



**SOMERSET LOCAL AUTHORITIES CIVIL CONTINGENCIES
PARTNERSHIP**

GOLD OFFICER RECOVERY WORKSHOP

POST EVENT REPORT

13th November 2012



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Authors: Jessica Harrison & Barbara Sharratt, Somerset Local Authorities
Civil Contingencies Unit, 01823 356804

1. INTRODUCTION

RECOVERY – ‘The process of restoring and rebuilding the community in the aftermath of an incident’ (‘Recovery: An Emergency Management Guide’ Home Office)

After the response to a major incident, the commitment of the Local Authorities will need to be sustained for potentially many more months and even years to manage the recovery effort. It is essential that all senior managers understand their role in the recovery phase and the strategic issues that need to be considered to facilitate the restoring and rebuilding of the community.

This workshop was designed to bring together all the senior managers from the 6 Somerset local authorities, to share experiences, knowledge and build upon the working relationships ensure an effective multiagency approach to recovery.

The Aim of the workshop:

To determine the strategic direction for recovery from a Major Incident

Objectives:

- Outline the ingredients of a successful recovery plan
- Explore the issues and challenges of the recovery effort
- Determine the strategic direction to enable the local authority management of the recovery effort
- Explore the coordination of the multi agency response to recovery
- Determine the arrangements necessary to ensure that Local Authority services are maintained during the recovery effort.
- Compare lessons learned from a Major Incident and the synergy with issues identified today
- Identify any further training needs

2. PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

Event Planning

The recovery workshop was primarily organised by the Somerset Local Authorities Civil Contingencies Unit with valuable support and advice from Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service.

Attendees

The Chief Executive and Senior Managers from the following local Authorities attended this event:

- Somerset County Council
- West Somerset Council
- Sedgemoor District Council
- South Somerset District Council
- Mendip District Council
- Taunton Deane Borough Council

This event was supported by the following organisations:

- Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service
- Avon & Somerset Constabulary
- Environment Agency
- British Red Cross

3. WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

The main focus of the day was centred on a workshop session where the local authority senior managers were tasked to work through a challenging scenario focusing on the strategic recovery issues.

To begin the event, a presentation was given to summarise the general principles of the recovery phase and the specific roles of the local authority. This presentation aimed to provide all delegates a basic level of understanding which will be consolidated during the scenario session.

The scenario session was expertly facilitated by Nick Manning, Somerset Area Manager from Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service. This independent facilitator ensured that all groups were given opportunities to provide honest feedback and contributed valuable advice and experiential anecdotes to consolidate the learning. Delegates were split into syndicate groups made up from representatives from all 6 local authorities. Each table were given support from the 'expert panel' and DSFRS managers.

The response phase of the scenario was introduced by the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service, detailing all relevant actions taken by the responding agencies and current situation at the point of handover to the recovery phase. The recovery phase of the scenario was split into three time frames; 2 days, 3 weeks and 3 months. Further information regarding the scenario can be found in section 4.

For each inject, the groups were given strategic questions to consider in light of the detailed information provided. The injects prompted useful debate within the groups and at the feedback sessions.

The day was finished with a thought provoking presentation by the Community Protection Manager from Hertfordshire County Council about the experiences and challenges of recovering from the devastating Buncefield incident. This presentation consolidated the learning from the scenario workshop session.

4. SCENARIO DESCRIPTION

Incident

The recovery scenario session began with a description of the incident from the perspective of the DSFRS.

- Date : Friday 16th November 2012, Time : 1500Hrs
- Hazardous material incident involving a fire and explosion within a commercial premises
- Large blast range effecting residential / commercial buildings and a secondary school
- Smoke plume containing hazardous substances
- Large cordon area and initial evacuation.

Inject 1 (2 Days)

Two days after the event the Strategic Coordination Group and Recovery Working Group has been established.

Specific information about the impact of the incident was disclosed which highlighted the severity of the explosion and the subsequent recovery issues.

The explosion meant that around 500 residents were evacuated, 200 homes and businesses damaged and hundreds of residents needing shelter provided by several of the Somerset local authorities. In addition, there were significant environmental and economic impacts felt across the area.

