



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government



# Local authorities' preparedness for civil emergencies

A good practice guide for Chief Executives



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# Foreword

I want to express my thanks to colleagues in local government for their dedication and hard work, in supporting their communities through the unprecedented events of the last two years. I have witnessed myself the hard work of individuals responding to emergencies, such as Storms Desmond and Eva and the Winter Hill moor fires. Local government plays a crucial role in responding to emergencies and helping your communities recover from them. The actions of local government have a direct impact on the handling of emergencies and your work has long term impacts as you support the community to recover. In many cases the recovery from these tragic incidents remains on-going and I know that you are working hard to be as prepared as possible for the future. The range of emergencies that you may be required to respond to is hugely varied, as demonstrated by events in Salisbury and Amesbury, and the preparedness and responsiveness of local authorities to respond to these events is vital.

My department has worked closely with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (Solace) and senior officers to refresh this guide. Our aim remains to support chief executives and other responsible officers to have the best possible preparations in place to assist their communities in response to all types of civil emergencies. I hope this guide will also prove useful for council leaders and members, although there are other guides for that audience too. This guide outlines duties set out in legislation, references guidance for further information and draws on local chief officer experience. I would like to thank Solace for their on-going support, working to strengthen local places.

**Jake Berry MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government**

The nature of the emergencies we face is becoming increasingly varied and complex. Local government has been involved in responding to several incidents which have proven difficult to pre-empt, challenging to respond to and severe in their impact on our communities; terror attacks in London and Manchester, the use of nerve agent in Salisbury and the devastating fire at Grenfell Tower have tested the resolve of our communities and reminded us all of the importance of local authority leadership in times of crisis. Communities expect their local authorities to be visible and to provide leadership. As such, local authorities have a critical role to play in emergencies, from the initial response through the recovery stage, to the return to normality. We must be prepared, understand our own capabilities and be ready to lead through unexpected incidents at the drop of a hat. It is not just the type of incident that is changing, but how we respond to and manage an incident is changing too with greater emphasis on mutual aid, and the challenges and benefits of social media.

This guide is not intended to be prescriptive, but will instead illustrate the principles of resilience and allow you to think through preparation in your own area. Although the challenges posed by civil emergencies differ across our localities, our priorities remain the same: above all we must respond swiftly and effectively, working with and for our communities. In so doing we must always be ready to provide reassurance, confidence, and ensure that the network of support needed in times of trauma and difficulty is in place, for as long as it is needed.

**Stephen Baker, Chief Executive for Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils and Solace spokesperson for Civil Resilience and Community Safety**

# Introduction

When emergencies happen the public expect local authorities and other organisations to be prepared to respond quickly and effectively to meet the urgent needs of affected local communities. Experience tells us that the public, the media and government have high expectations for public services to be maintained whatever the circumstances. Local authorities are seen as the fourth emergency service. They are expected to protect, advise and provide humanitarian assistance, even outside of normal working hours. Incidents such as the Manchester Arena bombing and the Grenfell Tower fire have shown how critical the local authority role is, particularly in community leadership and recovery. Local authorities don't have a uniformed division standing by to attend emergencies, but they must be ready to respond when emergencies happen.

How can local authorities make best use of their resources during an emergency and in its aftermath? How can they best support their communities and maintain delivery of their own services? Assessing local risk, planning for emergencies with the right partners, making use of new technology, and using information to build local authority capability and capacity will increase preparedness and will help to reduce, control or mitigate the effect of an emergency and enable a speedier recovery. Chief executives have a critical role in ensuring their authority is prepared for civil emergencies. Their visible leadership across their own councils, supporting other councils and in working with other organisations enables effective emergency planning for response and recovery.

This guide has been written to support chief executives and their senior management team so they can assure themselves and their local resilience forum (LRF) that their authority is well prepared. We hope the explanation of local authority duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and sharing local authority experiences give chief executives and their team what they need. An executive summary outlines strategic considerations on page six.

# Executive summary

## Civil emergencies: are you ready?

Local authority chief executive officers are responsible for ensuring the local authority complies with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and that the local authority continues to perform its functions. The following questions support chief executive officers to assure themselves that their local authority resilience arrangements are robust:

1. Is it clear to your residents how they can contact the local authority in an emergency, during a normal working day and out of hours (including on a bank holiday)?
2. Do you have clear communication plans to effectively communicate local risk to your communities and to warn and inform residents, businesses and tourists or visitors before, during and after an emergency?
3. Are you confident that your senior staff and local councillors understand, and are clear about the roles they might need to undertake in an emergency, both for the local authority and as a senior officer within a strategic response or recovery coordinating group? Do you review training arrangements regularly to ensure that all newly elected members and staff with a response role are suitably trained to undertake their duties?
4. Are your emergency plans, systems and procedures regularly tested to ensure they are fit for purpose and up to date? Do they address local risk and resilience standards? Do they describe how to maintain essential services, ensure business continuity and contain agreements with other local authorities to support you in a crisis?
5. Are you confident that your contractors and their supply chains understand the civil resilience risks for your area and have robust business continuity arrangements, especially for services for which your council has a statutory duty?
6. Are you confident your local authority is effectively fulfilling its role and responsibility within the LRF? Is the local authority role accurately described within multi-agency emergency plans? Does your authority stand ready to deliver it?
7. Are you confident that you have adequate resourcing plans in place, particularly to cover short or no notice emergency incidents and holiday periods, for a sustained duration?
8. Do you know where you could have gaps in your emergency response and recovery capabilities, including expertise and assets and do you know if and how you would request mutual aid from other organisations (including the military)?
9. Are you confident you can assess the full impact of an emergency, ensuring community needs are addressed? Are you ready to lead and report on the coordinated recovery effort to other organisations, including government? Are you prepared to deliver flood recovery funding if the framework is activated?

