

A councillor's guide to civil emergencies

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Foreword

I am pleased to introduce this updated version of the Local Government Association (LGA) councillor's guide to civil emergencies. Although the original version of this document was only published in 2016, there was a clear need to update it given the importance of all of us understanding and learning from colleagues up and down the country who in 2017 faced the challenge of dealing with the most devastating emergencies we can imagine.

The attacks in Westminster, Manchester, London Bridge and Islington were a terrible illustration of the ongoing terrorism risk we must remain vigilant to, while the fire at Grenfell Tower highlighted the importance of councils visibly responding to and leading their communities following a disaster. The Novichok incidents in south Wiltshire in 2018 also highlight that, to say the least, some risks can be extremely difficult to predict.

What all of these incidents showed is how much our experience of emergencies has changed in recent years, even since the terrorist attacks of 2005. The widespread use of camera phones and social media, and advent of rolling news, not only enable the public and press to pretty much live stream emergencies and the response to them; they also facilitate the sharing of information – and sometimes misinformation – exceptionally quickly. In these circumstances, there is a clear need for councils to be fleet of foot in their responses. The risks of not doing so are significant; yet all of us know that this has become more difficult given the way that resources are more stretched following years of austerity.

The heightened visibility of emergencies also makes it important for councillors to fulfil their civic and community leadership roles equally visibly. The saying that trust arrives on foot but leaves on horseback resonates strongly in relation to our handling of emergencies.

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the role and responsibilities of councils, cabinet members, and ward councillors, in terms of ensuring preparedness and resilience, responding to, and recovering from emergencies. These roles are different, but complementary; all of them are critically important. Based on the experience of and feedback from colleagues who have dealt with emergencies most recently, we intentionally focus throughout on the themes of leadership and communication, and highlight some of the potential pitfalls to be mindful of.

I hope that you find the guide useful, and most importantly that you will use it as a prompt to think about and scrutinise your authority's, and your personal preparedness for responding to an emergency. Only by developing our understanding, and regularly reviewing our plans, can we ensure that we are as prepared as we can be for any of the emergencies we may need to deal with.

Councillor Simon Blackburn

Chair, LGA Safer and Stronger Communities Board

Core terms and components of the civil contingencies framework

Core terms and components of the civil contingencies framework

The legal framework for responding to emergencies sets out clear roles and responsibilities, and emergency planning work relies heavily on established doctrine and procedures which broadly apply across different types of emergency. Councillors should ensure they have a basic understanding of these so that they understand the council's role in an emergency, as well as their own personal role as councillors. The key terms and concepts are summarised below.

Civil Contingencies Act 2004	The Civil Contingencies Act (the Act) sets out the legislative framework for responding to civil emergencies.
Civil emergency	An event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare or the environment of a place in the UK, or war or terrorism which threatens serious damage to the security of the UK.
Rising tide emergency	An emergency for which there is some level of advance warning, for example a flood which could be predicted based on weather forecasts and river levels.
No notice emergency	An emergency which is instantaneous and for which there is no notice. Recent examples include the Shoreham Bypass air crash and Manchester Arena attack.
Category one responder (to a civil emergency)	Organisations which are likely to be at the core of the response to most emergencies and are therefore subject to the full range of civil protection duties in the Act. Councils, the emergency services, health services, and Environment Agency are category one responders.
Category two responder (to a civil emergency)	These are cooperating responders, who are less likely to be involved in the heart of multi-agency planning work, but will be heavily involved in preparing for incidents affecting their sectors. The Act requires them to cooperate and share information with other category one and two responders.
Local resilience forums	Local resilience forums (LRFs) covering police force areas are multi-agency partnerships made up of representatives of the local category one and two responders, plus the military. They are responsible for identifying and planning for local civil resilience risks.
Preparedness/resilience	The concept of ensuring organisations and areas are prepared for emergencies, and focused on developing the resilience and capability to respond to and withstand them.
Response	The multi-agency processes and procedures that are put in place to respond to an emergency. The generic national framework for managing emergency response and recovery identifies three tiers of management and the relationship between them, as set out below.

Recovery	Recovery is the process of rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitating a community following an emergency, and is typically led by the local authority.
Strategic/Strategic Coordination Group (SCG) – ‘gold command’	<p>The strategic management response considers the emergency in its wider context and determines long term impacts and risks; defines and communicates the overarching strategy and objectives for the response; establishes the framework, policy and parameters for lower level tiers, and monitors the context, risks, impacts and progress towards defined objectives.</p> <p>A multi-agency SCG, typically chaired by the chief officer of the police or fire service and usually attended by the local authority chief executive or strategic director, will be established for significant or extended emergencies. An SCG does not have the collective authority to issue commands or executive orders to individual responder agencies, but ensures coordination as each organisation exercises control of their own operations in the normal way.</p> <p>For emergencies with significant recovery implications, it would be normal to establish a recovery coordinating group (RCG), usually chaired by the council chief executive or strategic director, to take on the role of the SCG once the response phase of the emergency is over.</p>
Tactical/Tactical Coordination Group (TCG) – ‘silver’	<p>The tactical coordination group (TCG) will be formed from senior operational officers from relevant agencies. A council will usually be represented at the assistant director/ head of service level.</p> <p>The group’s role is to jointly conduct the overall multi-agency management of the incident: determining priorities for allocating available resources and seeking additional resources if required; planning and coordinating tasks; assessing risks and using this to inform tasking of operational commanders; and ensuring the health and safety of the public/personnel.</p>
Operational – ‘bronze’	This is the level at which the management of the immediate hands-on work is undertaken at the site(s) of the emergency. While individual agencies retain command authority over their own resources and personnel deployed at the scene, each agency must liaise and coordinate with the other agencies involved, ensuring a coherent and integrated effort. It is the role of the operational commanders to implement the tactical commander’s plan within their functional area of responsibility.
Cabinet Office Briefing Room – COBR	COBR is the name given to central government meetings convened in response to civil emergencies. The composition and chair of COBR will vary according to the nature and severity of an emergency, but a ministerial-level COBR may be chaired by the Prime Minister or senior minister. Officer-level meetings may also take place.
Mutual aid	Arrangements put in place between different organisations and areas to provide support in the event that one of them is required to respond to an emergency and requires additional resources.

