

Background and Context

In 2008, North Wales Resilience Forum (NWRF) members agreed that it was necessary to develop and hold a strategic level, table-top multi-agency recovery exercise. The exercise was required to provide an opportunity to explore interagency recovery issues and consider the welfare and economic issues that arise when dealing with the recovery to a major incident. Additionally, such an exercise provided a development opportunity for those who are required to operate at this level in an emergency but had not previously had the opportunity to do so.

Exercise 'Watertight II' was developed as follow-on from Exercise Watertight I which covered the response to a flood event in North Wales. Several entries ranked as 'Very High' on the NWRF Community Risk Register are flooding scenarios and as such, it was appropriate to use flooding again as the basis .

How the Topic was Handled

The aim of the exercise was:

'To explore interagency recovery issues and consider the welfare and economic issues that would arise when dealing with the recovery to a major incident.'

The objectives of the exercise were to;

- Test the lessons identified from Exercise Watertight I, where applicable, have been implemented;
- Test elements of the NWRF Multi-Agency Plan – Flooding;
- Test and explore recovery issues in response to an emergency in North Wales;
- Explore the relationship between the Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) and Recovery Co-ordinating Group (RCG);
- Exercise the handover procedure from response to recovery;
- Test the longer-term use of voluntary agencies and their transition from providers of short-term food and support to mid-term support;
- Identify future planning, training and exercising needs;
- To demonstrate the potential of visualisation tools to aid the response to an incident.

Two main groups (Strategic Co-ordination Group and Recovery Co-ordinating Group) and five Recovery Co-ordinating Sub Groups (Business & Economic Recovery; Finance & Legal; Environment & Infrastructure; Health & Welfare; Communications) were created to plan an effective multi-agency recovery strategy following a major flood incident and the exercise provided the first opportunity for the Recovery Co-ordinating Group to practice its role as set out in the North Wales Multi-Agency Recovery Guidance. Two scenarios were presented to the exercise participants; Scenario 1 – The Aftermath, 3 days after the event and Scenario 2 – The Handover, 2 weeks after the event with each of the Subgroups having their own specific update to work with.

The exercise involved 74 participants and observers all from various responding agencies throughout Wales including representation from the Emergency Services, Local Authorities, Military, Welsh Assembly Government, Environment Agency, Category 2 responders and the Voluntary Sector.

Following the Exercise, all participants engaged in a structured debrief, where they were given the opportunity to share and discuss their ideas for dealing with the recovery of flood events in North Wales. This led to a Post-Exercise Report which contained a number of recommendations for NWRF to consider. Lessons learnt were subsequently shared across Wales via the Wales Flood Group and Wales Utilities Group.

Additionally, on November 12th 2009, NWRF held a seminar which looked at the Legal aspects of response and recovery – based on observations made during the exercise day.

Exercise Watertight II was funded by Environment Agency Wales and coordinated by a third party provider.

Lessons Identified

Good practice was noted throughout the exercise; some examples include the early implementation of the RCG, the continued logging of actions throughout the day, and the implementation of recovery plans.

The arrangements set out in the NWRF Recovery Guidance (which is based on the National Recovery Guidance) were generally found to be effective but with some scope for improvement of the processes and structures, for example:

- The need to avoid duplication of effort between the SCG and RCG during the transition from response to recovery.
- Greater clarity is needed about who decides when the RCG takes over responsibility. Does the RCG or the SCG lead the handover process?
- The RCG need to lead the development of recovery action plans by setting strategic objectives and realistic timescales for the various recovery sub groups.
- It was difficult for a separate communications sub-group to coordinate a single consistent message from the four recovery sub-groups and the RCG.
- Several participants identified the need for members of each group to have sufficient authority and technical knowledge to make appropriate decisions.

The Recovery Task Group under the NWRF structure has been responsible for reviewing the arrangements in place in NWRF following the recommendations set out in the Debrief Report.

The exercise demonstrated a good multi-agency working relationship in North Wales. Participants noted that it is vital to allow group members the opportunity to share their knowledge and expertise in similar future

training events as there are a large number of different organisations involved during the recovery.

Contacts for Further Information

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Additional Documents

- [Post exercise report](#)
- [Exercise planning document](#)