# The role of local authorities in civil resilience

Chief executives and senior leaders play a crucial role in civil resilience and must ensure their councils are adequately prepared for emergencies. They must stand ready to provide leadership when responding to emergencies and in recovering from them. The Civil Contingencies Act 2004, 'the Act', is the legal framework that sets out roles and responsibilities of emergency responders in England and Wales. All principal local authorities are category 1 responders under the Act. As such, they are, alongside the emergency services, some health bodies and the Environment Agency, subject to the full set of civil protection duties in the Act.

The Act provides a basic framework defining what tasks must be performed and how organisations can co-operate. Local responders work to a common national framework, and make their own decisions according to local circumstances and priorities. This allows local responders to develop plans and make arrangements that are appropriate in their areas to deliver their duties under the Act. They are required to:

- assess the risk of emergencies occurring and use this to inform contingency planning
- put in place emergency plans
- put in place business continuity management arrangements
- put in place arrangements to make information available to the public about civil protection and maintain arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public in the event of an emergency
- share information with other local responders to enhance co-ordination
- co-operate with other local responders to enhance co-ordination and efficiency
- (local authorities only) provide advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about business continuity management

Under the Act, an emergency is defined as an event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare in a place in the United Kingdom, the environment of a place in the UK, or war or terrorism which threatens serious damage to the security of the UK<sup>1</sup>.

As a category 1 responder, a local authority must perform its duties under the Act where the emergency is likely to seriously obstruct its ability to perform its functions, or where it considers it necessary or desirable to act to prevent, reduce, control, or mitigate the emergency's effects, or otherwise take action, and would be unable to act without changing the deployment of its resources or acquiring additional resources. [More information on the Act can be found here.](#)

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<sup>1</sup> [Civil Contingencies Act 2004 Part 1 section 1 \(1\)](#)

# What does preparedness for civil emergencies look like?

## 1) A prepared local authority plans for emergencies (including business continuity)

Local authorities should have clear emergency response and business continuity plans that set out how they will mobilise their resources to respond to emergencies and what services (routine and critical) they will maintain in an emergency. The Act requires category 1 responders to maintain plans:

- to ensure that they can continue to exercise their functions in the event of an emergency. The duty relates to all functions, not just emergency response functions<sup>2</sup>
- for preventing emergencies and reducing, controlling or mitigating the effects of emergencies in the response and, or recovery phases. Procedures should be put in place to ensure that the plan is reviewed periodically and kept up to date<sup>3</sup>

Skilled and competent emergency planners prepare local authority emergency plans to reduce, control or mitigate the effects of emergencies. However, it is the role of senior leaders to be assured that those plans are embedded throughout the organisation and will be effective when needed. This is essential where local authorities share emergency planning teams or where the emergency planning function has been contracted out. Plans should be flexible enough to allow staffing numbers to be scaled up or down. This will enable authorities to resource a response directed by a strategic coordinating group (SCG) or a recovery coordinating group (RCG). Plans should be clear about what operational support the local authority will put in place for different emergencies, and how this can be activated in and out of business hours.

Plans or elements within plans need to be visible to those that need to engage with them. For example, the local authority response may involve support from other agencies including other local authorities, the voluntary and community sector or spontaneous volunteers. Plans must be clear about how this support will be activated and managed. This support could include on the ground community alerting, for example, door knocking, checking on vulnerable residents, operating rest centres and providing on-going welfare support for people directly affected by emergencies.

National resilience standards along with British and international standards provide planners with good and leading practice information whilst offering assurance criteria to senior leaders within resilience organisations. Many local authorities undertake resilience peer reviews to encourage continuous improvement, whilst London local authorities have developed their own set of resilience standards.

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<sup>2</sup> [Emergency Preparedness Chapter 6: paragraphs 6.1 -6.13: paragraphs 6.1 -6.13](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Emergency Preparedness Chapter 5: paragraphs 5.15-20, 5.34-36, and 5.41-44](#)

## **Leeds City Council reviewed London local government's collective resilience arrangements in Autumn 2017**

The review...

'provided insight about how important it is that our plans for preparedness and response are accessible to everyone who may be needed to prepare, respond and recover from situations, not just to those who have a professional day to day responsibility'

'it was a good reminder for me [as a chief executive] to have a regular catch up with our resilience team, to ensure we are training and exercising enough, and that as chief executive officers we are creating the right context for effective mutual aid and sharing of lessons from incidents'

**Tom Riordan, Chief Executive, Leeds City Council**

## **John Barradell, Chief Executive of the City of London, called for the review**

'I found the process to be a valuable opportunity to gain impartial and insightful feedback from colleagues with expertise and a demonstrable track record in emergency preparedness.'