Case studies

Manchester Arena attack **Manchester City Council**

On Monday 22 May 2017, a suicide bomber detonated an improvised device in the crowded foyer area immediately outside the Manchester Arena, where around 14,000 people had been attending an Ariana Grande pop concert. Twenty two people, including several children, were killed; over one hundred sustained physical injuries and many more suffered psychological and emotional trauma.

Manchester City Council responded to the incident as a category one responder, working in partnership with a vast range of other organisations, including those which form the Greater Manchester Resilience Forum. The council activated plans to establish a family assistance/reception centre at the Etihad Stadium and arranged hotel accommodation for families and professionals involved in the response. The council also worked with the local police force to coordinate contributions from businesses offering help and support.

The council's civic and community leadership in the immediate and longer term aftermath was a notable feature of the response, and was specifically praised in Lord Kerslake's review of the preparedness for and response to the attack. Among other things, the council arranged a vigil less than twenty four hours after the attack, ensured council staff were able to offer support to people at the St Ann's Square tribute site, arranged support for communities impacted by subsequent police raids in various parts of the city, oversaw a charity set up to support the

victims, and put in place measures to tackle the spike in hate crime that followed the attack.

Shoreham Bypass air crash **Adur District Council**

On 22 August 2015, a vintage jet aircraft crashed onto vehicles on the A27 during a display at the Shoreham Airshow, killing 11 people and injuring 16 others.

The aircraft broke into four parts on impact, destroying several cars. Fuel escaping from the fuel tanks ignited in a large fireball and plume of smoke immediately following the impact. Following the crash, the A27 was closed in both directions, stranding those attending the airshow. People were initially able to leave the site only on foot, as the main access from the car parks to the A27 was closed.

Initially the role of Adur and Worthing Councils was to support the emergency services and West Sussex County Council as the tier one and two responders whilst keeping council services running as normal. Council officers also established a stand-alone website for a virtual book of condolence and together with West Sussex County Council opened a charitable fund to support victims of the accident, to be administered by the Sussex Community Foundation, a registered charity.

Storm Eva flooding Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council

On Boxing Day 2015 Storm Eva reached Calderdale, causing flooding across 20 miles of the Calder Valley. Some 2,000 homes and 1,000 businesses flooded and large areas were without power for several days. The severity of the damage in Calderdale meant that the council led the discussion with the Department for Transport, on behalf of the whole region, on the cost of the repairs required to restore critical infrastructure.

Calderdale Council is the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) and implemented emergency plans in partnership with the emergency services, Environment Agency, Canal and River Trust, Yorkshire Water, Northern Powergrid and local community groups.

Within hours local volunteers, with council support, had set up hubs in Todmorden, Hebden Bridge, Mytholmroyd, Sowerby Bridge and Elland, which quickly became the heart of each community, providing food, warmth, advice and support to the devastated communities.

Calderdale has local flood groups, with dedicated flood wardens and community based flood stores, which allowed the clean up to get underway as soon as the floodwater had gone.

The council coordinated the collection and removal of tonnes of waste and debris from across the valley and provided skips for residents and businesses. The highways team inspected the street lights, traffic lights and over 100 bridges in the flood affected areas, including 85 underwater inspections. Grants were swiftly made available by the Government and allocated to residents and businesses to contribute to the cost of the clean-up. Funding of approximately £13.2 million was awarded to support households and businesses through recovery schemes and council tax and business rates relief. Grant funding also made properties more resilient and helped affected businesses invest in their expansion.

The scale of the flooding and the subsequent damage to the highways network meant the council's priority quickly became focused on raising sufficient funding from regional organisations and central government to support the recovery. £25 million Department for Transport infrastructure funding was secured to repair damaged roads, bridges and landslips and make improvements to drainage.

The council delivered marketing campaigns targeting tourists, visitors and businesses to show that Calderdale was back in business and £100,000 was awarded to local organisations for events to help towns and communities recover and bring people together.

The Calderdale Flood Action Plan was published in October 2016 following consultation with the community and partner organisations to set out the actions required to improve Calderdale's resilience to flooding. It is a living document that is reviewed annually, with project leads from the council, Environment Agency and partner organisations reporting quarterly on their progress.

Continued efforts to secure funding are supporting the delivery of three major flood defence schemes in Mytholmroyd, Hebden Bridge and Brighouse, as well as smaller schemes across 22 locations. Work is ongoing to identify and maintain critical flood risk assets and improve the resilience of Calderdale's infrastructure across highways and transport, gas, electric and water, and the use of canals and reservoirs for flood storage is also being investigated.

Partner organisations are working to better understand the relationships between catchment management and flooding, engage with landowners and land managers and bid for funding to support the delivery of natural flood management (NFM) techniques. The partnership also works closely with the community to make people and property as prepared as possible for future flooding and help strengthen Calderdale's already active network of flood groups.

