

Background and Context

Exercise Heron 4 was a nuclear exercise conducted in relation to the Springfield nuclear reprocessing plant on the outskirts of Preston. It was conducted in accordance with Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations (REPPiR) and the guidance document issued by the Nuclear Emergency Planning Liaison Group (NEPLG).

The Exercise was run over two days with Day 1 (4th November 2009) focussing on the response phase and Day 2 (5th November 2009) on the initial recovery process. The national guidance on recovery endorses the principle of involving the community and within that the critical role that will be played by elected members. However the role of elected members has not been tested in detail in a nuclear exercise (but see Exercise Medway – Somerset re Hinckley Point). In the planning stages for Exercise Heron, it was determined through the Exercise Management team that Exercise Heron would provide an ideal framework to examine and develop the role of elected members.

How the Topic was Handled

Ashfield Business Enterprise and Development Limited was asked by Lancashire County Council (LCC) on behalf of the Exercise Management team, to facilitate and engage with a selection of elected members from the two local authority areas (Lancashire County Council and Fylde Borough Council) together with a representative of Clifton Parish Council and the chair of the local consultative group, the Springfield Site Stakeholder Group.

The selected elected members (7 in total), together with three LCC District Partnership Officers, were briefed in advance of the exercise. This briefing covered the principles of nuclear planning, and the response and recovery phases with details of the national template and the role of the community and elected members.

On Day 1 (the response phase), the elected members observed the latter part of the day. As part of the operational "play", a Recovery Co-ordinating Group (RCG) had been formed chaired by Lancashire County Council supported by Fylde Borough Council. At the close of the operational phase the elected members sat in on the standard hot debrief. Following this, to close the first day, there was a facilitated discussion, led by Ashfield Business Enterprise and Development Limited, with the elected members, members of the SCRG and the staff officer to the Police Gold Commander.

(The overall purpose of these briefings was to give elected members an overview of the background to nuclear emergencies and their anticipated role in the recovery phase)

Day 2 (the recovery day) was structured around the RCG and a number of key sub-groups set out diagrammatically below:



The time frame of the day was meant to replicate the first day of the recovery phase following the hand over at the close of the response phase. At the beginning of the day a full situation report was delivered to bring all participants up to date on the decisions of the response day and the prevailing circumstances at the start of the recovery phase. This briefing included a BBC News report (as a breakfast report for that day) press reports, maps and briefings from Health Protection Agency, effect of radiation etc..

Elected members were placed within the various sub-groups and contributed to the discussions surrounding the various injects/tasks. (It should be noted that whilst elected members worked with sub-groups, they did not form part of the RCG but did observe it working).

The injects were designed to generate discussion around the formulation of the initial key objectives, bearing in mind that this was the first day of the recovery phase. Some 70 people were involved in the exercise which ran from 9.30am to 4pm and concluded with a hot debrief followed by a formal de-brief meeting some three weeks later. Organisations represented included Environment Agency, HSE (NII), Food Standards Agency, GONW (Regional Resilience Team), in addition to a range of local LRF members.

The actual expenditure for the recovery exercise was in excess of £5K relating to room hire, refreshments, consultant fee and preparation of briefing materials. In addition are the staff costs running over some nine months of planning, delivery and de-brief.

Lessons Identified

A separate report on the role of elected members in the recovery stage of emergency incidents has been prepared by Ashfield Business Enterprise and Development Limited along with the formal de-brief report by the

exercise management team on the whole of the recovery exercise. The points below summarise key elements.

- Involving elected members in the exercise made everything "very real"; their input benefited the group and gave reality checks.
- Elected members are a vital resource to both help shape the recovery process and disseminate to the local communities
- Party politics were placed on hold – energy was focused on developing/delivering the recovery process. The different levels of representation (i.e. Parish, District and County Council) did not hinder the process.
- Recognising that there is a generic structure for the recovery process and that elected members are limited in number, the exercise raised the issue of where they should "sit" in the structure
- Involving elected members raised the issue about the sign-off of the RCG policy – is it at officer level or by elected members?
- The expectation that elected members will be used at some level in the recovery process raises the issue of their familiarity with not only the recovery process but the wider context of emergency planning. In summary, a need to identify :
 - their roles and responsibilities (terms of reference)
 - which members may be involved
 - briefing templates available in advance
 - consideration of training/exercising including media work

Summary: The use of elected members confirmed the approach that they have a valuable role to play in the recovery process (from all major incidents not just nuclear emergencies). If that role is to be delivered effectively, it needs to be incorporated into the planning phase by determining the mutually agreed guidelines.

Contacts for Further Information

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Additional Documents

- [Exercise Heron 4 Management Brief](#)
- [Environment Agency observations on Exercise Heron 4](#)