'The discussion and challenge we received was helpful and relevant, owing, in large part, to the reviewers' understanding of the context, their knowledge of the partnership and what it is seeking to achieve, as well as the challenges faced at the local level.'

'The speed with which the review took place also allowed for early adoption of its recommendations, providing assurance for both members and wider stakeholders.'

**John Barradell, Chief Executive, Corporation of the City of London**

## **Business continuity within local authorities**

Local authorities should have business continuity plans for business critical functions and essential services (including digital systems and communications) which they should exercise on a regular basis.<sup>4</sup> The local authority should be satisfied that robust business continuity plans are in place for the services the authority delivers, as well as contracted

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<sup>4</sup> [Emergency Preparedness Chapter 6: paragraph 6.22](#)

out services. Where a service is contracted out, the local authority retains the legal responsibility to ensure that service can be delivered.

Service commissioners should assure themselves that a service can be delivered in the face of any risk that has the potential to cause disruption to normal operations (including IT disruption) and availability of staff, buildings and equipment. For example:

- insert business continuity clauses into contracts and audit contractor preparedness
- consider building 'all-risk resilience' into contracts (for example, how to ensure domiciliary care is delivered during petrol shortages or severe disruption to transport networks)
- ensure data collection processes between the authority and contractor are clear and agreed. This will quickly establish the impacts of an emergency from a longer or disparate delivery chain (for example, delivery of urgent home medical equipment)
- ensure plans are in place to resource the statutory duty that the public body retains even if the contractor fails or exits the contract early or the contractor's business continuity fails
- ensure business continuity plans reflect business continuity standards

A more detailed checklist on dealing with emergencies for commissioners of public services is available at Annex A.

## 2) A prepared local authority understands its own capabilities to respond to an emergency and how it could access, or provide, mutual aid

It is not unusual for an emergency to stretch the capacity of the responding council and support from neighbours can be essential. A local authority should understand what resources, people and assets it has and what it may need to draw on from other councils, or other organisations, either in response to an emergency, or when recovering from one. Emergency plans should include workable and tested mechanisms for how mutual aid can be requested or offered between councils as well as how to activate mutual aid from other local or national organisations, including the military and the voluntary sector.

Mutual aid may be required in order to:

- staff reception centres and man helplines providing welfare support
- provide alternative accommodation for council operations or services
- provide equipment to protect council or other property
- enhance storage or improve signage
- survey damaged buildings or other structures and infrastructure
- staff the response or recovery structure

Most local authorities have mutual aid protocols in place with neighbouring and non-neighbouring councils. This allows mutual aid to be offered or provided from authorities that are unlikely to be subject to the same emergency. Regular training and exercising of mutual aid protocols is essential for quick, effective activation when it's really needed.

### **Mutual aid considerations:**

- gain a shared understanding of the authorisation process in advance
- be specific about the outcome to be achieved and be clear about the resources (people and assets) that are needed
- gain local leadership support for providing mutual aid early
- estimate the duration of mutual aid and backfilling
- effectively coordinate mutual aid between sending and receiving authorities
- discuss mutual aid with the local government association and other organisations within the SCG or RCG, including the voluntary sector and with the government liaison officer
- requesting that authorities ensure their staff work alongside incoming staff from other councils to transfer local knowledge
- keep good records of the mutual aid sent and received to allow the correct attribution of costs
- monitor staff welfare and assess health and safety
- monitor service delivery impacts and the effectiveness of business continuity plans
- encourage staff development and skill building to increase sector resilience

### **Stuart Love, Chief Executive, Westminster City Council: sending mutual aid**

During a recent incident, Westminster City Council (WCC) set up their internal command structure to coordinate providing mutual aid. They provided:

- mortuary functions (previously identified in emergency plans) and activated a mortuary plan
- accommodation to contain the local authority response structure

Once a formal request for mutual aid was agreed, one whole floor of a WCC building was dedicated to supporting the response and recovery period for four weeks. WCC provided up to 150 staff members, ranging from executive directors to administrative support. They undertook a variety of roles including:

- core staffing and management of the emergency coordination centre
- strategic and tactical command roles
- emergency planning officers
- local authority liaison officers
- housing officers
- humanitarian assistance and welfare
- communications
- mortuary officers and technicians
- finance
- community engagement
- ICT support (installing 35 network connections, solutions and distributing laptops within twelve hours)
- support and administration
- vehicles and equipment
- financial assistance to support the response, including providing cash payments to those affected.

Effective coordination of mutual aid at the giving and receiving boroughs was essential and providing significant numbers of resources and office space to the response instigated the activation of Westminster's business continuity plan. Service impacts were monitored and overseen by the chief executive. Daily business continuity reports were provided to ensure that critical business as usual activity was maintained and that there was adequate resilience within the council in the event of a further incident occurring.

### 3) A prepared local authority trains and exercises

Local authorities should have fully exercised and tested plans and capabilities to respond to an emergency. They should also exercise their own business continuity plans (business critical and service delivery) regularly.<sup>5</sup> Regular training and exercising (of people and plans) builds confidence and competence to enable robust delivery of the local authority role whether it's delivered in response or recovery.

There are a wide range of training providers in the resilience field, including those delivered by the LRF and the emergency planning college. The Local Government Association also provided specific resilience training for councillors.