Overview and key themes for councillors

Summary of council responsibilities

All principal councils are category one responders under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. They have clearly defined responsibilities in relation to civil emergencies and will typically lead the recovery from any emergency in their area. Category one responders must:

- 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 communications arrangements in place to make information available to the public about civil protection matters and maintain arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public in the event of an emergency
- share information with other local responders to enhance coordination
- cooperate with other local responders to enhance coordination and efficiency
- provide advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about business continuity management (local authorities only).

As a category one responder, a council must perform its duties under the Act where:

- the emergency would be likely to seriously obstruct its ability to perform its functions
- it would consider it necessary or desirable to act to prevent, reduce, control, or mitigate the emergency's effects, or otherwise take action; and it would be unable to act without changing the deployment of its resources or acquiring additional resources.

Local responders work to a generic national framework for managing emergency response and recovery that applies regardless of the size, nature or cause of an emergency. The framework provides local flexibility for responders to make their own decisions about what emergency planning arrangements are appropriate to deliver their duties under the Act, based on local circumstances, priorities and risks. Local resilience forums (LRFs) are the key organisation for developing area wide arrangements for responding to emergencies, and are responsible for producing community risk registers setting out specific local risks for their areas and local multi-agency emergency response plans.

Councillor role

In an emergency, as with business as usual, councillors are not involved in the operational response led by officers but must play a leadership role that includes:

- **political leadership;** ensuring that their council is meeting its obligations under the Act, in terms of preparing for and responding to emergencies
- **civic leadership;** providing a focal point for the local area during an emergency situation
- **community leadership;** helping to increase community resilience, and supporting communities' emergency responses and through the period of recovery.

Councils and councillors may be required to deal with many different types of civil emergency, and the nature of an emergency (eg, whether it has involved loss of life, whether homes and businesses have had to

be evacuated) will clearly shape the response and recovery to it. These different situations will also impact how councillors are able to fulfil their roles. As an example, it is inevitable that more information will be made available – to both councillors and the public – about a flooding incident than a detailed police investigation into a terrorist attack. Councillors will need to understand how these differences affect response and recovery; however the principles of effective political, civic and community leadership will remain the same.

Political leadership

Senior political leaders in a council should ensure that councils are managerially equipped and resourced to plan for, respond to and recover from emergencies. This will involve making significant policy and funding decisions to help plan for emergencies, and promoting joint working and mutual aid arrangements with other local authorities and agencies. In a response situation, it will include supporting officers to respond to emergencies, enabling them to defend key decisions and helping to minimise reputational risk to the authority. Political leaders may also be required to consider resourcing recommendations from the strategic or recovery coordination groups or make representations to government for additional financial resources or other assistance. Finally, political leaders must also ensure recovery functions are mainstreamed and that lessons learnt are addressed and shared more widely.

Civic leadership

The emergencies which councils responded to in 2017 highlighted the critical significance of councils' civic leadership as a key feature of an effective emergency response and recovery.

The council's civic leadership role means providing a visible focal point for the local area during this period, offering information, support, reassurance and comfort, and standing alongside representatives of different communities and organisations. Media and communications will be a critical enabler of the council's civic leadership role.

Community leadership

Visible and empathetic community leadership by ward councillors at a very local level is hugely important. Community leadership cuts across preparedness, response and recovery; councillors need to understand their communities, local vulnerabilities, community networks, assets and businesses to help develop their community's resilience, and then use this information and capacity to inform and support an emergency response if it becomes necessary.

The advent of social media has increased opportunities for effective communication with local residents, but – again as highlighted by the 2017 emergencies and illustrated later in this document – can also create challenges for councils and councillors. Councillors should bear in mind general guidance on using social media, working closely with their communications teams and avoid pitfalls such as providing unverified information.

Community leadership will also be crucial as communities rebuild and move through periods of recovery, when ward councillors can act both as the voice of the community within the council, and vice versa.

Preparedness and resilience

Summary of council responsibilities

Councils should maintain a set of fully developed, tested and up to date plans covering a range of different scenarios, based on locally identified risks, to enable them to play a full and effective part in the response to and recovery from an emergency. In relation to potential flooding emergencies, councils have specific additional responsibilities, which are summarised in Appendix 1.

It is vital that councils understand their capability and capacity in this area. Emergency and business continuity plans should be regularly revisited to check they reflect current capability and that key contact details are up to date and easily available. Despite the many demands on their time, it is clearly extremely valuable for councillors to receive emergency planning training and briefings, and for senior officers to take part in training exercises. This process can also help ensure understanding of the relative roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers¹, which will strengthen councils' ability to respond to an emergency and help ensure corporate resilience. Unless everyone has thought through their role during a crisis and the recovery, there is a risk that in an emergency, they will be on the back foot.

¹ Emergency plans in areas with directly elected mayors should also be updated to reflect the potential role of the mayor, particularly in relation to communications and civic leadership.

“It was clear that previous training initiatives were helping our staff deal with a difficult situation ‘on the ground’, supporting the first and second tier response agencies while keeping our own services running as normal. Regular training, even on desktop exercises, is very important in helping staff and councillors think about the issues they may have to face and, should the worst happen, vital to give them the skills they need to make critical decisions.”

Councillor Neil Parkin Leader
Adur District Council
(Shoreham Bypass air crash)

Councils can also strengthen their preparedness for dealing with emergencies by developing strong links with the other agencies and groups that they may need to work with in the event of an emergency. Councils should ensure that they are actively engaging in the local resilience forum (LRF) and investing in the relationships that are critical for partnership working during the response phase of an emergency. Authorities should also develop robust mutual aid arrangements that can be drawn on when responding to an emergency requires additional capacity and support.

Councils should also ensure that they are developing the strong relationships with other groups likely to become involved in the response to an emergency, such as the voluntary sector, religious groups and other community groups. Councils will be doing this anyway, but it is important to understand the role this might play in the event of an emergency.