Inject 2 (3 Weeks)

By this point, Avon and Somerset Constabulary has officially handed over to the Local Authority to manage the recovery and restoration of the affected community. A Multi Agency Strategic Recovery Group (SRG) has been established to manage the strategic recovery.

The cordon for the affected site has been reduced but there is considerable damage to infrastructure including houses and a block of flats that needs to be demolished.

There is still a huge demand on local authority resources from the local community and external pressures from the media and Central Government. Welfare issues are beginning to crop up from within the responding organisations.

Inject 3 (3 Months)

3 months after the incident, there are still long term recovery issues experienced within the community. Adverse economic and health impacts have now been realised. Media interest has now reduced but with a public enquiry looming, the attention has now transferred to placing blame for the incident.

The future of the explosion site and the demolished flats has begun with elected members and community members greatly involved to ensure the best use of the area.

5. LESSONS LEARNED/IDENTIFIED

Inject 1 – 2 days after the incident

1. Identify who is leading the local authority response to this incident.

- It was agreed that the lead local authority would be the appropriate District Council with the Chief Executive acting as chair of the Strategic Recovery Group.
- Also emphasised the importance of the recovery arrangements being multi- agency.

2. Consider the priorities in planning the recovery and identify the key strategic issues to address?

- Temporary accommodation and getting resident back into their homes.
- Managing 'business as usual'
- Traffic management
- Request further information and assessment of the environment and infrastructure risks
- Communication is key and the correct multi-agency representatives need to be involved. Messages of advice and reassurance to businesses and communities should be priority.
- Emphasis on working with partners
- Use of social media

Expert Advice – Public use of social media can blindside the organisations so particular attention and expert knowledge is required.

3. What support would you expect from the Resilience and Emergencies Division (RED) or central government?

- A contact point would be required within RED and this would be done through the Gold arrangements.
- They would be a useful link into the Central Government Departments for advice support on issues such as transport and funding.
- Key to access major contractors
- Support with managing the political intervention at a local level

4. What steps should be taken to manage the costs involved in the response and recovery to this incident?

- Record the expenditure in a consistent manner across all organisations
- Lead authority to established protocol
- Governance structure to manage process and expenditure (Recovery Impact Group)
- Alert Central Government to the potential funding requirements
- Anticipate future costs and long term expenditure

- Agree who is responsible for authorising spend
- Accountability

5. Are you confident that you have sufficient staff and resources to manage the continuing demands of the recovery effort?

- A dynamic approach is required – different people are needed at different times
- Resources focused on humanitarian efforts
- Communication to the public is key especially with managing public expectations around the normal business
- Consideration needed to manage business continuity issues in organisations
- Agreed it would be a challenge to cope alone – Mutual aid options required across the local authorities
- Anticipate the resource requirements in the short/medium/long term
- Be aware of the impact of the long hours and different working environment can have on the staff
- Importance of building good working relationships with other organisations

Expert Advice – The Environment Agency learnt a vital lesson in previous incidents that separate teams are needed to manage the recovery and business as usual.

Expert Advice – Don't forget the assistance the Voluntary Sector can provide in a major incident. They can provide skilled and trained personnel for emotional and practical support.

Inject 2 – 3 Weeks after the incident

1. Identify 5 priorities in the response to your given area of recovery

Humanitarian

- Housing
 - Mourning/remembrance
 - Staff welfare/ health and welfare
 - Health issues
 - Communication
- At local level the Voluntary Agencies will be embedded into the community

Economic

- Business in immediate cordons are the priority
- Discretionary relief – business rates/grants

- Communications
 - Taunton “open for business”
 - Practical advice/help to get people into the town (gritting)
 - “Cowboy builder” advice
- Objective Assessment Criteria for help to businesses
- Economic losses/insurance issues
- Importance of community resilience
- Establishing a business forum

Expert Advice – Investigate potential income generating opportunities for the local economy (bigger employers for support and Chambers of Commerce)

