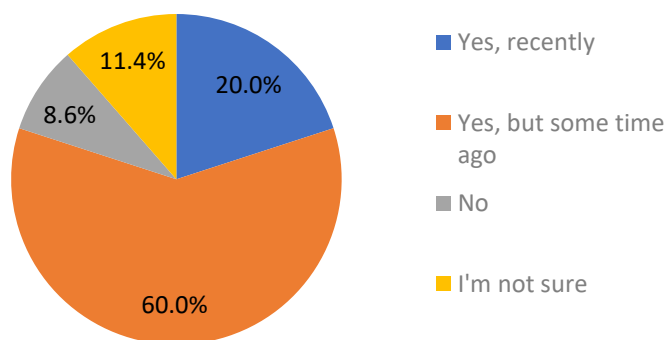
5.5   Some of the 'yes' responses related to colleagues. For example: 'I was not at the organisation and did not receive the training'. Conversely, some said they had received training, but not colleagues.

5.6   Three quarters of those who said they or colleagues had received training said it was some time ago: some said five, seven or even 'over 15 years' ago.

5.7   The training referred to included sessions arranged or delivered by MDNW, Harwell, Lancashire County Conservation Studios, National Museums Liverpool, Museums of Cheshire, in house specialists, English Heritage or the National Trust, work with the local Fire Service, and former employers outside the region. Nine respondents said they or their colleagues had attended training delivered by Harwell. Some training took '2.5 hours', or a 'single afternoon'; most lasted for a full day, and some for several days. One respondent said their organisation had received a serious of hour-long sessions, over a period of time. The topics covered in the various training included: emergency planning; salvage and recovery; working with the fire service; and flood risk management. A very few had taken part in full-scale exercises.

5.8   Those who had received training were positive about it. For example:

'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.'

5.9   Respondents who had been involved in planned exercises said the experience had been especially helpful. One talked about an exercise planned over months with colleagues from across a local authority. The result had been 'very interesting':

> *'We realised that in the event of major flood, fire, explosion (gas) the emergency services would not allow access to our museums. So plans to decant collections post / during an emergency were almost useless. Our decant window was before the emergency services arrive and after they finish which could be up to 72 hours later.'*

5.10   Another said that a night-time exercise with 'fake casualties' and the emergency services 'helped us to test our procedures and make necessary amendments'. A third said that a tour of another museum that had experienced a flood was 'hands-on real life experience' and 'really very valuable'.

5.11   No one was critical of their training, though several commented that the sessions they attended hadn't been very practical. One referred to having taken part in online training some time ago, but said: 'sorry I can't remember the detail'.

5.12   Overall, the survey results support the following points about training:

- People find emergency training useful – and especially 'hands-on', practical sessions, which seems to have a more lasting impact than theoretical and/or online sessions.
- Harwell Restoration appears to be the largest single provider of training for this group.[14] It is likely that organisations with a Harwell support contract also have more staff trained in emergency handling than those that do not have a contract.
- Many of the respondents who have taken part in training did so with previous employers. The level of training in any given workforce 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.
- Larger organisations tend to provide the most training, and especially full-scale exercises.

Emergency equipment

5.13   Respondents were asked if they had a store or stores of emergency equipment, and/or access to them:

- Twenty-five reported that they had their own stores; the museums were of different sizes and types, and spread around the region; three of them also had access to other resources - one was part of a larger organisation, and the other two were independents;
- Two respondents said they had access to partner resources only; and
- Six said they had no stores nor access to any – two were Accredited, and four were not (though one of these was 'working toward' it).

5.14   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 chart.

5.15   There didn't appear to be any patterns behind these answers: museum of all sizes, type and locations selected each of the options - even some larger multi-site groups said 'no'. Sectoral demographics do not appear to dictate whether an individual museum or group has what it considers to be an adequate supply of emergency stores.


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

- Yes: 46.2%
- No: 30.8%
- I'm not sure: 23.1%

---
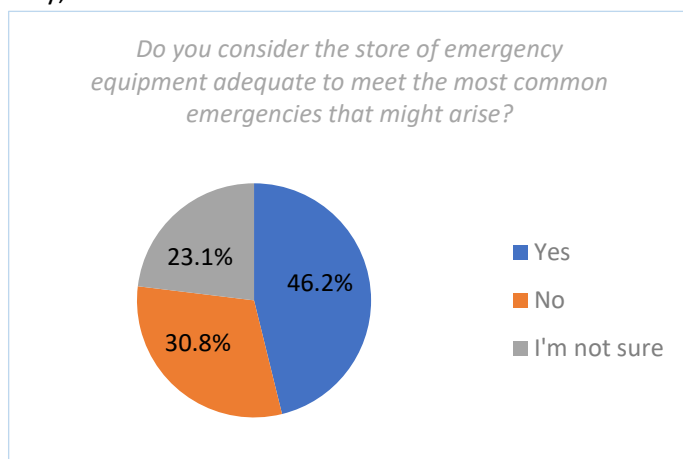
[14] Nine of the 28 respondents who provided information about the training they or colleagues had taken part in said it was delivered by Harwell.

5.16   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. The results are provided in the chart.
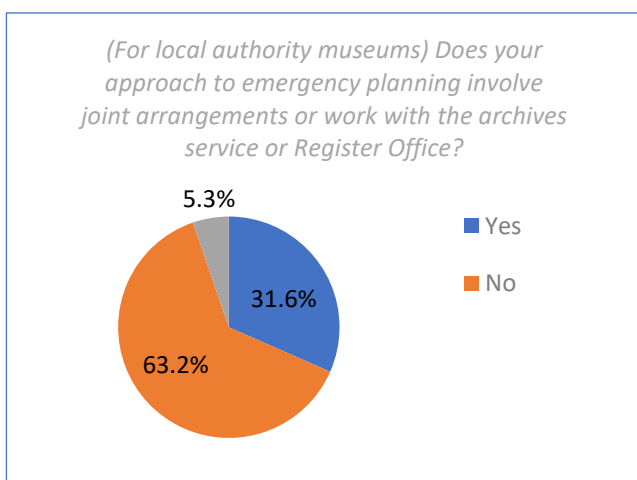
5.17   More than one third of museums did not have such a support arrangement in place; two thirds of these were independents, and one third part of a local authority.