The councils that experienced terrorist attacks in 2017 were able to move quickly to hold public vigils and memorials that brought communities to visibly stand together because of the relationships they already had.

Role of leaders and portfolio holders

Clearly, senior councillors will have an important role to play in the tasks outlined above, particularly understanding and shaping the respective role of politicians and senior officers during an emergency response and recovery. Experience has shown that where their respective roles have not been clearly established prior to an emergency, or where agreed roles are exceeded or disregarded, the coherence of the council's position is undermined. Senior councillors also have a key role in building relationships with local partner agencies and contacts.

Senior councillors should seek assurance that the council is prepared to deal with an emergency and has appropriate business continuity plans in place to continue to operate even where it is directly affected by an emergency (for example, if the council was gutted by a fire, as was the case at Melton District Council in 2008 and South Oxfordshire in 2015). Appendix 2 sets out a series of questions for which senior leaders may wish to seek comprehensive and substantial answers backed up by relevant documentation where appropriate.

To support emergency preparedness, senior political leaders should:

- Discuss with chief executives and senior officers the main risks to local communities, so they can promote and support key actions to increase resilience.
- Understand and support the work of the LRF in planning for emergencies by:
 - helping them to be aware of the needs of discrete groups and issues within communities
 - seeking assurance that the council has worked with the LRF to develop sufficient plans for response and

recovery work, and that the LRF regularly tests these plans and trains personnel by running training exercises.

- Help raise awareness amongst local communities and the general public about the risks posed by key issues, and the roles and responsibilities of different agencies that can be involved in managing risk and responding to an emergency, so that communities are reassured and have a better idea of who to turn to in the event of emergencies occurring.
- Work with the communications team to ensure familiarity with internal and external communications processes in an emergency and their role within this.
- Encourage all councillors to participate in training so they are prepared to respond to an emergency and get involved in recovery from it.
- Understand the functions, ways of working, priorities and constraints of other organisations and in particular, if possible and appropriate, build personal relationships with key personnel, which will facilitate effective working during a crisis and may support the development of mutual aid arrangements with other organisations.
- Explore with the chief executive and senior officers whether contracts with suppliers include clear provisions requiring comprehensive plans for continuing service provision in the event of a civil emergency and for assisting with the response to and recovery from an emergency as appropriate and required; for example:
 - care providers should be expected to have across-the-board arrangements for continuity of care in the event of an emergency, including provisions to evacuate care homes and how these provisions would work
 - street cleaning and waste collection contracts should include provision for vehicles and equipment to be used in support of response to and recovery from an emergency.

The ward councillor role

As representatives of their local communities, ward councillors can help to build community resilience and strengthen councils' ability to respond to emergencies by developing an understanding of their local areas and building relationships within them.

Ward councillors will need to be familiar with the council and LRF's emergency response plans and, as with senior politicians, have an important role to play in seeking assurance about corporate council preparedness for responding to a civil emergency. Wherever possible, they should also contribute to the emergency planning process, undertake training and participate in exercises to ensure that they are familiar with what will be expected in an emergency.

However the emphasis for ward councillors is on a very local and outward facing community leadership role. Understanding and mapping communities – for example, where there are particularly vulnerable residents, what community assets there are that can be drawn on in an emergency, key local networks and organisations and how to quickly contact them – will help to ensure rapid and effective emergency responses. These are neighbourhood mapping activities that ward councillors may be undertaking as a general part of their role, but it is useful to consider them in the specific context of an emergency response.

Ward councillors also have a role to play in sharing information with local residents and helping them to think about and understand how they can strengthen community resilience. As part of their representative role for their area at the council, they can champion resilience in other local services, for example new developments in the area, and ensure that the LRF is aware of any particular issues or risks in their communities.

To support emergency preparedness, ward councillors should:

- promote and encourage the preparation of community plans
- use their local knowledge to identify local groups and partners who may be able to play a role in recovery
- promote self-resilience within the community and help manage residents' expectations
- actively engage with community members involved in community resilience work more widely
- take part in emergency response and recovery training exercises
- ensure they are familiar with the communications team emergency plans and processes
- scrutinise emergency plans and hold officers to account for the detailed preparation and updating of them with partners on the LRF – Appendix 3 sets out a set of possible scrutiny questions.

Response

Summary of council responsibilities

In an emergency scenario, the value of councils and councillors having invested time in planning and preparation, and in understanding where there are particularly vulnerable residents and communities, will become clear. Depending on the nature of an emergency, the 'blue light' services – police, fire and rescue and ambulance – may be at the forefront of the multi-agency response efforts. However, councils have responsibility for key activities that facilitate the response and support those impacted by the emergency. Much of this support will overlap with recovery activities, which councils will typically lead, which is why it is helpful to plan and begin recovery work as soon as possible during the response phase. Councils' response activities may include:

- Providing immediate shelter and welfare for survivors not requiring medical support, and their families and friends, via evacuation, rest, humanitarian and other centres to meet their immediate to short term needs², including providing access to telephones, computers and help with correspondence.
- Potentially providing catering facilities, toilets and rest rooms for use by all agencies, for the welfare of emergency

² Under homelessness legislation councils have a duty to secure suitable accommodation for people until a settled home becomes available. This means that in the event of an emergency, they have a responsibility for providing temporary shelter in the first instance and subsequently temporary accommodation in an extended emergency. Councils, registered social landlords and housing trusts have a duty to cooperate in providing assistance on request, where a housing authority asks for help with meeting its homelessness function.

response personnel, in the event of a protracted emergency. This will depend on the circumstances and available premises.