Local authority chief officers will want to consider:

- MAGIC (multi-agency gold incident commander) training. The course provides training for senior leaders across all resilience organisations. It helps chief executives and their teams understand the complexities of the SCG and, crucially, practise it in a multi-agency environment
- media handling in a crisis
- introductory chief officer training provided by MHCLG. MHCLG resilience advisers are also available to support local authority senior officer training
- the emergency planning college course for chief executives to understand their role in civil protection

'The MAGIC course is excellent for senior local authority officers who are either new to the world of emergency planning or who need a refresher. The course is an excellent opportunity to learn through hands on training and to establish relationships with people who you may find yourself working alongside in the event of a major incident.'

**Stuart Love, Chief Executive, Westminster City Council**

'The opportunity to get to know colleagues from across the LRF during training and exercising has proved invaluable. When faced with a 'real life' event, levels of trust and confidence in each other are already in place'

'Executive members learn about their vital role in communicating with and maintaining confidence in their communities. Their community leadership role is vital.'

**Amanda Deeks, Chief Executive, South Gloucestershire Council**

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<sup>5</sup> [Emergency Preparedness Chapter 6: paragraph 6.22](#)

Local authorities should satisfy themselves that training delivered to local authority staff fully supports national resilience standards. Joint training and exercising with other local authorities and other organisations, within a LRF or with other LRFs will encourage shared learning, support continuous learning and make effective use of joint training budgets and staff time. The joint organisational learning tool, available to all emergency responders, provides a consistent and accountable mechanism to ensure lessons identified are suitably addressed and become learned.

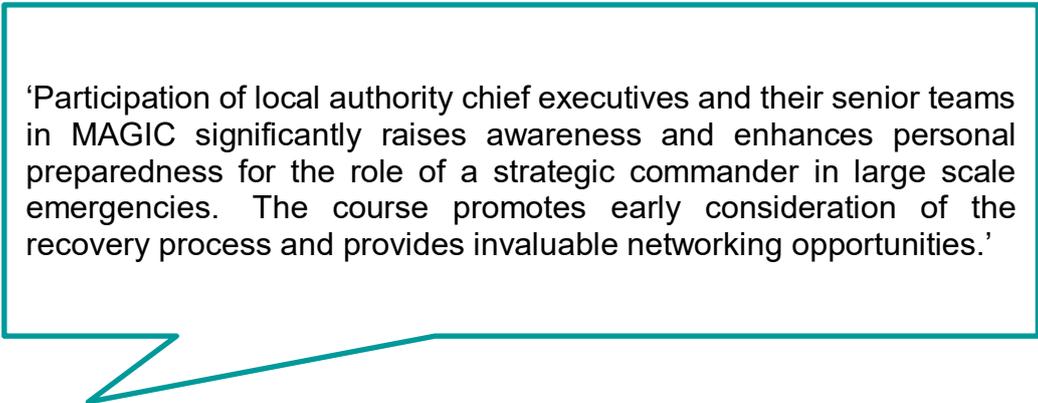
Local authorities are expected to manage the humanitarian aspects during emergencies. This requires staff at all levels to be effectively trained to deal sensitively with victims and survivors, including their friends and family. Training and exercising reserves and volunteers builds a further level of resilience in the event of concurrent or long duration incidents.

Training should:

- be based on the organisation's response plans and procedures
- take account of nationally recognised best practice
- prepare responders for the roles they will undertake and the tools and resources they will need to use
- take place frequently enough so that responders can undertake their role with competence and confidence
- address all roles within plans including senior leaders (e.g. directors, elected members and the Mayor)
- be regularly revised to take account of learning from incidents and exercises, and pertinent technological advances

Exercising should:

- be used to test and validate if a plan is fit for purpose
- test procedures, management structures, resources, systems and training
- be built around scenarios that explore likely and impactful risks
- test local authority capacity e.g. staffing levels and the impact of holiday periods
- test local authority capability e.g. evacuation and shelter, warning and informing, coordinating the voluntary sector, and spontaneous volunteers
- provide assurance and identify gaps/weaknesses requiring development



'Participation of local authority chief executives and their senior teams in MAGIC significantly raises awareness and enhances personal preparedness for the role of a strategic commander in large scale emergencies. The course promotes early consideration of the recovery process and provides invaluable networking opportunities.'

**Chief Superintendent Nicky Searle, MAGIC Course Director**

### **Cornwall Council respond to the Coverack storm, 18 July 2017**

100mm of rain fell in three hours and a 4ft torrent of water poured down the main road cutting the village of Coverack off on the North side. Over 50 homes and businesses were flooded, a coastal path, footpaths and other roads were simply washed away. This was a no notice event – but one that was planned, trained and exercised for.

Upon their appointment, senior officers are trained by the emergency management team. Training consists of understanding how and when to activate the council's emergency management and business continuity plan, appreciating the local authority role in response and recovery, being familiar with duty officer powers under the Cornwall Council constitution, knowing how to instigate an incident impact assessment and accepting the personal and professional responsibilities that fall to a duty senior officer. Training is given on keeping council staff, elected members, central government and the community up to date too. Refresher training is provided annually or as required. A duty senior officer Trevor Doughty capably led the Coverack response, routinely feeding back to the chief executive. A recovery lead, Simon Mould was appointed immediately to get recovery underway.