5.18   Respondents were asked if their museum had other emergency support arrangements in place, with museums or other partners. Almost one half reported that they did, largely through informal agreements. For example, a representative of one larger multi-site group said they had an 'informal relationship with several other museums….also good working arrangements with several local councils re access to storage and dehumidifiers etc.'. Several respondents from museums in the same geographical area referred to having support arrangements with this same

Does your museum or group have a contract with a specialist provider of emergency support services, such as Harwell Restoration, or access to one through a broader relationship (such as a local authority-wide contract)?

- Yes - our own contract
- Yes - as part of a broader relationship
- No
- I'm not sure

organisation. Two respondents who reported they had no such arrangement at the moment, they planned to try to establish them. One said that they had started to engage a major private sector firm with a large presence next to the museum.
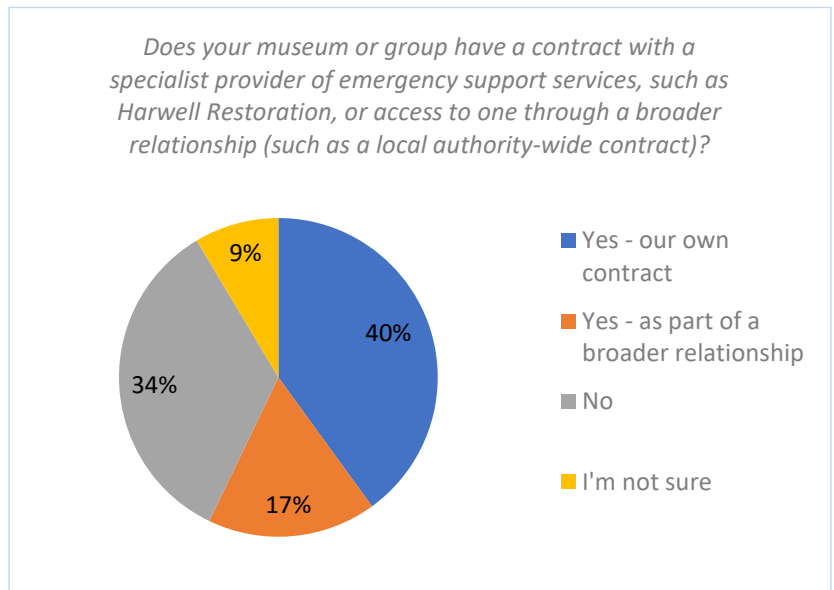
5.19   Only 20 per cent of respondents said their museums had arrangements in place to provide support to other museums. Most of these were multi-site groups, at the larger end of the respondent group. Many others said they would be happy to help others, and some gave positive examples of having received help. This suggested there is a lot of goodwill and community spirit. The ability to actually give or receive such informal help depends partly on how developed an individual or team's networks are, however, helping them to know who to reach out to in an emergency. One comment illustrated that at least some respondents are actively aware of this: [we] 'are currently rethinking…how we could help other museums due to where staff live or experience of working in other venues'. Another said:

> *'This would be something I would like to explore. I think it's important to support other organisations and colleagues particularly when responses to emergencies can be very expensive and time consuming which is difficult to deal with when museums face increasing funding and staff cuts.'*

(For local authority museums) Does your approach to emergency planning involve joint arrangements or work with the archives service or Register Office?

- Yes
- No

5.20   Local authority museums were asked if they were part of a joint approach to emergency planning with the archives service and/or Register office. Almost one third (most of them multi-site groups) said yes. More than two thirds of the local authority respondents said that their museum was not part of such a joint approach, or that they are not aware of it. This suggests that some local authority museums could increase their emergency resilience by exploring this issue with other parts of the organisation.

5.21   More than three quarters 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 there were two examples of larger museums that had not or weren't sure.

5.22   A small minority of Accredited museums 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.

5.23   More than 60% of respondents considered that their insurance provision is adequate to meet its exposure to risk. Almost all of the others, however, weren't sure. One multi-site group gave examples of detailed issues in museum and collections insurance, and suggested that a training session on what policies may or may not support would be very useful for many.

Additional support needs

5.24   All of the respondents answered the questions about additional support needs, which asked if they needed any of a list of types of support, with potential answers of 'yes', 'maybe a little', and 'no, we have what we need'. The results are presented in the table below.

Potential form of additional support	Yes	Maybe a little	No, we have what we need
Access to more emergency response equipment	21	11	3
Practical help during emergencies	26	8	1
Specialist training	22	11	2
Specialist advice	23	9	3
Template policies and forms	19	8	8
A discussion network	21	12	1

5.25   Several features of this are worth noting, some visible in the above headlines and others background details:

- There appears to be substantial unmet need for all six options: very few respondents said 'no, we have what we need' to five of them, with only 'template policies and forms' receiving more than three responses; even that is a small minority of the 35 respondents.
- No one responded 'no….' to all of the options (the closest was a university museum that said 'no' to four options, but 'maybe a little' to 'practical help….' and 'yes' to 'a discussion network'. Even the largest multi-site museum services in the respondent group said 'yes' or 'maybe a little' to most of the options.
- Eleven museums or groups responded 'yes' to all six of the options. These included four Unaccredited museums.
- There are no clear 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.

