

Background and Context

In May 2005, Sunderland City Council initiated a partnership community cohesion exercise, with the objective of ensuring that the city would be prepared for the impact on the community cohesion of Sunderland of a terrorist attack elsewhere in the UK.

How the Topic was Handled

The exercise, funded by the Home Office, was facilitated by Mediation Northern Ireland, and involved all local strategic partners involved in promoting cohesion in Sunderland, together with representatives of central and regional Government, the media, and the IDeA. Each participant role played, and outlined actions to take as the scenario heightened, and the implications for communities were presented.

The confidential report of the exercise was received from Mediation Northern Ireland in late June. It provided a thorough account of the proceedings, including an analysis of roles and responsibilities, challenges to cohesion, strengths, gaps and shortcomings, and key concerns. It recommended that relevant strategic partners give due consideration to the findings.

Following receipt of the report of the exercise, it had been the intention of the council to produce a summary of action required. Unfortunately, on 7 July 2005, the terrorist incidents in London resulted in plans and procedures being implemented and tested for real. The community cohesion exercise held on 13 May proved to be timely. As partners had so recently discussed the city's response to a terrorist attack elsewhere in the UK, Sunderland was relatively well prepared for the events on 7 July.

As a follow-up to the 13 May exercise, a meeting of the North East Regional Media Emergency Forum had been held on Monday 21 June, in order to consider arrangements for joint statements, pre-preparation of important messages giving public information and reassurance. The city and region's communicators were therefore also fairly prepared for the real events, having given recent consideration to the key issues.

Lessons Identified

The planning for real exercise highlighted a number of important lessons that will be addressed by the partner agencies in revising their cohesion contingency plans.

Contacts for Further Information

Communities and Local Government