

Telecommunications Sub-Groups' Workshop – Birmingham, 8 September 2009

A note on the afternoon break-out session

Many thanks to all delegates for taking part in the discussion groups that came together on the afternoon of our Birmingham workshop. These have been and will remain a fixed part of CCS's national telecoms events as they provide us all with very valuable feedback on what we are doing in building telecoms resilience.

At the end of this note is a table of recorded comments and suggestions; there were many others that more or less touched on the same issues. For the purpose of this short analysis we have chosen to look at what emerged from the groups under a few key themes:

1. the tools
2. the work of TSGs and their plans
3. the question of support

The tools

Alongside recognition that technical options sat alongside rather than overrode others ('satphones still valuable even with HITS' / 'pagers still a useful tool'), was a progressive sense that it was necessary to consider more angles than simply purchase or installation of kit or choosing the latest available at the expense of good current solutions. The **compatibility of systems** - e.g. Globalstar and Iridium - set up by partner responders needed to be borne in mind, as did the important issue of **service provider diversity**: did local organisations buy from a healthy range of telecommunications companies or were local eggs in just one or two baskets?

There was diversity of use was also picked out as good practice, for example the routine use of 'emergency' equipment such as HITS, was highlighted as sensible aid to familiarisation and to keeping kit in good working order.

It is, of course, widely agreed that the building of a fall-back capability requires resources and the point was raised more than once that this was a difficulty that was always present. Yet it was also pointed out that things could be done to, at least, in part get around some of the financial issues. Among these were the local adoption of funded arrangements like IBIS, the local promotion of cost-neutral schemes such as MTPAS, and consideration of agreements with the voluntary sector partner RAYNET. Mutual aid protocols with neighbouring LRFs for the possible lending of equipment in non-wide area emergencies was also put forward as an option well worth considering. This last measure also falling into the theme of support activities discussed below.

Exercising was also raised, with delegates saying that telecoms should be a part of all local exercises, for example, the activation of MTPAS and even use of the HITS transportables, which could be deployed at a pre-planned event subject to negotiation with CCS and Paradigm.

The work of TSGs and their plans

The evolving Terms of Reference for the Groups, some felt, needed to be matched with a new level of authority, which would also help with attracting new members and gaining support and resources from member organisations.

At present, as a sub-group of the Local Resilience Forum, the TSGs take their authority to exist, meet, and progress work from the LRF. As the guidance document states:

The legal powers and responsibilities that the TSG or any sub-group has reside in the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) duty-holders who are its members.

Delegates are aware that a project examining collaborative working under the CCA, including the legal status of LRFs, is currently running as part of the CCA Enhancement Programme. A consultation paper is due to be published in the autumn.

It was suggested that the TSGs should have been formally consulted before the guidance document was published, especially in relation to their terms of reference. The guidance was however produced partly in response to requests for such a document and sought to incorporate, as far as possible, stakeholder comments and ideas that had been communicated to the Resilient Telecoms Programme Team over the past months. Furthermore, the document's status on the Cabinet Office website was as a living document that would be revised as necessary. Its pages carried an invitation for practitioner suggestions to be sent in to the Team at any time.

The very nature of the plan came up. Was it or was it not a plan? If a plan, was it a plan to improve resilience locally or to respond to an emergency or both? (Answer: it's probably both.) Was a separate plan needed if the local generic multi-agency plan covered the telecoms angle? (Answer: perhaps not if emergency planners were fully confident that the plan was fit for purpose.)

However, following previous advice from CCS, most TSGs have decided that a local telecoms plan – that is, a document that considered not simply the who-what-how of telecommunications in an emergency, which might be covered in the generic multi-agency response plan, but also the question of whether current arrangements were all that they should be, and what to do to alter this situation if not, and which could grow into a body of knowledge of cross-LRF telecoms matters, was worth creating. Also that once created it would have a valuable place alongside other local plans, including having a positive impact on organisations' individual business continuity plans.

Some suggested elements of the plan were well-received, for example the use of an options table that gave quick information on the pros and cons of different technical options, and the addition of a glossary for non-techies.

The question of support

CCS's recent request for draft plans to be shared with it was raised. It was explained that this was not to produce a league table or to criticise work undertaken so far, but to allow for a national picture of where everyone was with this work to emerge and also to enable the centre to think about how some use of peer support might be

arranged. Some plans had been sent in, but there was still an absence of knowledge about how matters were progressing in many areas.

In terms of plan sharing on a general scale, this would have to await the NRE, however through events like the workshop and regional meetings TSGs were naturally at liberty to approach others for a sight of their plans and advice on the work needed. The explanatory matrix of 'tools in the box' was an example of something that could be shared not only as an idea but as a technical piece, after all what would be the point of each TSG producing its own boiled down appreciation of satellite phones or airwave?

The issue of bringing RAYNET into local arrangements was, while essentially a local decision, something that CCS would provide support with through engagement with the organisation nationally to gain a better understanding of its capabilities. The outcome of this action would be included in a future version of the TSG guidance document.

Some of the key comments

TSG Plans/Guidance	Working together/ support	Diversity of tools
Need for some development of TSG authority to match increasing workload	Plan sharing between TSGs would be helpful	HITS -Transportables can be used for exercise with CCS-Paradigm approval
Should include non-tech guide	Satphones/NRE - National Directory for NRE	HITS - calls to other networks are chargeable
ToRs were not consulted on published guidance	Central co-ordination, promotion of Airwave	HITS - Police Forces should ensure staff training in use of the boxed kits and that staff are always available to deploy it.
Matrix is a very useful tool for analysis	Greater awareness of RAYNET needed – pros (capabilities, equipment) and cons (availability, volunteer status)	Satphones - still valuable even with HITS
Is a plan necessary if all elements of response and prep are covered (e.g. in other plans)?	Why have plans been called in recently by CCS?	Satphones - check which responders have which systems for compatability (e.g. police have Globalstar, EA have Iridium)
Is it properly defined as a plan or is it something else?		Satphones - Lincs LRF has recommended that all responders have minimum of 1 Iridium/BGAN
Need for technical		Satphones –

specialists to deliver appreciations of tools in the box – analysis must be accurate		regularly check that they work
Must be subject to exercise to know that it will work		General - Resource issues are likely to always be important in capability building decisions
SOPs should include agreements on fixed frequencies		Company diversity should also be addressed – e.g. not all contracted to BT, O2 etc
Telecoms to be a part of all local exercises (e.g. MTPAS)		
TSGs to promote organisations BCPs		
Speed sheets are useful for understanding technical capability (best practice element)		

Going forward

CCS would welcome ideas for content and venues of future workshops. Finally, to return to the matter of local telecoms plans, we would appreciate an email from each Chair either attaching their plan, or providing word on the current situation. Those who have already sent copies or told us about their planning arrangements can excuse themselves from this action, otherwise please email Telecommunications.Subgroups@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk And if you think talking through some of the issues with colleagues who have produced plans would be beneficial to you, let us know, and we will try to arrange this.

Resilient Telecommunications Programme Team
Cabinet Office
October 2009