5.26   Ten respondents added comments about additional support needs. Two of these suggested having networks on the Yorkshire and East Midlands model, and another suggested a virtual network model. These points will be explored in the next section. Others said that training would be beneficial, with one commenting that it would need to be ongoing due to the high turnover of staff. One said that a regional store of large items of kit would be useful.

Other evidence

5.27   The evidence from the interviews broadly supported that from the survey results. Those with representatives of English Heritage and the National Trust provided important input on several key points.

- English Heritage works with Historic England and the West Midlands Fire Service to deliver a three-day residential training course, including 'hands-on' exercises in handling emergency salvage. It is run four times each year, with 30 places on each course, some of which are reserved for English Heritage and National Trust

staff. Participants generally give very positive feedback on their experience.[15] There is currently a waiting list of 'years' for a place on the course, however, and given the increasing turnover of staff in individual museums, it isn't practical for an employer to secure places for existing staff. The cost to participants is £575, including accommodation and food; that seems very reasonable compared to some other training, but could be a barrier for small museums.

- National Trust and English Heritage properties have their own supplies of emergency equipment, though they can be quite limited at small properties; larger properties have more kit, and they use internal networks to support each other in the event of a problem. The National Trust has trailer with emergency supplies based at Dunham Massey, available to deploy to its sites as necessary.[16] It also has an Archipress vacuum packing machine at Dunham Massey.

- English Heritage does not have a policy on lending kit to other organisations, and tends to receive few requests for practical assistance. It does have a national hotline for urgent conservation advice, and sometimes representatives from outside the organisation call it. There is some evidence that museums can be reluctant to call it, as the conservator on duty could be in another part of the country and may not know their circumstances.

- The National Trust does not receive many requests from outside the organisation for help, and those they do tend to be after major events such as the widespread flooding in 2009 and 2015. There was one request in the North West last year, though after discussion the matter was resolved without the Trust needing to deploy its resources. (The request came from someone who used to work at the Trust, and is familiar with the resources it has available in the region.) The Trust's staff would be more than willing to help others, though insurance and other administrative issues would need to be resolved.

Conclusion

5.28 **The level of preparedness for emergencies varies**, in many respects:

- Emergency plans are in place for the Accredited museums (and some of the others), but not everyone feels they are fit for purpose. Unaccredited museums do not necessarily have plans in place, but face many of the same risks.
- **Training is very useful**, but coverage is patchy and dependent partly on individual CVs rather than policy.
- A large majority of museums have access to at least basic emergency equipment, though **larger and/or more expensive items such as pumps, generators and dehumidifiers are less commonly available**.
- Some museums have contractual support arrangements with Harwell Restoration, and/or other partners well placed to provide appropriate support (for example, local authority archive services); others do not, however, and would have to improvise solutions as necessary.
- **Almost every museum has some additional support needs**.

---

[15] Several survey respondents mentioned having been on the course, in some cases many years ago. All were positive about it. An overview of the course content and the perspective of one training participant is available at: https://theironroom.wordpress.com/2018/04/09/attending-historic-englands-salvage-and-disaster-recovery-course/.

[16] It has another at Wallington, in the North East.

6. Emergency networks

6.1   This section explores the emergency networks available to museums in the North West and nearby areas in recent years, discussing their nature, functions and issues they have faced. It concludes by summarising the factors that differentiate them and those they have in common, examining some advantages and disadvantages.

The North West

6.2   In 2009-10 Renaissance North West, a museum development organisation that reported to the then Museum, Libraries and Archives Council,[17] set up 'Area Emergency Networks' in the region, as part of its sustainability and resilience programme. The network was organised on a county basis (though with Cheshire and Merseyside working together). Each had an administrator who maintained a contact list and arranged training.[18] The intention was that contacts on the list were each employed by a museum in the North West and agreed to be available to provide support for other museums in the event of an emergency; the employers agreed to release the individuals for up to two days for this purpose. More than 70 people signed up, and most of them received salvage training in Summer 2010.[19] Emergency equipment was made available via two main stores and dispersed smaller ones, on the basis that it would be replaced by any organisation that used it.[20]

6.3   Renaissance North West ceased to operate in 2012, following the UK government disbanding the Museum Libraries and Archives Council and transferring its museum functions to Arts Council England [ACE]. In the same year ACE started to invest in a museum development programme,[21] delivered in England through a network of nine regional providers and practitioners, including MDNW.

6.4   In 2013-14, discussion at county forum meetings prompted MDNW to review the Area Emergency Network contact lists,[22] and to commission Harwell Restoration to provide emergency planning and management training. MDNW returned to this in 2015, again reviewing the contacts and the networks more generally. The process wasn't completed. Though individuals may have continued to take advantage of relationships developed through the networks, and indirectly some of their functions may have been continued by other groups, effectively there have been no emergency networks in the North West since then.

Networks elsewhere

6.5   The consultant gathered evidence about emergency networks and related support in: the East Midlands; the North East; the West Midlands; Yorkshire; Edinburgh; and Wales. All of those consulted reported the same trends: increasing number and severity of emergencies; growing building maintenance backlogs; reducing resources; and greater turnover of staff.[23] The key points from each area are set out below.

---

[17] https://mlanorthwest.org.uk/museumslibrariesarchives/museums/renaissancenw/.

[18] The approach was informed by a workshop with attended by representatives from museums in the region; it heard feedback from staff who had attended National Trust training and from a representative of the East Midlands Museum Service who was involved in an emergency network there. See: 'Emergency Networks – Things to Consider', Renaissance North West, circa 2009; and the agenda from an 'Area Emergency Networks' workshop organised by Renaissance North West, on 27 February 2009 at Manchester Art Gallery. Documents held by MDNW.

