Executive Summary

The report shows that it is often not so much the floods themselves, but what comes afterwards, that people find so difficult to deal with. The research on which this report is based aimed to undertake a real-time longitudinal study to document and understand the everyday experiences of individuals following the floods of June 2007 in interaction with networks of actors and organisations, strategies of institutional support and investment in the built environment and infrastructure. It had the following objectives:

- To identify and document key dimensions of the longer term experience of flood impact and flood recovery, including health, economic and social aspects.
- To examine how resilience and vulnerability were manifest in the interaction between everyday strategies of adaptation during the flood recovery process, and modes of institutional support and the management of infrastructure and the built environment.
- To explore to what extent the recovery process entailed the development of new forms of resilience and to identify the implications for developing local level resilience for flood recovery in the future.
- To develop an archive that will be accessible for future research into other aspects of flood recovery.

The flooding which affected the city of Kingston-upon-Hull took place in June 2007. Over 110mm of rain fell during the biggest event, overwhelming the city's drainage system and resulting in widespread pluvial flooding. The floods affected over 8,600 households and one person was killed. Our research used in-depth, qualitative methods where 44 people kept weekly diaries and participated in interviews and group discussions over an 18-month period. We also carried out extensive stakeholder engagement through a project steering group, stakeholder presentations, workshops and consultation responses.

The Recovery Gap

- Key to the findings is the identification of a 'recovery gap'.
- This emerges during the longer process of recovery at the point where the legally-defined contingency arrangements provided to the community by its local authority diminish and where the less well-defined services provided by the private sector (e.g. insurance, builders *etc.*) start.
- The nature of the gap means that residents receive little effective support during this time. As a result, they must step in to coordinate the actions of the different private and public sector organizations involved. Such project management is challenging, time-consuming and stressful.

What does the flood recovery process look like?

- Determining what a flood is, what caused it and who was affected by it is not as straightforward as might be expected. The patchwork nature of the water distribution, combined with the role of 'expert' judgements in ascertaining latent water damage can pose particular problems for those experiencing damage within their homes.
- Flood recovery is a long and difficult process with no clear beginning or end point. Far from showing a steady process of improvement, it is punctuated by a distinct series of 'highs' and 'lows' which are closely tied with other issues that are going on in a person's life.
- People's experiences of recovery are also linked to the ways in which they are treated by the different companies and organizations involved in the recovery process. Many people had to cope with the double trauma that occurs when the first disaster (the flood) is compounded by a secondary disaster in the form of poor treatment from the various companies and agencies that are supposed to be helping with the recovery.
- Recovery does not end when people move back into their homes and neither do things go back to 'normal' as there are aspects of everyday life which have fundamentally changed – both for better and for worse.

What does the process of flood recovery involve?

- The recovery process involves new and often psychologically challenging kinds of physical, mental and emotional work for residents, many of whom step in to 'project manage' the repairs.
- In addition to the new work of flood recovery, everyday tasks such as washing, cooking and commuting can also become more difficult as a result of living in temporary accommodation.

- Front line workers, who helped and supported flooded residents through their job roles, played an important part in the recovery process. Workers can also be vulnerable to the impacts of flood recovery – especially if they were also dealing with their own repairs at home.

What does 'recovery' mean'?
- Flood recovery is about rebuilding a sense of home and community as residents adapt to a new and altered set of circumstances.
- People's sense of the future also changes in different ways. For some, this means fatalistic attitudes towards rain, climate change and government bodies emerging. However, others are engaging in debates about public participation in how the built environment is managed, and are developing their own 'resilience' strategies for future floods.

Suggestions for Action

Our study identified some specific ways to address the recovery gap. These are highlighted in Table 2 on p.121 of the main report and we recommend that all readers refer to this in addition to reading this summary. However, we also identified a series of broader framing issues to do with the ways in flood recovery is conceptualised and managed:

1. Developing more flexible notions of 'recovery' in formal frameworks

Our study shows that recovery is more complex than existing frameworks for recovery delivery allow. As a result, it is important to ensure that the support that is given to communities reflects their longer-term needs, priorities and timescales, rather than the shorter-term goals of the emergency planning community.

2. Developing an 'Ethic of Care'

Our research shows that there is a very clear link between how flood recovery is managed and how residents feel about – and are able to make progress with – their recovery. We propose that key deliverers of recovery work should adopt an 'ethic of care' to the householder. This will involve encouraging different companies and organizations (e.g. loss adjustors, 'disaster restoration companies', drying companies, builders etc.) to recognize the role that they play in delivering the recovery process, with associated responsibilities towards householders. Developing appropriate support for frontline workers should also be included in this 'ethic of care'.

3. Building in spare capacity and capability

This study supports the conclusions of other research on disaster management by showing the need for spare capacity and capability within institutions so that they are able to respond to the uncertainties that unfold during and after a disaster. Both capacity and capability may emerge from more informal working practices rather than those documented in protocols and job descriptions. Promoting greater flexibility in terms of both institutional roles and individual job descriptions could therefore be very beneficial. Capability and capacity also emerge through facilitating and funding a broader, community-based resilience approach, where there is cooperation between formal organisations and community groups.

4. Enabling 'collectives' and new forms of learning and engagement with policy

Our project methodology shows the importance of creating spaces where people can share their experiences in a way that enables them to learn from and support each other, and where key stakeholders can attend these events to learn from householders in a facilitated context. The process we have developed provides a potentially powerful tool for public participation in policy making.

5. Understanding and addressing vulnerability

While vulnerability may, in part, be related to pre-existing social characteristics (our study highlights particular issues associated with older people, council tenants and private renters), it is the *interaction* of these factors with the specific circumstances operating in a person's life which determines how and when they may become vulnerable. Vulnerability is therefore a dynamic process that is related to the ways in which the recovery process is managed. Thus while specific indicators such as age and disability may provide a starting point, our research suggests that it is necessary to give workers greater freedom when defining vulnerability so that they can use their knowledge to prioritise those who need help most.

6. Building resilience

Table 2 identifies key actions that could be taken to improve flood recovery. However, to build resilience for the future will require looking more fundamentally at the characteristics of contemporary social life and the vulnerabilities that society generates, at how these are manifest within our built environment and reproduced through our institutional frameworks set up to respond to floods and other disasters. We need to learn from the ways in which forms of resilience and vulnerability were created, revealed and disrupted during the flood and the recovery process. We hope this report has assisted this learning.