Cornwall Council exercises their organisation's response to emergencies as a single authority and in the multi-agency environment. Various scenarios are tested throughout the year to keep staff up to date. Every real event or exercise is fully debriefed and learning taken forward to inform future plan writing and procedural change. It's this systematic rehearsal that enables a swift and targeted response. As a result, many impacted Coverack businesses opened the next day, skips were made available to residents by 21 July and Coverack's main road was rebuilt just six days after the disaster.

Cornwall Council recognises its geographical isolation challenges. It has developed over 40 plans with Cornwall communities and voluntary organisations so they can be activated quickly.

Source: Arthur Roberts, Cornwall Council

#### 4) A prepared local authority is an active member of the local resilience forum

The Act requires cooperation by responders through the LRF. The LRF is the principal form of multi-agency co-operation in the local police service area. Responders satisfy their legal duties to attend the forum by nominating suitable representatives at appropriate groups within the forum<sup>6</sup>. A local authority chief officer or senior deputy should attend the executive, which usually meets twice a year. Executive members are required to demonstrate leadership in setting the resilience strategy, establish priorities (informed by local risk management), allocate resources, make collective resilience decisions, undertake strategic training and sign off emergency plans. Any strategic representative from a responder organisation can chair the LRF, including local authority chief executives.

All local authority chief officers and senior managers within the area should be familiar with the priorities of the LRF and the top risks in the community risk register. If it is not practical for all local authority chief executives in the LRF area to attend the forum, they should put arrangements in place to be represented by a sufficiently senior deputy. All authorities must be aware who represents the authority at the forum and should be briefed on the local authority's role in emergency plans.

'I attend the LRF on behalf of the district councils in the county and regularly feedback to my chief executive colleagues through an established group which meets every four to six weeks. I prepare briefing papers for discussion on LRF activity ensuring their views are distilled back to the LRF.'

'as the Solace spokesperson for civil resilience and community safety, I engage with government departments to actively shape emerging resilience policy and discuss progress on civil emergency issues, planning and activity ranging from winter preparedness and mutual aid to cyber security.'

**Stephen Baker, Chief Executive for Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils and Solace Spokesperson for Civil Resilience and Community Safety**

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<sup>6</sup> [Emergency Preparedness Chapter 2: paragraphs 2.66-2.69](#)

## 5) A prepared local authority undertakes local risk management with their local resilience forum

Local authorities must carry out risk assessments with other emergency responders, within the LRF, to produce a community risk register and fulfil their duties under the Act<sup>7</sup>. Identifying and planning for risks specific to a local area will help the local authority become better prepared, and better able to respond and recover, should a risk materialise. Local risk management guidance provides advice to responders on how to fulfil their local risk assessment duty.

Knowledge of the UK's top risks in the national risk register as well as appreciating local risks that could impact on the local authority supports the local authority's own risk management. If risks such as pandemic influenza, flooding, widespread electricity failure or malicious attacks on infrastructure or services materialise, the local authority may be significantly impacted. Local authority senior officers will want to assure themselves they fully understand the local community risk register to effectively respond and recover from an incident. The national risk assessment and associated planning assumptions provide an overview of the consequences of these risks, and describes how government and emergency responders should plan for them. Undertaking thorough risk management enables the local authority to provide comprehensive information to residents and businesses to mitigate the impacts of emergencies and advise communities on steps they can take to prepare themselves, further reducing impacts.

### **Local authorities leading on risk management:**

- East of England LRFs are very clear with residents that if they live along the coastline, they are at risk of flooding. Lincolnshire County Council is just one local authority that forms part of an East Coast Flood Group. The group is chaired by Humber LRF and includes key representatives from Northumbria to Kent. Local authorities, the Environment Agency, Met Office, Flood Forecasting Centre, utility companies, the Military, the voluntary sector and government departments work together on mitigating the impacts of east coast flooding. The group identifies and addresses gaps in their collective capability to prepare, respond and recover from east coast inundation. It shares experiences and good practice and is leading the way on planning for mass evacuation and long-term shelter of residents and employees.

Source: Alan Bravey, Humber Emergency Planning Service, Chair of East Coast Flood Group

- Local authorities with nuclear sites work together to address the risk of a radiation emergency by sharing information, improving planning and exercising and developing public communications. The working group is chaired by Suffolk County Council and forms a key part of government's nuclear resilience framework helping to shape nuclear emergency preparedness legislation.

Source: Andy Osman, Head of Emergency Planning, Suffolk Local Authorities Joint Emergency Planning Partnership

<sup>7</sup> Emergency Preparedness Chapter 4.

### **A cyber incident impacts Doncaster Council, April 2016**

A ransomware virus affected Doncaster Council's IT network for one working day in April 2016. The virus encrypted files and requested a payment to be made to unlock them.