[19] 'Area Emergency Response Networks in the North West', Emma Dadson, Harwell Restoration, undated, but known to be from before September 2014; 'Cumbria Area Emergency Network, Salvage Volunteer Agreement', author unknown, undated, but known to be from before 2015.

[20] *'Generators, pumps and emergency lighting are stored at Stockport Museum Service, where it can be quickly loaded onto a van and driven to any institution requiring assistance. There is also a significant stockpile at Lancashire Conservation Studios in Preston, again with access to a museum van. In Cumbria and Cheshire, equipment has been dispersed amongst the institutions with volunteering staff with the idea it would be transported by car, so the focus is on smaller items, but does include some pumps and dehumidifiers.'* Emma Dadson, Ibid.

[21] https://mduk.org.uk/about/.

[22] A note from the time shows that MDNW promoted volunteering for the network to museums in the region, and set out what was expected (that network members would be available on the basis set out above, and would take advantage of training opportunities) and what it committed to do (providing training opportunities and equipment, to consult and answer queries). 'Museum Development North West, Area Emergency Networks', undated but believed to be from 2015.

[23] It should also be noted that the in speaking about former network arrangements, many of the consultees pointed out that it was before they were in post, and that they didn't necessarily know full details.

The East Midlands

6.6   The East Midlands Museum Service [EMMS] used to operate a 'Regional Emergency Disaster Service' [REDS]. Established in the 2000s, members paid an annual subscription for access to training, emergency kit and expertise; the 'REDS Squad' was added to the service, providing 24/7 access to an expert in the event of an emergency. EMMS commissioned an evaluation of the REDS Squad in 2018.[24] The report found that the hotline service had never been used, and in the event of emergency network members had 'managed this either in-house, with the emergency services, or with support from local relationships'.[25] It concluded that the REDS Squad's role was 'neither appropriate nor functional'.[26] The report recommended that REDS be rebranded as the 'East Midlands Emergency Disaster Network' and that is should be Museum Development East Midlands [MDEM]. 'The focus of this network should be on prevention as much as incident response, with a strong practical training programme'.[27]

6.7   The report informed the design of a new 'Emergency Risk Network', managed by and funded through MDEM.[28] It was established in 2019, with £15,000 of funding over three years. The key elements were: the network itself, involving twice-yearly meetings to share best practice and access peer support, open to all museums and heritage organisations; emergency planning resources on the MDEM website;[29] support from the County Forum; training;[30] and access to specialist advice. From 2019/20 to 2021/22, the network broadly delivered its intended activities, including six network meetings, several workshops and 16 training events, and producing a range of resources.[31] The funding paid for capacity at MDEM to coordinate the network and deliver the activities, and for related costs. The original funding source has dwindled, but the Network is continuing with an affordable programme of activities.

6.8   A representative of MDEM said that the network is focus on providing learning opportunities on learning, whether through training, workshop or peer-to-peer contact. The 'network' title is important, though, as it emphasised the importance of learning from and developing relationships with others; retaining it was part of the learning from the REDS Squad evaluation – though that service wasn't really used, people liked knowing that it existed as it gave them a sense of security. In this sense, the 'Emergency Risk Network' is effectively a strand in MDEM's training programme, rather than a 'network' in the old sense.

The North East

6.9   The North East had an emergency network in the 1990s and 2000s, perhaps into the early 2010s. Beamish, the Living Museum of the North, played an important role, including by hosting a dump of emergency kit. Over time, the network declined, as funding dried up and participating museums experienced increasing pressure on their own budgets. Eventually it ceased to operate, and hasn't been directly replaced. The North East's Collections Care Advisory Network continues to exist, and provides services relevant to this project.[32] Managed by Museum Development North East [MDNE], it is delivered by Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums. Support includes a range of advice and training, including in emergency response salvage.[33]

6.10   MDNE and senior staff at regional museums are considering how to approach this topic for the future, including in the context of the pending merger of the museum development function across the three northern regions.

---

[24] 'Review of Regional Emergency Disaster Service, EMMS Evaluation Report', Kaite Ann Smith, 2018.

[25] Smith, Ibid, p.5.

[26] Smith, Ibid, p.5.

[27] Smith, Ibid, p.10.

[28] https://mdem.org.uk/emergency-risk-network/.

[29] https://mdem.org.uk/resources/emergency-and-risk-resources/.

[30] An example of recent training is at: https://www.raf.mod.uk/our-organisation/stations/raf-cranwell/news/museum-development-east-midlands-visit-raf-college/.

[31] 'Emergency and Risk Preparedness Programme and Network, 2019-22', Museum Development East Midlands, 2022.

[32] https://museumdevelopmentne.org.uk/conservation-advisory-network.

[33] https://thebowesmuseum.wordpress.com/2015/06/26/fire-rescue/.

The West Midlands

6.11   West Midlands Museum Development [WMMD] coordinates an Emergency Response Network,[34] established some years ago. It funded a supply of emergency equipment to seven host sites around the region's counties, intended to help all museums with first response in small emergencies. It is not available 24/7, though staff at the host sites intend to enable access as quickly as possible. Museums can borrow the equipment as necessary, in office hours. It is free to access, though any consumables used must be replaced on a on a like-for-like basis. No usage data was available.

6.12   WMMD provides training in topics related to this project, including salvage, emergency planning, handling water damage, and working with the fire service. It is peppered throughout the training programme, rather than organised as a standalone emergency programme marketed as part of the Network. There is always demand for the sessions.

