

Background and Context

On 7 December 2006, a tornado struck a $\frac{3}{4}$ square mile residential area in the London Borough of Brent. Lasting just one minute, but with winds of 130-160mph, there was large scale damage to property, infrastructure, street furniture and trees.

One casualty sustained minor injuries and was treated by the London Ambulance Service before being taken to hospital for treatment. No fatalities were sustained.

The event was declared by the London Fire Brigade as a 'Major Incident' as defined by the London Emergency Services Liaison Panel Procedure Manual. The Metropolitan Police Service established a safety cordon around the affected area, with a Joint Emergency Services Co-ordination Centre (JESCC) setup in a nearby Church. Joint management of the incident by the emergency services was conducted from this Centre, with tactical commanders from each agency conducting regular meetings throughout the response on the first day and recovery phase in the following week.

The London Fire Brigade chaired meetings at the JESCC on the first day as they managed the response phase. Meetings over following days were chaired by the Local Authority Liaison Officer from Brent Council who supervised the joint management of the recovery phase.

Specialist Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) officers from the London Fire Brigade searched properties in teams to locate casualties. Brent Council Building Surveyors were deployed with each USAR team in order to immediately assess the safety of structures within the affected area.

A Reception Centre was set up nearby in order to triage residents and their immediate requirements. This was tailored to the extent to which their property had been affected. This Reception Centre also provided controlled access by the media to residents and a single point of contact for residents requiring council services.

Over the course of the incident, from response to recovery, approximately £700,000 in total costs were incurred by the emergency services and local authority.

How the Topic was Handled

- Over 200 properties were affected, some of which were uninhabitable.
- Cordon access to residents, insurance assessors, loss adjustors, contractors was managed by the Metropolitan Police with Council Town Centre Wardens escorting visitors to specific addresses.
- The Council set up and maintained an Emergency Office in a church adjacent to the incident site, in order that the public had a 'one stop shop' for advice, assistance and information. Leaflets were distributed on an ad-hoc basis to all residents in the affected area

to inform them of future meetings, general advice in dealing with insurers, builders, waste removal and parking.

- Daily public meetings were chaired by the Local Authority and held at a local Church (in which the Emergency Office was situated) in order that the public and media could be given up to date information throughout the recovery phase.
- The immediate clean up of the highways within the cordoned area was complete within 24 hours. The Council provided tailored refuse collection over 4 weeks to enable waste removal from private properties beyond normal services. The provision of skips to residents was initially considered but discounted as contractors may have used this resource.
- The Local Authority approached central government via the London Resilience Team to ascertain whether central government funding for recovery work was available.
- A 'Gold' Strategic Recovery Group was set up by the Council on the first day. This group was chaired by a Director with both line management control of most of the deployed council units and the seniority to set a strategic direction for the council recovery. Instances where an insurer was not acting quickly to assist a resident were brought to the Recovery Group and where necessary, senior management from the insurance company were approached.
- The Council established and maintained an Emergency Control Centre over 4 days (peak time fully staffed, minimal overnight staffing) in order to co-ordinate the on scene recovery work, Council resources, media liaison and lines of communication to the Strategic Recovery Group.

Lessons Identified

- Engagement with the Association of British Insurers at the early stage of the incident ensured that Insurers were made aware of the scale and nature of the incident.
- Uninsured residents become especially vulnerable and rely on local authority assistance, voluntary contributions, friends and family in the immediate aftermath of an incident.
- A multi-agency 'Gold' Recovery Group may be useful in tackling strategic issues in a joint context, rather than at the tactical level between Commanders at the scene.
- Some insurers acted very quickly to re-house residents, make safe and secure properties, and conduct immediate remedial works. Other insurance companies were slow to assist and contractors were deployed slowly and without due consideration for health and safety.
- Registration of affected properties should be completed using Information Technology systems in order that information can be accessed by a number of departments at a later date, for example, Building Control surveyors, Housing officers.

Contacts for Further Information

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