#### **Factors key to successful risk mitigation:**

- business continuity plans and the cyber security incident response plan were in place and immediately activated by senior managers - including the chief executive agreeing to shut the council network down
- messages about the incident was issued to customers, residents, businesses and partners using pre-agreed briefing products
- the incident was reported to CERT UK, CiSP (cyber security incident reporting portal) and Yorkshire and Humber WARP (a forum for technical local authority staff to share cyber security issues) in line with plans
- the council cyber security team worked with an anti-virus supplier to minimise impacts and initiate recovery
- there was no loss of data as council information and data was regularly backed up
- recognising during risk assessment and pre-planning that cyber-crime is a corporate risk and requires senior leadership commitment to mitigation, response and recovery

Source: Alison Morte, Head of Service, Doncaster Council

## **6) A prepared local authority is ready to provide advice before, during and after an emergency**

As part of fulfilling the duty of warning and informing, local authorities<sup>8</sup> must publish contact information to allow partners, residents, local businesses and other members of the public to contact them in an emergency (including out of hours) to get advice or activate an immediate local authority response. Contact numbers, along with information explaining what callers can expect when they are connected, should be clearly communicated, for example, it might be displayed on local authority websites or included in local emergency planning guides.

Arrangements to respond out of hours can vary from in-house provision to shared arrangements with other local authorities or emergency responders. However, contact with the relevant local authority's duty officer must be established, if needed. Similarly, contact with a nominated senior local authority officer must be confirmed in order to activate their participation in the local SCG or national response arrangements.

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<sup>8</sup> Emergency Preparedness Chapter 7

The Act describes public awareness and warning and informing as two distinct legal duties for local authorities and other category 1 responders - advising the public of risks before an emergency and warning and keeping them informed in the event of an emergency.<sup>9</sup> The warning and informing activity should complement local authorities' own emergency arrangements and result in the public being better prepared and better able to respond and recover from an emergency. Clear advice to targeted audiences should be made available, in a suitable range of formats, for different types of emergencies. It is also good practice to provide information on other sources of help and what support the local authority or other responders will not provide.

### **Calderdale Council's communications with residents, businesses and members, December 2015**

Unprecedented floods caused devastation across 25 miles of Calderdale on 26 December 2015. Over 2000 residents and more than 1000 businesses were flooded. The council utilised social media from the first day of the incident to provide safety advice, disruption updates and reassurance to residents. It was a quick way to direct thousands of people to the community flooding website, communicate questions and answers and direct people to community hubs for shelter, food, equipment and advice. The council reached over 420,000 people on Facebook and received over 1 million impressions on twitter.

#### **Key factors that helped to improve communications:**

- communicated with residents through independent, community-created social media groups. The council posted comments and engaged with residents positively, providing information and dispelling rumours
- active in several community Facebook groups by opening dialogues with residents and responding quickly to posts
- proactively shared messages about the council's continuing flood resilience work
- the communications team sent coordinated daily briefing notes to senior managers, councillors and businesses – ensuring consistent information was sent to all and avoiding multiple sources of information being circulated
- held more regular face to face communication events with key organisations and political groups
- visited and leafleted flood-affected businesses to discuss damage and offer advice.
- distributed press releases and a provided dedicated flooding web page containing a business support section. Over 600 flood resilience grants were approved for local businesses

Communicating in this way allowed the council to share information across a range of platforms, quickly. It's more proactive and responsive to how residents and business want to receive information from the council.

Source: Robin Tuddenham, Chief Executive, Calderdale Council.

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<sup>9</sup> [Emergency Preparedness Chapter 7: paragraph 7.1](#)

## 7) A prepared local authority is effectively represented at a senior level at a strategic coordinating group and the recovery coordinating group

During an emergency, the local response will be directed by an SCG. The group will contain strategic representation from all relevant responding organisations. A local authority chief executive or nominated senior deputy is expected to form part of that group for the duration of an emergency, or have an arrangement in place to ensure the authority is effectively represented.

The local authority representative at the SCG should be prepared to undertake a chairing role or have the authority to fully participate as a member. The representative must be able to advise on the local authority's capability and capacity to respond, make decisions about deployment of resources (people and assets) and be able to brief the media. They must competently represent the local authority at any central government response or recovery structure, for example at COBR, a response coordination group or a ministerial recovery group and represent the whole multi-agency structure when required.

A local authority should stand ready for the transition to recovery, be in a position to appoint a chair and form a RCG. It is essential that local authorities work with other relevant organisations when leading a RCG. This may include organisations that are not routinely involved in resilience activity such as local businesses, academia, elected members, a mayor and community groups.

Central government is represented at the SCG or the RCG through a government liaison officer or a recovery liaison officer. They are readily available to support and advise local authority colleagues on central government engagement and asking government for help.

### **All 33 London local authorities:**

- share a 24/7 duty chief executive rota
- ensure there is strategic capability to act as a London local authority chief officer in an emergency. They can speak for all local authorities at the SCG with delegated spending powers on behalf of an affected borough. They also have the ability to instigate mutual aid between London's authorities to expedite the local authority response
- deliver strategic resilience training to chief executive officers and directors so that they understand their role, including at an SCG.

## **Lancashire County Council and Blackpool Council respond to water contamination, August 2015**

Lancashire experienced a water contamination emergency involving cryptosporidium during August 2015. It resulted in a boil water notice being issued to over 390,000 customers across the county. The local authority took over chairing the SCG after it was transferred from the police to the water company.