Yorkshire

6.13   There is a Rapid Response Network [RRN] for Yorkshire & Humber.[35] It was set up as an informal network in 2007, but adopted a formal constitution based on The Charity Commission guidelines in 2011, to allow it to own assets, have a bank account and make grant applications.[36] It was established with volunteers from the sector in necessary roles such as Treasurer, with a Committee and formal meetings, including Annual General Meetings. Over the following years it secured funding from the then Heritage Lottery fund to procure emergency kit for storage at depots around the region. Membership is on an subscription basis, currently at circa £50 per year, though this used to be higher.
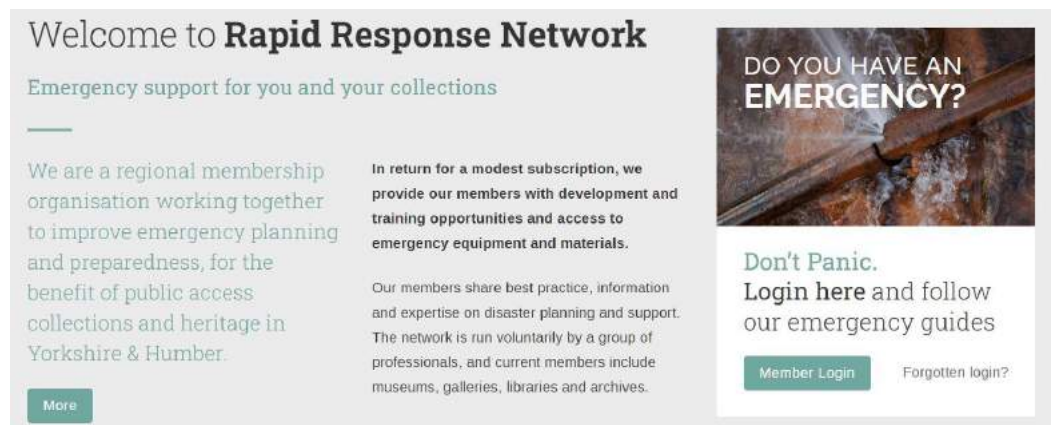
6.14   In recent years the network has experienced some difficulties. Even before Covid, a number of volunteers had moved on, leaving key posts vacant for some time. Others began to struggle to find time for it as aspects of the employed roles changed. It does not appear that the salvage kit has been used or checked in the last four years.

6.15   For much of its existence the RRN provided training in-person, involving conservators, the fire service and guest speakers. This stopped when Covid hit and has not resumed. The Network had assembled resources available online, and these are still available.[37] (Its newsletter archive ceases in Spring 2018, however, and the last post in the news section of its website is from October 2021.)[38]

6.16   The key officers at the RRN are currently considering next steps, in discussion with Museum Development Yorkshire.

Edinburgh

6.17   The Edinburgh Collections Response Network [ECRN] was started in 2014, building on previous work. It is administered by volunteers from the sector in the city, and meets annually. Meetings are in person, with the host rotating among members. The host provides the Chair and sessions usually involving some training. It has a WhatsApp group and

---

[34] https://mdwm.org.uk/emergency-response-network/.
[35] http://www.rapidresponsenetwork.org.uk/.
[36] 21 October 2010 Group Update, at: http://www.rapidresponsenetwork.org.uk/news-events#archive.
[37] http://www.rapidresponsenetwork.org.uk/resources/.
[38] http://www.rapidresponsenetwork.org.uk/news-events#archive.

shared Teams group, hosting meeting minutes, notes, a resources spreadsheet, and contact details. There are about 35 members from museums and galleries across Edinburgh and Lothian, including the large national institutions. Membership is free. Members make pledges as to what resources they can provide for others. So far, the network as a whole hasn't had to mobilise in response to an emergency, though members often provide advice to each other. This relatively compact geography means that members have lots in common and find it relatively easy to stay in touch.

6.18   Before Covid, attempts were made to create a network committee and to meet more frequently. It proved difficult to find the capacity for this. ECRN members were aware of ongoing interest in the topic, however, and arranged a session open to any interested organisation from across Scotland, in Stirling, on 27 October 2022.[39] This sold out, largely with representatives of organisations outside the network. The event title and part of the agenda implied at least an intention to develop a broader approach to the topic: 'ECRN: Building a salvage network for Scotland', and the closing session 'Audience discussion – "What should our next steps as a national network be?"' Hosting the event involved a lot of capacity, and though it was popular, the ECRN is not in a position to repeat it. It is not clear whether there will be any further steps towards creating a national network.

Wales

6.19   Some years ago, two emergency support networks existed, one in North Wales and one in South Wales. Their level of activity differed, relating to how much time and energy the key people in each area were able to devote to it – those in the North were particular active. Once they moved jobs the network effectively ceased to operate. By the time Covid hit neither network was active.

6.20   In 2021 a new Collections Advisor started with the Museums, Archives and Libraries Division [MALD] of the Welsh Government. The Collections Advisor and colleagues reviewed the position and agreed that networks served an important function, and that the Welsh Government should facilitate them. They restarted networks in North and South Wales, promoting networking, providing training, and consulting the sector as to its needs. This worked well to start with, but over the first year it became clear that there was some of duplication of effort. They moved to a single network model for the whole of Wales, with two online meetings each year for everyone, and one in person; physical training is delivered in both North and South Wales. Training has included salvage, emergency planning for digital collections, and reviewing emergency plans; representatives from organisations that have experienced emergencies speak at meetings. Members are encouraged to work with and learn from each other.

6.21   The network is inclusive, involving museums, archives, libraries and freelancers, on the basis that they all have an interest in the topic and are in a position to help each other. Approximately 80 organisations are members, including the national museums and National Trust, alongside local and independent bodies.