- Liaising with the coroner's office to provide emergency mortuary capacity in the event that existing mortuary provision is exceeded.
- Communicating relevant updates to the public for information and reassurance.
- Coordinating the activities of the various voluntary sector agencies involved, and spontaneous volunteers, potentially through the creation of a sub-group to lead this.
- Making arrangements for the receipt and distribution of donations of cash, clothing, furniture, etc (this role could be undertaken by the voluntary sector).
- Providing medium to longer-term welfare support of those impacted by the emergency, eg) setting up a dedicated resource centre/one-stop-shop with social services support and other service providers, particularly the voluntary sector and dedicated case workers; setting up help lines, and liaising with police and crime commissioners' offices in relation to support for victims of crime.³
- Providing public health advice and support.
- Providing investigating and enforcement officers under the provision of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 as requested by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).
- Facilitating the inspection of dangerous structures to ensure that they are safe for

³ Where an emergency relates to an incident which is the subject of a police investigation and could lead to a prosecution, victims have a statutory entitlement to support under the Victims Code. This support is the responsibility of police and crime commissioners.

emergency personnel to enter.

- Cleaning up pollution and facilitating the remediation and reoccupation of sites or areas affected by an emergency.

“The flooding we experienced on Boxing Day 2015 was unprecedented. We were badly hit by floods in 2012. At the time these were also described as unprecedented, but it is clear that what was previously a once in 100 years event, or even once in every 50 years, is now happening with much greater frequency. Many homes and small businesses have been flooded several times over the past few years and I know that it has been a struggle.

Council staff, communities and volunteers supported each other during the clean-up operation and established community hubs in the five towns affected by floods. The council dealt with dangerous, flood damaged structures, cleared tonnes of debris and silt and provided assistance packages to householders and local businesses.”

Councillor Tim Swift Leader
Calderdale Council

Recent experience highlights the importance of effective management of public facing responsibilities in providing assurance about the handling of the emergency. Regular and empathetic communication; the close involvement of the voluntary sector, and effective coordination of volunteers and donations are all key to enabling councils to provide practical and emotional support whilst also fulfilling their statutory duties.

Media and communications

Councils can show civic leadership and relay information through intelligent and sensitive use of communications. This should be delivered through a variety of different channels to reach as wide an audience as possible, including traditional print communication, social media, local and national media channels, councillor led community and civic events, public meetings and leaflet or newsletter drops. Maintaining good relations with the media will be more important than ever during and after an emergency, and councils should:

- agree and use key messages consistently across all communications, including agreeing key messages across LRF and first responder organisations
- use the front page of the council website to clearly direct residents and press to up to date information regarding the emergency, with clear signposts of where to go for further information if needed, and relevant contact details for other organisations
- monitor social media, retweeting information from other partner organisations where relevant
- ensure that regular updates are disseminated to all councillors and staff via intranet/ line managers and that front line staff are briefed to deliver key messages to residents.

“One of the most important learnings from the tragic events at the Shoreham Air Show was the need to ensure that communications were regular and consistent – whether between members and officers, the council and its partners, or the council and the media. If clear, concise and accurate information hadn’t been available when it was needed, the potential for causing additional distress in the community could have been enormous.

It was imperative that our messages were aligned with and interview candidates were aware of what was being said by other agencies, so that we could put on a united front during the response phase. We had to balance the needs of our local community with the desire for information from national agencies (who didn’t understand local nuance) so that lines of communication and action remained clear.

I was initially taken aback by the media appetite for information – we received requests for interviews from across the country within hours of the tragedy unfolding, and these kept coming throughout the days and weeks that followed. It was incredibly important to have agreed a number of members, who could field media interview requests, in advance with our communications team – this ensured that there was clarity and consistency for our community in who they were receiving messages from.”

Councillor Neil Parkin Leader
Adur District Council

Financial assistance

The Government operates a mechanism for emergency financial assistance to help local authorities to cover immediate costs they incur in responding to emergencies. The Bellwin Scheme may be activated by ministers where an emergency:

- involves the destruction of, or danger to, life or property, and as a result
- one or more councils incur expenditure on or in connection with the taking of immediate action to safeguard life or property, or to prevent suffering or severe inconvenience, in their area or among inhabitants.

It is important to note that the Bellwin Scheme doesn’t cover precautionary actions or the recovery from an emergency; is subject to an expenditure threshold (which is published annually), and only applies in England. In Wales it is known as the Emergency Financial Assistance Scheme and is administered by the Welsh Government.

Role of leaders and portfolio holders

When an emergency occurs, senior politicians, as leaders of local places, have a vital role in providing civic leadership and reassurance to local people. Depending on the emergency, the council may become a lightning rod for emotions, and will need to manage this effectively. Visibility of senior politicians will be important, and the communications strategy should be seen as facilitating the civic leadership role.

Senior councillors in particular will also have an important role during the immediate response phase in supporting officers and councillor colleagues, who are likely to be working exceptionally hard over long periods with limited breaks, potentially in emotionally difficult circumstances. Providing simple human support and recognising when individuals – including themselves – need a period of respite are important, and link back to the need to have clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

To support emergency responses, senior political leaders should:

- Ensure that the council continues to deliver services and provide support to the most vulnerable in the community and to those driven out of their homes.
- Work with the council's communication team to act as a public face for the council in interactions with the media and the wider community through interviews and public meetings. It will be particularly important to take care to avoid issuing contradictory or unconfirmed information to the media and the public. The key messages agreed with the communications team should be clearly and consistently reiterated in all communications, including social media and face to face interactions with residents.
- Assist with VIP visits, ensuring they are sensitive to the needs of the community.
- Work with the council's communications team to keep onsite and remote staff and councillors informed by ensuring internal communications are updated in line with external communications.
- Ensure that the council is fully and effectively cooperating with all relevant partners, not least the voluntary sector and making best use of all the support offered by the wider general public.
- Support officers and colleagues who are closely involved in the emergency response and recovery, ensuring that periods of relief and additional support are provided.
- If appropriate, make representation to the government for financial or other assistance.