### **Key activity:**

- the emergency response plan was activated
- there was a clear distinction in senior roles. Directors represented the council at the SCG and managed the incident. They liaised with strategic leads from other resilience organisations, assessed impacts, made strategic decisions and managed information flows. The chief executive and executive directors managed corporate operations and communications with press/media and elected members
- mobilisation of appropriate response cells to gain scientific advice, undertake appropriate warning and informing and continually risk assess
- as the incident grew in scale and began to impact upon institutions such as care homes, hospitals and schools as well as affecting increasing numbers of residents, it was agreed this was a public health issue and the Director of Public Health took over as the SCG chair

### **As chair of the SCG, the Director of Public Health:**

- coordinated the strategic multi-agency response to the emergency
- ensured information was shared to mitigate the impacts of the emergency (directing some sensitive discussions to occur in smaller forums)
- invited subject matter experts to form recommendations to the SCG
- was responsible for the content of the SCG decision log
- ensured appropriate communication mechanisms existed at the local, regional and national level
- remained visible and available to other organisations
- kept central government up to date through liaison with the government liaison officer
- participated in ministerial meetings (COBR) as required

Following the incident and during the multi-agency debrief, Lancashire LRF identified its intention to train more senior staff in the multi-agency gold incident commander (MAGIC) training course. As a result, more senior officers can now fulfill the role of chair at an SCG, RCG or supporting sub group.

Source: Mark Taylor, Emergency Planning Manager, Lancashire County Council

## 8) A prepared local authority is ready to provide community leadership

During an emergency, residents and businesses expect civic leaders and their council to provide strong, visible leadership. The public, media and politicians will also look to the council to provide information and clarity on what has happened, what is still happening and what will happen next. Local authorities should brief senior officers and councillors on its own organisational response to an emergency, as well as the multi-agency response, and the social, economic, environmental and political impacts of the emergency. This will enable civic leaders to consider how to fulfil their community leadership role, identify and represent their community's needs, help inform and reassure residents and businesses, and be equipped to deal with the media. The councillor's guide to emergencies describes how councillors can ensure resilience and readiness.

### **The city of Manchester provide civic leadership following the Manchester Arena attack on 22 May 2017**

- council officers and elected members, including the leader of the council, were activated early and briefed on the incident. The Chief Executive liaised with the Mayor of Greater Manchester and advised and supported elected members
- the Leader of the Council gave a joint press conference with the Mayor on the town hall steps at 07:30, 23 May where it was quickly decided and announced a vigil would occur in front of the town hall that evening. The vigil provided a managed focal point and allowed for promotion of key messages - respect and resilience. The vigil attended by anyone who wanted to be there, along with local and national politicians (including the Prime Minister); was a powerful outpouring of emotion captured by news channels across the world. The Bishop of Manchester spoke for all faiths and the poet Tony Walsh performed his poem about the city. The vigil did not include political speeches
- business continuity advice and reassurance was provided to businesses. The council leader was determined to send a message that Manchester was open for business by continuing to host the Great Manchester Run and City Games
- the council set up an emergency fund swiftly on 23 May. The Deputy Leader of the Council was involved and is Chair of the Board of Trustees. The fund made its first payments that week
- there was immediate national and international media interest. The council's approach to communications and media was proactive and responsive. This included monitoring and responding to all social media, website and press activity and enquiries

Source: The Kerslake Report: An independent review into the preparedness for, and emergency response to, the Manchester Arena attack on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017

## 9) A prepared local authority has plans in place for assessing the impacts of an emergency

All local authorities should have a clear process for collecting and reporting information, in accordance with law, that enables them to deliver their duties. This information may be shared with other resilience organisations or the public to save or protect human life and relieve suffering. The information could include how an emergency has impacted upon residents and local authority services. It may describe what arrangements are now in place for critical services such as schools and care provision. Gathering information on the impact on local businesses and local infrastructure provides insight into how the local economy is responding and what additional support may be required.

How the local authority quality assures and updates the data and information on the consequences of an emergency should be described within emergency response plans. The resilience standard on information sharing explains how to achieve good and leading practice in this area and includes specific reference to vulnerable people, locally significant infrastructure and recovery. All responding organisations have the ability to communicate information securely via a reporting template and mapping tool, on a shared digital platform, ResilienceDirect.

### **Key considerations when assessing and recording impacts:**

- undertake thorough impact assessments to inform and prioritise recovery work
- identify affected council owned and non-council owned properties through visits
- identify those citizens that are vulnerable or need extra help from the local authority
- identify affected businesses and community facilities
- communicate widely and help the community understand the impacts of the emergency by using a trusted spokesperson
- identify impacts on the local transport and infrastructure network that may hinder social cohesion or economic stability
- contribute to shared local response or recovery situation reports
- proactively utilise the media and social media
- gain an understanding of the government's Bellwin Scheme and any operating recovery scheme

## 10) A prepared local authority has plans in place to manage the recovery from a major emergency

Local authorities should have plans in place to instigate recovery. Recovery work should start from the beginning of an emergency and will initially occur alongside response activity. Recovery can be long and complex and is an essential part of emergency management. Local authorities may experience further demands on services, whilst they are expected to continue to meet the needs of those affected by an emergency. Local communities may also look upon an emergency as an opportunity to improve an area. This will undoubtedly be subject to close scrutiny from communities, the media and politicians alike.