6.22   The network commissioned a mapping exercise looking at emergency equipment and resources: which organisations have what, where it is and what can be offered to others; they have compiled the results into a database, with contact details, and established a Memorandum of Understanding for use of the equipment on a 'replace what you use' basis. All of the equipment is paid for and managed by network members, though the Welsh Government may consider assisting with the capital purchase of larger items in the future.

6.23   The Welsh Government's contribution is the staff time in facilitating the network, and a small budget for training and research. Once each year a staff member promotes the network to potential new members and checks the contact details in the database.

Conclusion

6.24   Emergency networks have been part of the sector in recent years in the North West, and every other area considered for this project. The details have varied over time and by place, as summarised below.

6.25   **Organisation**: from informal groups of volunteers with a common interest, to formally constituted body with a committee and legal reporting responsibilities. Some haven't really had an 'organisation' at all, being a programme

---

[39] https://www.icon.org.uk/events/ecrn-building-a-salvage-network-for-scotland.html.

of activity coordinated or delivered by a body with broader responsibilities, such as a Museum Development team (itself hosted by a formally constituted organisation).

6.26   **Inclusivity**: from being focused on Accredited museums to being open to all museums and heritage sites, and even archives, libraries and freelancers.

6.27   **Geography**: reflecting administrative geographies and local arrangements. Within the English regions considered, it appears that only the North West has had networks based on sub-regions: others covered their whole region, though usually with salvage kit stored in dispersed hubs and events taking place in different locations. The Edinburgh network is focused on a single city and its hinterland, whilst that in Wales covers the whole country.

6.28   **Funding**: from relying purely on volunteer time and occasional in-kind support, to annual budgets of thousands of pounds secured from external sources and/or member subscriptions.

6.29   **Staffing**: from solely volunteer time to paid staff and retained consultants.

6.30   **Support provided**: (variously) advice, emergency response services, access to contact lists, access to emergency equipment/salvage kit, training and networking opportunities. All networks have involved salvage kit, in some form: from mapping existing kit and facilitating access to it by making the data available and supplying template agreements to funding the capital cost of purchasing the kit, arranging storage and facilitating access.

6.30   Though elements of the experience varied, there are common features. These are summarised below.

6.31   **All of the networks have their origins 10 years or more ago**, when the sector was generally better funded and staffed, and staff turnover was slower than it has since become.

6.32   **All of the networks have experienced significant pressures** due to changes in the operating environment and the sector itself, as staff involved in the early years moved on, budgets reduced, and the nature of employment gradually changed. Most of the networks changed a lot in response, including by amended their model, reducing functions or even ceasing to operate. At the time of writing, there are no functioning emergency networks in the North West and North East, and the one in Yorkshire is in flux, pending decisions as to its future; the network in the West Midlands is focused on salvage kit and doesn't provide broader functions; only the one in the East Midlands seems to have been re-worked consciously, following a structured evaluation.

6.33   **Networks have rarely been activated to provide practical support during emergencies**, and some of them not at all in this capacity. Museums tend to manage problems in house, or through their own local or personal networks. They have used networks before and after emergencies, however, for ongoing learning and seeking advice or support in the aftermath of an event.

6.34   **Networks providing salvage kit is no longer effective**. Though there is anecdotal evidence that some museums accessed kit some years ago, none of the networks that still provide this service had data about its usage. Some of the consultees said they had not heard of the kit being used for years, and that some of it was probably out of date. The recent mapping exercise in Wales offers a potential exception to this: it is focused on helping those in need access existing kit held by member organisations, a more practical and sustainable task than procuring or holding kit on behalf of the network. It is too early to assess how effective this will be, however, and it depends on having paid staff time available to maintain the database and access to the information.[40]

---

[40] Wales is also a partial exception to several of the other points above, due the national government making a conscious decision to invest staff time and some funding in reviving an emergency network, as it considered there was a need and that was the only way to make it happen.

6.35   **Training is an important and valued function.** Every network has provided access to training, and reports continuing steady demand for it. In the East Midlands, the network is effectively a training programme. Evidence from outside the networks supports the value of training. (For example, the residential course in the West Midlands, discussed in Section 5.)

6.36   **Fostering personal networks is key**. Every network has provided opportunities to 'network' with others, formally and informally. The formal means have usually involved maintaining contact lists and mailing lists. This proved labour intensive, and in many cases impractical to sustain. The informal means have involved encouraging peer-to-peer learning at events, meetings, training and through providing case studies with contact details. This has proved more practical and effective, though its success is difficult to quantify and depends partly on individual skills and willingness to reach out to others. Most networks used a mixture of the formal and informal, with the balance shifting toward the latter over time. Many of the consultees stressed how important the networking function is, and this aligns with the broader findings as to the role it plays in helping people access support when emergencies occur. The approach taken in the East Midlands reflects this, in that they still have a 'network', but it is effectively a label for a strand of the MDEM training programme dedicated to the topic, and promoting organic networking around this. An MDEM representative said that the very word 'network' was helpful in that it conveyed a sense that people were not alone and that they could speak with others about this important issue. Those consulted in some of the other areas said they agreed with this point, and thought they could learn from the East Midlands example.

6.37   **Relying on volunteers to operate networks is no longer practical**. Many networks began with staff employed by museums operating them in a voluntary capacity, as an informal part of their job, with their employer's agreement. As time has passed, this has proved increasingly difficult, resulting in network posts becoming vacant. Those relying purely on volunteers have struggled to maintain their services and some have ceased to operation. Some networks retained part-time paid staff for periods of their history, and operated broadly as intended at the time. In 2023, none of the networks considered in England have paid staff, though those in the East and West Midlands are overseen by their respective Museum Development team and have access to some resources. The network in Wales is coordinated by Welsh Government employee, as part of her job.

