

**TITLE OF REPORT:** Strategic Resilience and Emergency Planning Framework

**REPORT OF:** Paul Dowling, Strategic Director – Communities and Environment

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## **SUMMARY**

To provide the Committee with an update on the progress over the last six months in relation to the Strategic Resilience and Emergency Planning Framework.

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### **Background**

1. As a reminder for members, the Strategic Resilience and Emergency Planning Framework was produced to continue the work undertaken from the previous Resilience Strategy and to provide the future focus and direction based on four themed areas.
2. The key focus over the last six months for Resilience and Emergency Planning has been to continue to work in collaboration with our local, regional, partners and communities; assess and mitigate risk; increase our capacity and capability to respond; train and exercise councillors and new volunteers; and strengthen community resilience.

### **Update on Progress**

3. Updates from the Themed Areas from the last six months include:

**Building resilient and stronger communities** - working with businesses, the voluntary sector, partner agencies, communities and individuals to ensure they are better prepared for and able to recover from emergencies:

- The Council's Resilience Team is a member of the Metrocentre Steering Group, which, in partnership with Metrocentre Management Team and the emergency services, produces, reviews and validates the centre's Incident Management and Evacuation Plan. The plan is currently being reviewed to ensure all arrangements are current and in line with national resilience and security arrangements, designed to facilitate the most effective incident response and evacuation arrangements for a range of incident types, including malicious attacks such as terrorism.
- Gateshead is taking a more active role within the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum and now is regionally leading on the Communities and Training and Exercising Group themes, as well as taking on the Vice Chair role of the Tactical Business Management Group.

**Assessing Risk** – identifying new hazards and threats that may affect Gateshead implementing measures that may prevent an emergency or incident occurring:

- Following the publication of the National Risk Assessment and Resilience Planning Assumptions, Gateshead has been involved in the development of the Local Resilience Forum Planning Assumptions. This exercise has identified a number of priority work areas and recommendations both regionally and locally to progress forward with over the next 12 to 18 months.
- In conjunction with this, the National Capabilities Survey conducted by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat in the Cabinet Office is about to be launched. The survey is completed on a bi-annual basis and seeks to assess the UK's capability to respond to risks determined by the National Risk Assessment. This is completed at a local level and will assess and review Gateshead's capability to respond.
- The Corporate Risk and Resilience Group has been re-established with key representatives from all Council services. The overall aim of the group is to promote and support risk management and resilience, to ensure compliance with statutory requirements of the Council's Financial Regulations and the Civil Contingencies Act.
- Exercise Swan took place in October 2016 and was developed to test response arrangements to an Influenza pandemic risk across the Northumbria, Durham and Darlington and Cleveland Local Resilience Forum areas. The exercise took place over the six weeks up to 13<sup>th</sup> October. Over the six weeks there was a gradual escalation period of a pandemic, with a focus on the considerations each agency would make to prepare as the situation worsened. An internal working group was established with the Director of Public Health overseeing the actions, and then attending the final session on behalf of Gateshead Council. A number of internal issues have been identified to be addressed and work is ongoing including:
  - A full review of the current Pandemic Influenza Plan is required
  - A refresh of the Council's business continuity arrangements
  - Agreeing of appropriate Attendance at Multi-Agency Command and Control
  - Identification of appropriate Internal Management of an Influenza Pandemic
  - Increasing the Voluntary Sector Involvement
  - Refreshing the Communications plan
  - Reviewing of Body Storage Issues
- In February 2017, the Director of Public Health published the Annual Health Protection Assurance Report for 2015/16. This report describes those activities and arrangements that protect the population from risks to health arising from biological, environmental, chemical and radiological hazards. It includes schemes to prevent the incidence of diseases (i.e. screening, immunisation and vaccination); surveillance systems to identify incidents of certain infections; the control and management of individual cases of certain diseases to reduce the risk of spread; and the communication of messages and risks during urgent and

emergency situations. The Director of Public Health role is to provide assurance that arrangements to protect the health of the communities that they serve are robust and is implemented appropriately to local health needs. The report confirms that the arrangements in place are suitable and sufficient for this purpose. The report identifies an issue regarding the unavailability and/or timeliness of data at the Gateshead level for certain screening programmes. In these circumstances, assurance for Gateshead is limited to the overall assurance available in respect of the programme or the period for which data is available

**Enhancing our partnership arrangements to respond and recover** – the effective response and co-ordination of arrangements in the event of an emergency or incident occurring and achieving a rapid return to normality:

- The newly recruited Incident Controllers from the Emergency Response Team undertook some exercising during August, September and October 2016. *'Exercise Impact'* was a table-top exercise designed to test officers in a simulated scenario identifying and documenting any actions and decisions. Feedback from the exercises has been very positive.
- In September 2016, the North East Counter Terrorism Unit provided Leadership Team with an overview of Protect and Prepare, part of the Government's Contest Strategy. The aim of the session was to understand the threat from terrorism; guide individuals on what to do if they find themselves involved in a terrorist incident or event; and provide the ability to recognise and report suspicious activity. A similar session for councillors is scheduled to take place in April 2017.
- Following the recruitment of new volunteers to the Emergency Response Team, the Resilience Team undertook further *'Strategic Incident Controller training'* in November 2016 with Leadership Team with a mixture of both Strategic and Service Directors from the Council. This will enable this cohort of directors to act as Incident Controllers as required and add further resilience to the Emergency Response Team. Some further table-top exercising will take place during May 2017.
- The Sandbag Policy for Gateshead has now been fully implemented after being agreed by Cabinet and approved by Council in September 2016. In summary, sandbags will now not be provided to individual residents and businesses to use on their own properties. However the Council will hold a stock of sandbags primarily to assist the response in managing surface water on and from the public highway, and assist with the response in known 'at risk' flooding areas when appropriate. A full communications plan has been undertaken to inform residents, officers and councillors of this policy change, including an article in council news, Gateshead Now email and social media posts. The Council website has been fully updated with advice and guidance of how to become more resilient and proactively protect properties from flooding. A flooding leaflet *'How to prepare and what to do in a flooding emergency'* has also been developed from a range of sources with the onus focussed on residents strengthening their own community resilience.

- The Council has now procured a new Emergency Management Digital Logging System. This ensures all local key actions; decisions and information are logged during an incident or emergency on one system. It is envisaged that the new provider will implement their system from April 2017.
- Resilience Direct is a Cabinet Office secure web-based platform for the resilience community to share information amongst all emergency responders and agencies for planning, response and recovery. A mapping facility allows responders to produce and share real time maps showing cordon areas, locations of reception centres and addresses affected. The system provides a secure information-sharing platform. Work has been completed in Gateshead to ensure the necessary officers are trained to use this in a response mode.

**Strengthening Communication and Community Engagement** – communication is essential before, during and after an emergency or incident. A resilient community is well informed and aware of the assistance and advice available to them so they can help themselves. Updates include:

- A Members' Seminar with Councillors was held in December 2016 that provided councillors with an overview of the Emergency Response Guidance for Councillors. The session included an interactive table top exercise which took councillors through a scenario that had happened in Gateshead and were asked how they would respond and what their role would be in this situation. Feedback was positive from the session and this is to be an annual event within the Members' Calendar.
- The Resilience Team have been working on a draft Community Resilience Plan for the community of Blackhall Mill. The aim of the plan is to inform Blackhall Mill residents of the potential risks they face; promote self-resilience and opportunities to volunteer; provide advice on who to contact for assistance or make aware of specific incidents and inform residents of the roles of others and opportunities to work together. Consultation with residents; councillors and volunteers within the area has begun. This area is a pilot and it is envisaged that this approach will be rolled out across other areas within Gateshead.

## **Incident Management and Response**

4. The Emergency Response Team has been involved in the planning and responding to a number of incidents and pre-planned operations over the last six months. This has included:
  - *Operation Jessop – October 2016*  
In October 2016, Northumbria Police contacted Gateshead Council to request assistance in dealing with a suspected large quantity of chemicals being stored within a residential property in Gateshead. The chemicals had been bought on-line and had triggered concerns due to the quantities bought and the potential volatility if used or stored incorrectly. An operation took place and was coordinated successfully without causing tensions or issues within the community. The chemicals turned out to have been bought legitimately but due to unsafe storage conditions were removed and safely disposed by professional contractors.

- *Operation Border – October 2016*  
On Tuesday 18 October 2016 in response to intelligence from within Operation Sanctuary, Northumbria Police undertook a series of raids in properties within Newcastle, Gateshead and County Durham areas as part of an ongoing operation to tackle and disrupt offences of Modern Slavery which was called 'Operation Border'. This was part of a UK wide response to identify and arrest those responsible for human trafficking and slavery, and was locally publicised at the time. The impact was minimal within the Gateshead area as no offenders or victims were identified. The operation was pre-planned and led by Northumbria Police which was undertaken in conjunction with multi-agency partner organisations.
- *Severe Weather Issues – November 2016*  
Gateshead experienced a number of weather issues over the 21 and 22 November. This resulted in some issues with surface water flooding in a numbers of areas and major roads and issues with rising river levels including Blackhall Mill. As a consequence a Tactical Command Room was activated by Northumbria Police on the morning of the 22 November to deal and respond with the issues on the roads during the rush hour period. One learning point was in relation to communication and further improvements in the use of social media.

## **Recommendations**

5. Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to:
  - Consider and comment on the progress report
  - Indicate whether it is satisfied with the progress achieved within the last six months
  - Agree to receive a further report in September 2017.

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