The local authority will usually lead the recovery process and a senior officer will chair a RCG with support from a wide range of multi-agency partners. Representatives from organisations such as business partners and tourist organisations as well as community groups and faith leaders may also form part of the RCG. Similarly, wider representatives from the local authority, such as finance teams and the section 151 officer, social services and elected members may be required to contribute to a recovery programme. Central government may participate through a recovery liaison officer. The RCG should engage with the community to develop and agree a clear recovery strategy. Dedicated community engagement and consultation may be required to understand community needs and ensure these are fed into the strategy. Developing a recovery work programme with clear targets and milestones will help to prioritise work, measure progress and may assist in deciding when specific activities can be scaled down.

For severe weather events with significant wide area impacts, MHCLG has published a framework for flood recovery funding to be delivered through local authorities. This guidance sets out what recovery support might be made available should Ministers decide to activate the framework, and how local authorities can access it. The guide is accessible to emergency planners on [resilencedirect](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/resilience-direct) and encourages local authorities to make suitable preparations to deliver business and community recovery support at pace should the scheme be activated.

Recovery is most effective when organisations and people involved in the process are properly trained, exercised and prepared for their role. Detailed advice on recovery planning is described within Cabinet Office emergency response and recovery guidance, national recovery guidance and in the local recovery standard.

## **Carlisle City Council suffered widespread storm and flood damage, December 2015**

Carlisle, like many parts of Cumbria, suffered widespread flood and storm damage during December 2015 and early 2016. Operating out of a temporary centre [the civic centre was flooded], Carlisle City Council set up a crisis management team. It consisted of senior officers whose priority was to manage the council's response and recovery activity. The team focussed on:

- activating business continuity plans for service recovery (customer contact, access to services, delivery of key services, re-starting ICT infrastructure, communications and asset recovery)
- communicating with residents, staff, members, press and media
- liaising with county wide recovery groups for housing and infrastructure
- managing donations to flood victims

### **Factors key to the recovery process:**

- considering recovery from the beginning of the emergency
- establishing a temporary customer service centre complete with ICT and facilities to meet and assist residents and customers
- assisting 256 households to find temporary accommodation
- 350 skips provided to flood affected communities and 1,064 tonnes of flood material disposed of from flood affected streets
- over 1500 households flooded with the majority receiving a £500 community support grant administered by the council
- over 200 businesses flooded with many receiving a £5,000 flood resilience grant
- managing council tax and business rate discounts equalling over £2 million
- making over 60 council assets safe by assessing, stripping, drying and preparing facilities for full recovery
- liaising with insurance brokers, loss adjusters and insurers to develop a claim for property and contents
- providing alternative premises for affected sport and leisure, and arts facilities
- repairing damage to parks, open spaces and community centres
- working with many organisations including the voluntary and academic sector to distribute donated goods and services to affected residents

Carlisle City Council Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel oversaw the approach whilst the council, led by Chief Executive Jason Gooding, fed into Cumbria Recovery Co-ordinating Group, chaired by Dominic Donnini, from December 2015 to April 2017.

Source: Jane Meek, Corporate Director of Economic Development, Carlisle Council.

# Other Useful Documents

This guide should be considered in conjunction with:

1. The duties within the [Civil Contingencies Act 2004 \(CCA\)](#) and associated Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (Contingency Planning) Regulations 2005
2. [National risk register](#)
3. [Local risk guidance](#)
4. Associated [Emergency Preparedness](#) Guidance
5. [Resilience standards](#)
6. [SCG and RCG chairs aide memoire](#)
7. [Emergency response and recovery \(non-statutory guidance\)](#)
8. [Human aspects in emergency management](#)
9. [Support for victims of terrorism \(toolkit available via GLO\)](#)
10. LGA comms guide
11. [LGA guide for councillors](#)
12. The Local Government Association brings together useful information on [severe weather and flooding](#) for local authorities
13. [Preparing for emergencies: finding out about local plans](#)
14. MET office [advice](#)
15. [Flooding: advice for the public](#)
16. [Preparing for a flood: getting help during and after](#)
17. [Flood Recovery Framework for local authorities](#)

If you would like any further information on any of the material in this document, including the examples, please contact the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Resilience and Emergencies Division at the following e-mail address [redcontrol@communities.gov.uk](mailto:redcontrol@communities.gov.uk)

## Annex A

# Checklist for commissioners of public services:

Do the arrangements in place for out-sourced service delivery provide robust resilience?

- Are the provider's emergency plans and procedures, including business continuity arrangements for specific services, fit for purpose and up to date? Do they consider specific risks and scenarios such as disruption due to severe weather or industrial action?
- Is it clear to providers where to obtain advice and support in developing their business continuity plans?
- How do you ensure that the provider can put adequate resourcing plans in place, particularly to cover short or no notice incidents? Do the plans consider recovery timescales that are acceptable to both the provider and commissioner?
- Is it clear to your service users how they can contact the provider / or the local authority in an emergency, both during a normal working day and out of hours?
- Does the provider have clear communication plans for warning and informing service users of any disruption?
- Do you carry out any testing or exercising of business continuity arrangements of contractors?
- Do procedures regarding the commissioning of public services include a requirement that organisations tendering for contracts meet the resilience requirements set out by your organisation?
- How do you ensure that providers share information and data on the impact of disruptions?
- Do service providers understand any responsibilities that may be imposed on them during an emergency as set out in local emergency plans?
- Do service providers deliver contracts to multiple authorities and could this have implications during prolonged or wide spread emergencies (because of increased demand for services or resources)?