6.38   **The most useful geography for a network has varied by function and over time**. For example, in the initial period that the North West's county-based 'Area Emergency Networks' were active, their scale was practical and allowed for the local knowledge of those administering them to play a very helpful role; running a single network would have been too large a job, and could have seemed anonymous. In the years since then the position has changed in that resources no longer allow for the same level of local administration and the use of online meeting technology has transformed remote working. The recent experience in Wales supports this, in that running two networks proved inefficient due to having to do many things twice: the decision to merge them into one network for communication and discussion purposes, whilst ensuring that physical training is delivered in both North and South Wales and that the salvage kit database provides local data, seems wise.

6.39   **There are advantages to being as inclusive as possible.** There are many examples of emergency preparedness and response having involved people and organisations outside the Accredited museums sector, whether that be unaccredited museums, archives, libraries, and freelancers, along with unrelated businesses and neighbours. Many of these have informal relationships with either a local museum or with the sector in general, and some face similar emergency issues – especially archives and libraries. A fully inclusive approach would be impractical for a subscription network model providing access to emergency kit; it can offer a key advantage for a model focused on fostering learning and relationships, and providing access to training: more participants and perspectives would provide more opportunities for connections, some of whom may be well placed to assist during an emergency.

6.40   **The concept of a 'network' is popular.** Those involved in managing networks across all of the areas considered said that their members and users liked having a 'network', whether they used its functions or not. They appeared to find the concept comforting, in that they felt there was somewhere they could turn for help if needed.

Many of the respondents to the project survey expressed support for having a network in one form or another, and none of them referred to practical difficulties with operating them sustainably in the past.

7. Recommendations

7.1   The evidence gathered suggests many potential actions that could improve resilience to emergencies. They range from small, practical steps for individuals or single museums, to broad matters relating to policy and resources. Some are short-term, and others long-term. Given that MDNW commissioned the research primarily to help shape its future approach to supporting museums on this topic, it is appropriate to focus on things it may be able to implement or influence. The recommendations are set out below, organised in five related themes: evidence, awareness, skills, networks and resources.

Evidence

7.2   This report adds to the growing body of evidence about the topic. There remain significant gaps, however, and developing a more complete picture will assist museums in making investment decisions and will inform approaches to national bodies about future funding programmes.

Recommendation 1

Carry out a region-wide risk assessment, working with individual museums. This would go beyond the current area-based dataset, taking account of very local and buildings related factors to produce a more meaningful and adjusted assessment for each. It would provide a solid basis from which to provide targeted support for those most at risk, and those facing specialist issues. (Medium term.)

Recommendation 2

Identify museums that appear to be at particular risk, and which may require priority or distinct support. For example, some sites may be at such risk that they aren't viable in the long term; providing help with addressing this at the strategic decision-making level, though facilitated board sessions and/or business planning and options appraisal support may be more useful than conventional emergency planning training. (Medium term.)

Recommendation 3

Map the availability of large items of emergency equipment and facilities. Whilst many items of equipment are widely available, many museums do not know where they can access items such as large pumps, dehumidifiers, large freezing facilities and specialist items such as Archipress machines. Their availability could be mapped as part of the region-wide risk assessment; this would provide museums with a good starting point if they needed to access such facilities in an emergency.

Awareness

7.3   The report suggests that awareness of risk and emergency issues is high among sector professionals with some responsibility for the topic in their organisation, and that the top-tier of the decision-making structure in many museums or groups are aware of long-term threats and taking steps to address them. It is not clear, however, that awareness of the issues in organisations as a whole is sufficient to support emergency planning and response measures effectively. This seems especially the case for museums in larger organisations with other responsibilities, such as local authorities and national bodies. The extent to which funding bodies are aware of the issue is also unclear, as it was beyond the scope of the project.

Recommendation 4

The final report from the current project should be disseminated as widely as practical to those with a direct interest in the topic, including museums in the region and museum development teams in nearby regions; its key messages and evidence should be used to inform discussions with funding partners and policy makers. (Short term.)

Recommendation 5

Emergency matters should be given a clear presence in museum development support programmes, to raise their profile and focus more attention on them. This could include branding a strand of the overall training programme (see below), publishing a series of guest blogs on the topics, and related outward-facing steps. (Medium term.)

Skills

7.4   The effectiveness of emergency preparation and response is partly dependent on the skills available to each organisation, and the sector as a whole. Training is an effective way to boost skills, but its availability, content and take-up isn't necessarily adequate to meet the challenges museums are facing.

Recommendation 6

Museum development programmes should include emergency planning and response in their ongoing training schedules, identified as a theme in their own right. (See the network point, below.) The content of the training theme could include core topics (such as how to develop an effective emergency plan) delivered on a regular cycle, and more specialist or narrow topics (such as dealing with long-term risks through business planning, and the realities of insurance cover for museums) delivered less frequently. (Medium term.]

Recommendation 7

Consider developing a version of the three-day English Heritage and Historic England course, delivered in the north with priority access for museums in the north. The existing course held in the West Midlands is very popular: demand far exceeds supply, so the waiting list runs to 'years'. Many of those in the North West who have taken part did so a long time ago, and the pipeline of new 'graduates' to the region is very narrow. The economies of scale and increased overall capacity provided by the three museum development services in the in North offers an opportunity to develop an equivalent course for that part of the country. This could be done in partnership with English Heritage and Historic England, and could involve focusing the content to allow for delivery in two days to further increase accessibility. As well as increasing the sector's skill levels, the new course could act as a high-profile focal point to boost awareness of the topic, and to promote networking. (Medium to long term.)

Recommendation 8

Review the relevant parts of the Accreditation training to see if they can be supplemented with suggestions from the survey responses, such as reviewing plans after every emergency, not just to the Accreditation timetable. (Medium term.)