The ward councillor role

The community leadership role is critical when an area is significantly impacted by an emergency. Councillors can play a role in signposting communities to support, including working to ensure that vulnerable residents in particular are assisted.

Again, preparatory work – in this case to understand community vulnerabilities and assets – will pay dividends in an emergency scenario.

The most important role for local councillors in the event of an emergency will be to be in their communities, providing support and reassurance to residents, calming tensions if these have become inflamed and providing as much information as possible, including correcting inaccuracies and rumours. Ward councillors should also provide moral support to the council officers working in what may be a challenging and difficult emergency response scenario, but should remember that, as with the delivery of services during business as usual, the elected member role is not to be involved in the operational response led by officers.

Feedback from councillors and officers involved in emergency responses has emphasised the importance of regular communication by ward councillors, for example using social media and in person. Councillors will need to have realistic expectations about the information that will be available to them if the emergency involves a major criminal investigation, such as a terrorist attack, but should be open with residents about the level of information that is available and provide regular updates, even if the update is that there is no further news at that time.

Experience suggests that if residents have had to evacuate, the key concern for them will be when they can return to their homes, and that it is advisable to avoid offering anything other than firm details on this. Information that subsequently turns out to be false assurances or over promising can significantly impact reputation and trust.

It is also worth bearing in mind that while councillors have a clear and legitimate role to scrutinise the council's corporate response to an emergency, actions that are perceived to be seeking political advantage may not be appropriate at this time.

To support emergency responses, ward councillors in affected areas should:

- provide community leadership in their own wards
- be present locally to identify the needs of individuals and the wider community and feed them in to the appropriate response or recovery organisation via council officers
- signpost members of the public towards the right agency to get the support they need
- communicate information to the public and media as required by the communications team
- support and assist those affected in how they engage with the media.

The Manchester community came together to show solidarity with those affected by the attack and to show that the city was united. The council quickly took action to provide a focus for this support. The vigil in Albert Square was held less than 24 hours after the attack and was so important as a first step to the city's recovery.

Councillor Sue Murphy,
Deputy Leader, Manchester City Council

Recovery

Summary of council responsibilities

Ideally recovery work, or at least preparations for it, should begin from the moment the emergency begins and initially run alongside the response phase, although the formal close-down of response and a full transition to recovery will not take place until the emergency services withdraw and responsibility transfers to the local authority.

Recovery is more than simply the replacement of what has been destroyed and the rehabilitation of those affected. It is a complex social and development process which will look different for each type of emergency. Indeed, for some emergencies, there is a need to be careful about the language of 'recovery'; some people will never fully recover, either physically or emotionally, from their experience of a terrorist attack or similarly catastrophic event. However, it should also be recognised that the recovery process can provide opportunities as well as creating challenges, including improving local places through redevelopment, as well as developing and strengthening community links and resilience.

Recovery will be multi-faceted and may be long running, potentially involving many more agencies and participants than the response phase. It will certainly be more costly in terms of resources, and it will undoubtedly be subject to close scrutiny from the community and the media. Having begun at the earliest opportunity it should continue until the disruption has been rectified, demands on services have returned to normal levels, and the needs of those affected (directly and

indirectly) have been met. It could last months or even years and will normally be led by the council, usually with the chief executive or appropriate strategic director taking the chair of the recovery coordination group.

During recovery councils will have a large part to play in addressing community needs via drop-in centres and, if appropriate, organising anniversaries and memorials as part of the recovery effort. Establishing an aftercare group as a sub group of the recovery coordination group can help to provide emotional support to victims, including responders. For example, this could include setting up community support or self-help groups for people who want to talk about the incident; planning events to bring displaced communities together, or providing a care and counselling service. While this group might be initiated by the council, it may be led by the voluntary sector.

Councils are expected to make arrangements to bear the costs of recovery in all but the most exceptional circumstances. The Government is clear that it is up to councils to assess their own risk and put in place the right mix of insurance, self-insurance, and reserves. In the event of an exceptional emergency however, individual departments, eg the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), Department for Education (DfE), Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and Department for Transport (DfT) will consider providing financial support for various aspects of the recovery effort.

It should be noted that departments will not pay out for recovery costs that are insurable. There will be no automatic entitlement to financial assistance even if arrangements are activated. Councils will have to demonstrate need against criteria laid down by the department running a particular scheme. Also the Government will not normally pay out against costs relating to areas where there is already an established government spending programme, or where existing programme spend can be re-prioritised.

Role of leaders and portfolio holders

Senior political leaders will need to maintain a visible leadership role during the recovery period, reflecting that although media interest may have moved on, the effects experienced locally will last much longer. Political leadership will need to be sensitive to the needs of communities in reflecting when it is time to resume, as far as possible, a business as usual approach in the local community (for example, the removal of any temporary memorials that have been created), even as recovery efforts continue.

Making the case for financial assistance to support recovery processes may be a particularly important role following a major emergency that has created significant costs.

Political leaders should also play a prominent role in capturing the learning from the council's experience of responding to the emergency, in terms of what worked well, what worked less well, and how things could be improved in a future emergency response.