Generic Issues

- Proactive media strategy - Tell our story and individual stories
- Build confidence in businesses and residents
- Significant resources required for VIP visits
- Managing politics

Expert Comment – It is crucial to get the communications strategy right as it is commonly an issue raised at incident debriefs

Environment & Infrastructure

- Ongoing issues with utilities – key priority
- Strategy for rebuilding the community and housing infrastructure
- Longer term strategy
- Pressure for the school to reopen
- Long term River Tone contamination issues

2. How would you ensure that the wishes of the community are fully integrated into the recovery process?

- Use mechanisms in place ie, Humanitarian Assistance Centre
- Regular meetings
- Meet with local community representatives
- Variety of communication channels and communities (local residents/ parents of school children)

3. How could the media be used to your advantage?

- Make use of the media in a positive manner (good news stories)
- Use of social media to communicate the right messages
- On-going strategy for engagement

- Communications must be bottom up and impartial (should give people the forum for a voice)
- Organisations tend to work in silos – Community engagement should be done together
- There should be a standing community reference group
- Demographics require bespoke communications
- Voluntary sector can assist with identifying community representatives

Expert Advice – The British Red Cross can assist with managing donations using their well publicised Disaster Appeal Fund.

Inject 3 – 3 Months after the incident

1. What would you be doing in anticipation of any inquiry into the cause of the disaster and the Local Authority's response to it?

- Ensure a joined up approach
- Request expert help
- Audit – ensure relevant data process and decisions are available
- Communications important before and after
- Political briefings important

2. Identify any sources of funding to assist the recovery. How will you ensure that funds are available to assist the long term regeneration and reconstruction of the area?

- Bellwin Scheme, insurance, reserves, private investments
- Politicians bidding for funds
- Emphasis on the importance of decision log and well trained loggists – inquests could take place several years later when memories fade

Expert Advice – Social Media can be a very powerful tool but care must be taken – eg, staff tweeting details of an incident

3. How might you celebrate the spirit of the community and the local leaders involved?

- Good news stories about humanity and goodwill of the community/
Celebrate the good work that people have done
- Keep elected members involved
- Commemorative event
- Dialogue required with community – how will the money be spent? What do they want to see in the future

4. How will you ensure a continued dialogue with local residents and the wider community regarding the redevelopment and recovery effort?

- Community groups/Business Forums looking at future
- Plan for what the future might look like
- Plan to return to better than 'normality'

5. Please identify any other priorities for action.

- Outreach – not making people come to us
- Staff and their wellbeing
- Long term health effects
- Public inquiry - potential to drain the resources financially and practically
- Disaster appeal

6. EVALUATION FORM SUMMARY

Identify three lessons that you will take away from this training:

- **Communications:** 19 delegates emphasised the importance of a sound multi agency communication strategy and recognised the value of social media as part of the strategy.
- **Use of the Voluntary Sector:** 4 delegates left the event with a better understanding of the assistance the voluntary sector can provide in the response and recovery.
- **Mutual Aid and Integrated Response:** 6 delegates emphasised the importance of robust mutual aid arrangements between organisations and the requirement to work closely together in an integrated response.
- **Training and 'Team' Identity:** 7 delegates identified how they valued these types of events to enhance their understanding of their roles but also the opportunity it provides them to build good working relationships with other organisations - "We are the Team!"
- **Finance, Logging and Governance:** 14 delegates emphasised the importance of accurate logging, audit trails, finance procedures and the overall governance arrangements to coordinate the recovery efforts.
- **Community Involvement:** 4 delegates felt that it should be a priority to ensure the communities are involved in the recovery process and have a 'voice'.
- **Business Continuity:** 5 delegates recognised the consequence of the recovery process on 'normal' business and how important it is that this business continuity is managed effectively.
- **Longevity of the Recovery Phase:** The length and extent of the recovery phase was recognised by many delegates.

Other lessons included:

- Increased confidence
- Developed knowledge
- Instinct plays a part in thinking what to do – common sense, use it
- Listen carefully – don't resolve what you don't know
- Need to take the widest possible view when looking at recovery