Networks

7.5   The report has found that networks in the formal sense can play an important part in boosting museums' resilience, though some functions (such as providing emergency salvage equipment) are not effective. It has also found that informal, personal networks are vital.

Recommendation 9

Brand the training programme as an 'emergency network', on the East Midlands model. Support this with a mailing list for those who have taken part in training, and open to anyone who has an interest in the topic. Encourage ongoing contact between training participants. (Medium term.)

Recommendation 10

Encourage individual museums and staff to 'network' actively, with the aim of sharing learning and building relationships with potential sources of help in emergency situations, such as neighbours, the local council, the fire service, other museums and archives. In doing so, they should be mindful of broader local civil contingencies arrangements, as in the event of an area-wide emergency (such as widespread flooding), specialists from outside the area – and even some staff – may not be able to travel. Encourage use of informal tools such as WhatsApp groups to foster speedy and flexible communication. This could be done through including the point and examples it in training content, blogs and other materials. (Medium term.)

Recommendation 11

Make the training and any other resources provided as inclusive as is practical. Museums (Accredited and otherwise), archives, libraries, freelancers and others are well placed to support each other, especially in a local context. Bringing them together will foster learning and relationships, widening potential networks. (Medium term.)

Resources

7.6   Resources are fundamental: many of the issues identified in the research have been made worse by reduced budgets and staffing levels in recent years. Given the difficult economic climate, this is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. There is also a need for access to resources of other kinds, including key items of equipment and best-practice templates.

Recommendation 12

Use the increasing evidence base to build a case to national funding bodies for greater investment in matters that will help address the risk to museum collections and buildings. This could include building maintenance, specialist staff, relevant training courses, and targeted support to help museums identified as being at greatest risk to develop solutions or mitigating measures. This could be particular effective on a pan-northern basis. (Medium to long term.)

Recommendation 13

Use the increasing evidence base to encourage museums at particular risk to allocate a greater proportion of their budget towards developing solutions, in parallel to making the case to external funders. Given the financial challenges this will not be easy, but in the case of severe risk maintaining the collections and existing access to them might be more realistic than delivering new initiatives. (Medium to long term.)

Recommendation 14

Provide online checklists, forms and templates, based on best available practice already available, including in other regions. Appendix 2 provides a starting point, but to be most useful the content should be determined by professionals with experience of the practical reality of planning for an responding to emergencies. These could be held be on the MDNW website, in a printable format. (Short to medium term.)

Appendix 1: List of direct consultees

Name	Organisation
Pierrette Squires	Bolton Museum & Galleries / NW Conservators Group
Katharine Richardson	Edinburgh University / Edinburgh Collections Response Network
Sarah Lambarth	English Heritage
Emma Dadson	Harwell Restoration
Samantha Beath	Manchester Museum
Sarah Hartshorne	Museum Development East Midlands
Ian Bapty	Museum Development North East
Kaye Hardyman	Museum Development North West
Emma Chaplin	Museum Development North West / Freelance
Olivia Basterfield	Museum Development West Midlands
Jo Bartholomew	Museum Development Yorkshire
Alan Bentley	Museum Development Yorkshire
Wiebke Cullen	National Football Museum
Gabrielle Heffernan	National Football Museum
Caroline Cotgrove	National Trust
Sara Maggs	Welsh Government, Museums, Archives & Libraries Division
Paula Martin	Yorkshire Rapid Response Network / Harewood House

Appendix 2: Resources

Author / owner	Resource	Link
Birmingham Museums Trust	Online risk assessment tool	https://www.raptonline.org.uk/welcome.asp
Climate Central	Flood risk map	https://coastal.climatecentral.org/map/9/-2.0276/53.704/?theme=sea_level_rise&map_type=year&basemap=roadmap&contiguous=true&elevation_model=best_available&forecast_year=2030&pathway=ssp3rcp70&percentile=p50&refresh=true&return_level=return_level_1&rl_model=gtsr&slr_model=ipcc_2021_med
Collections Trust	Emergency Planning for Collections	https://collectionstrust.org.uk/?s=emergency
Harwell Restoration	Organisation website	https://www.harwellrestoration.co.uk/
Henry McGhie / Curating Tomorrow, UK	Museums and Disaster Risk Reduction	https://curatingtomorrow236646048.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/museums-and-disaster-risk-reduction-2020.pdf
Henry McGhie / Curating Tomorrow, UK	Museums for Better Futures: Taking Action for Sustainable Development	https://media.churchillfellowship.org/documents/McGhie_H_Report_2020_Final_EsEknUr.pdf
Henry McGhie / Museums for Climate Action	Mobilising Museums for Climate Action	https://cdn.sanity.io/files/r8ktmtzu/production/265c8ad6d5c63bc401f642f594b33ddfbc158b5c.pdf
Historic England	Various resources	https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/emergency-and-fire/
Julie's Bicycle	Museums Environmental Framework	https://juliesbicycle.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Museums_Environmental_Framework_2017.pdf
Museum Development East Midlands	East Midlands Emergency Risk Network website	https://mdem.org.uk/emergency-risk-network/
Museum Development North East	Organisation website	https://museumdevelopmentne.org.uk/
Museum Development North West	Organisation website	https://museumdevelopmentnorthwest.wordpress.com/
Museum Development West Midlands	West Midlands Emergency Response Network website	https://mdwm.org.uk/emergency-response-network/
Museum Development Yorkshire	Organisation website	https://www.museumdevelopmentyorkshire.org.uk/
National Trust	Climate hazard map	https://national-trust.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=a44672bb34c4491a909034d0eed76583
Rapid Response Network (Yorkshire)	Rapid Response Network website, which has a resources section	http://www.rapidresponsenetwork.org.uk/
The Institute of Conservation	Various resources	https://www.icon.org.uk/