To support the recovery process following an emergency, senior leaders should ensure that:

- Resources and agencies are being effectively deployed and working together coherently.
- Council services and operations return to normal at the earliest appropriate opportunity.
- Communities that have been disrupted by the emergency, and in particular the vulnerable members of the community, receive the short, medium and long term local support they need once the emergency is no longer national news and central government has shifted its attention elsewhere.
- The community are being kept well informed of plans and progress.
- Local voluntary sector organisations and the community are fully involved in the recovery process.
- A recovery strategy has been developed, supported by a concise, balanced, affordable recovery action plan that can be quickly implemented, involves all agencies, and fits the needs of the emergency.
- An impact assessment has been started early with councillors playing a central role in identifying problems and vulnerabilities in their community, which may require priority attention, and feeding those problems and vulnerabilities back to the relevant recovery group. The impact assessment is likely to develop over time from an initial outline assessment, probably covering the more immediate needs of people, to a more refined assessment of longer-term humanitarian needs and economic development
- Lessons learnt from the emergency are being compiled, widely shared and acted upon; follow up actions might include revision of plans, further training, strengthening of liaison with other agencies.

- Thorough debriefs are being planned and carried out to capture issues identified, recommendations to be implemented, and planning assumptions to be reviewed.
- That the community (including businesses) is involved at all stages of recovery; elected members can play a key role in this, chairing public (and business) debrief meetings; they can also be useful for door-knocking rounds, bringing back issues that the community has identified, and providing a trusted point of contact for those with concerns.
- Information and media management of the recovery process is coordinated by the communications team.
- Frequent internal communications keep all onsite and remote staff and councillors updated with key messages.
- Effective protocols for political involvement and liaison (parish, district/county/unitary, combined authority/mayoral and parliamentary) are established.

The ward councillor role

As community representatives and figureheads in their local community, councillors for the affected community have an important role to play in assisting with the recovery process. The role of councillors is vital to rebuilding, restoring, rehabilitating and reassuring the communities affected and speaking on their behalf, and this phase will therefore require a more significant role than for the operational response activities.

During the recovery process, ward councillors will need to represent their communities within the council, as well as representing the council within their communities, sharing information and feedback on proposals and decisions.

An important part of their role will be to monitor the longer term community impact of the emergency, and any specific concerns or tensions which have arisen that need to be addressed.

To support the recovery process, all councillors in the affected areas should:

- Listen to the community – as councillors and local figureheads, they have a key role as the voice of the community and can therefore:
 - be the eyes and ears ‘on the ground’ by providing a focus for and listening to community concerns and feeding these in appropriately
 - provide support and reassurance to the local community, by listening or visiting those affected and acting as a community champion and supporter.
- Use local knowledge – as a member of the community, councillors have unique access to the thoughts and opinions of, and information relating to their local community. As such, they can play a part in using:
 - local awareness of the thoughts and feelings of the community to identify problems and vulnerabilities the community may have and which may require priority attention and feeding them back to the relevant recovery sub-group, eg the community recovery committee
 - local knowledge to provide information on local resources, skills and personalities to the relevant recovery sub-group, in particular local community groups which can also be an important source of help and specialist advice; working closely with community groups, councillors will also be valuable in knowing how and who is active within a community.
- Provide support to those working on recovery through:
 - providing encouragement and support to recovery teams working within the community
 - working with the communications team to communicate key messages, from the RCG and its sub-groups, to local and national press and to disseminate credible advice and information back

to the community, keeping community members involved, including potentially assisting in debrief sessions with the community and managing community expectations along with the wider council

- actively engaging with community members involved in the recovery efforts.
- Demonstrate political leadership:
 - through scrutiny – getting buy-in and closure at political level, including sign off for funding
 - presenting the case for their community to the strategic community recovery committee where relevant.

“Nearly three years on, we’re working on a much more strategic, comprehensive scale to minimise future flooding and strengthen the resilience of our communities. By working closely with our partner organisations, we are delivering targeted flood alleviation schemes, improving the resilience of our highways and utilities infrastructure, managing our uplands to slow the flow of water into the valley bottoms, and helping communities to be better prepared the next time flooding hits.”

Councillor Tim Swift Leader
Calderdale Council

Appendix 1 – specific flooding related responsibilities

County councils and unitary authorities are lead local flood authorities (LLFAs) and have duties under the Flood Water Management Act 2010 (FWMA).

Under the FWMA, LLFAs are required to:

- Develop, maintain, apply and monitor a strategy for local flood risk management in their areas. Local flood risk means risk from surface run off, ground water and ordinary watercourses.
- Cooperate with other risk management authorities in exercising their local flood risk management functions. Risk management authorities are LLFAs, the Environment Agency, water and sewerage companies, highways authorities, internal drainage boards and district councils.
- Maintain a register of assets – the physical structures or features that are likely to have a significant effect on flooding in their area, including information for each of them about ownership and state of repair.
- Investigate significant local flooding incidents and publish the results of such investigations.

LLFAs also:

- are statutory consultees on planning applications for major development (10 dwellings or more) proposals which have surface water drainage implications
- manage both consenting and enforcement activity related to altering, removing or replacing certain structures or features on ordinary watercourses (except in those areas covered by an internal drainage board).

LLFAs and the Environment Agency need to work closely together to ensure that their local and national strategies and plans are consistent with one another. An essential part of managing local flood risk is taking account of new development in any local plans or strategies.

By working in partnership with communities, LLFAs can raise awareness of flood and coastal erosion risks. Local flood action groups (and other organisations that represent those living and working in areas at risk of flooding) will be useful and trusted channels for sharing up-to-date information, guidance and support direct with the community.

LLFAs should encourage local communities to participate in local flood risk management.

Depending on local circumstances, this could include developing and sharing good practice in risk management, training community volunteers so that they can raise awareness of flood risk in their community, and helping the community to prepare flood action plans. LLFAs must also consult local communities and any risk management authorities that may be affected about their local flood risk management strategy.

If a flood happens, all councils as ‘category one responders’ must have plans in place not only to respond to flooding emergencies, but also to control or reduce the impact of a flooding emergency.

Appendix 2 – possible questions for leaders/portfolio holders to raise

- How engaged is the council in the LRF?
- Are there sufficient officers at each level appropriately trained to participate in multi-agency coordinating groups?
- Are all senior staff aware of what the council roles and responsibilities are in local resilience forum multi-agency emergency plans and is the council ready to deliver them?
- Have arrangements been made to enable close working with other councils within the LRF in the event of an emergency (eg information sharing, shared communications plan, joint spokespeople, etc)?
- Has the council appropriately considered plans for leading the recovery from emergencies that may occur?
- Does the LRF have an up-to-date risk register and does it fully reflect risks faced by the council and incorporate climate change risks? Is it sufficiently detailed and comprehensive, written in plain English and understandable to the general public? Is it readily available to the public?
- Are there sufficient plans for preventing emergencies; and reducing, controlling or mitigating the effects of emergencies in both the response and recovery phases?
- Do the emergency plans fully reflect the identified risks?
- Do plans clearly identify vulnerable groups or businesses that are at particular risk?
- When were business continuity plans last checked, updated and tested?
- Is there a flood risk management strategy in place with adequate systems and resources to implement it?
- Is there sufficient up-to-date information on the website to enable residents to contact the council in an emergency during a normal working day and out of hours and does the website make clear to residents what they can expect from the council in a local civil emergency?
- When was the website last updated? Is it fully up-to-date and does it fully reflect current arrangements and points of contact?
- Does the council have arrangements to generate the resource to respond to calls from residents about short or no notice emergencies out of working hours, particularly during the holidays, eg over Christmas and the New Year?
- Are senior members of staff suitably trained in the implementation of the LRF's emergency plans and ready to respond in the event of an emergency?
- Are emergency contact numbers for all key personnel, including councillors, available and up-to-date?
- Are councillors aware of their role in responding to and recovering from an emergency and have they had a recent up-to-date communications brief on emergencies to enable them to fulfil their community leadership role and be well informed for any media contact?
- Are up-to-date and fit for purpose emergency and business continuity plans in place and are they coherent with local resilience forum plans?
- Have lessons learnt from previous emergencies across the country been identified and plans modified accordingly?

Appendix 3 – possible questions for scrutiny committees to consider

- How well is the council cooperating with other key organisations like the Environment Agency and the emergency services?
- Have risks to council buildings and facilities (eg schools, leisure centres, libraries, residential care homes, day centres) been properly identified and are mitigations and fall back plans in place?
- Is the council conducting active horizon scanning for new risks and working with the LRF to regularly update the risk register?
- Is the risk register sufficiently detailed and comprehensive, written in plain English and easily understandable by the general public?
- Is the council aware of the impact emergencies could have on local businesses and the local economy and does it have plans to mitigate the impact?
- Does the council have the wherewithal to be able to give advice to the commercial and voluntary sectors in the event of an emergency?
- Do plans include measures for preventing emergencies and for mitigating the impact of emergencies when they arise?
- Do plans reflect lessons learnt from previous emergencies across the country?
- Has the council appropriately considered plans for leading the recovery from emergencies that may occur?
- Have climate risks and opportunities been built into local growth plans?
- Has training been provided to councillors and has training offered been taken up?
- What assurance is there that the council has developed and practiced appropriate emergency and business continuity plans and are they coherent with the local resilience forum plans?
- When were the council's business continuity plans last tested and how frequently are such tests planned to be carried out?
- When was the last time the council participated in an exercise and when is the next exercise planned?
- When were response and recovery arrangements last reviewed to ensure that newly elected members and staff are fully briefed?
- What arrangements does the council have for scaling up the staff resource to not only support the response and recovery, but also maintain the delivery of front line services?
- Which officers have been appropriately trained to participate in coordination groups and is this sufficient to ensure that the council can participate fully in responding to and recovering from emergencies?

Appendix 4 – useful references

Local authorities' preparedness for civil emergencies – a good practice guide for chief executives (Solace / MHLCG)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/759744/181116_LA_preparedness_guide_for_cx_v6.10__004_.pdf

Responsibilities of responder agencies and others – government guidance

www.gov.uk/guidance/preparation-and-planning-for-emergencies-responsibilities-of-responder-agencies-and-others

Emergency preparedness – government guidance

www.gov.uk/government/publications/emergency-preparedness

Emergency Response and Recovery: Non statutory guidance accompanying the Civil Contingencies Act 2004

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/253488/Emergency_Response_and_Recovery_5th_edition_October_2013.pdf

House of Commons briefing paper – dealing with civil contingencies

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8016/CBP-8016.pdf>

LGA severe weather resources

www.local.gov.uk/topics/severe-weather/flooding

www.local.gov.uk/topics/severe-weather/heatwaves-information-councils

www.local.gov.uk/topics/severe-weather/cold-weather-plan-england

LGA councillor briefing pack – resilient communities: ensuring your community is resilient to the impacts of extreme weather

www.local.gov.uk/councillor-briefing-pack-resilient-communities

LGA guide for communicating during extreme weather

www.local.gov.uk/guide-communicating-during-extreme-weather

LGA crisis communications – cyber attack

www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/comms-hub-communications-support/cyber-attack-crisis

LGA councillor's guide to cyber security

www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-cyber-security



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