

TITLE OF REPORT: Strategic Resilience and Emergency Planning Framework

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

SUMMARY

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

Background

1. As a reminder for members, the purpose of the Strategic Resilience and Emergency Planning Framework is to determine the future focus for Gateshead Council working in collaboration with partners and the community. This will ensure that we continue to have robust arrangements in place to mitigate, prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies and major incident situations.
2. The framework has recently been refreshed and this was presented to Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2017 followed by endorsement by Cabinet in December 2017.

Incident Management and Response

3. The Emergency Response Team has been involved in responding to a number of diverse incidents and planning for a pre-planned operation once again over the last six months. A highlight of some of the issues include:
 - **Fire at the former Springs Health Club, Low Fell** [25 March 2018] – the Emergency Response Team received a call early morning of a fire that had broken out in the derelict former Springs Health Club site in Low Fell. There was no evacuation of local residents; no road closures or diversions implemented and the local ward councillors were informed as part of the Emergency Response Protocol for Councillors.
 - **Property Fire at Newbolt Court, Gateshead** [18 March 2018] – the Emergency Response Team were notified of a fire in a property at Newbolt Court in Gateshead. The fire was contained within the one affected flat, therefore no need for an evacuation from the block. The Duty Caretaker coordinated the response with Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service throughout the night, and there was also no need to escalate to emergency response arrangements. The local ward councillors were informed as part of the Emergency Response Protocol for Councillors.

- **Adverse Weather** [27 February 2018 to 4 March 2018] – over the course of seven days Gateshead experienced some inclement adverse winter weather. This resulted in heavy snowfall with various road closures due to drifting snow and ice throughout all areas of Gateshead; power outages in some communities; the suspension of bin collections; closure of schools and part closure of some leisure and library facilities. The weather resulted in an unprecedented move of the Met Office issuing an AMBER warning for heavy snow over the course of a number of days. An internal debrief has been undertaken and lessons learned and recommendations are currently being collated by the Resilience Team.
- **Operation Caritas** [15 January 2018] - this was a pre-planned Northumbria Police led operation with involving potential victims and offenders of modern slavery, trafficking and exploitation. The operation took place across the Inner West area of Gateshead and within the Newcastle area and to facilitate this; the Resilience Teams in both Gateshead and Newcastle worked together with services and partner agencies to develop the appropriate support and response arrangements.

Emergency Response Exercising

4. The council has participated in a number of both internal and external exercises over the last six months with representation from a number of different groups and services. A number of highlights have included:
 - **Critical Level Workshop** [March 2018] – this was a multi-agency workshop that was held to explore the preparedness, response and recovery plans when the UK Terrorism Threat Level is raised to critical from the result of a terrorist incident.
 - **Exercise Skynet** [February 2018] – the purpose of this exercise was to test the multi-agency response to a cyber-attack on IT systems and the associated command and control structures. Led by Northumbria Police the scenario tested a number of objectives including capturing any technical interdependencies between multi-agency IT systems. The debrief from the session is currently being collated.
 - **Simulated Fire Fighting Exercise** [February 2018] – this was a simulated exercise led by Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service in conjunction with the Gateshead Housing Company. It involved the testing of a new system of work using Breathing Apparatus (BA) and hose management and deployment elements of a new high rise procedure which took place at Eslington Court in Teams. This was very successful and is to be rolled out to operational fire teams across the region.
 - **Site Incident Officer Training** [December 2017] – in conjunction with Northumbria Police, this was specific training for the council's Emergency Response Team Site Incident Officers which involved looking at roles and responsibilities using a previous incident that was experienced within Gateshead. Feedback from attendees at the session has been positive and this approach is to be utilised in future.

- **Exercise Resilient RAT** [November 2017] – this exercise was led by the Armed Forces and involved the exercising of a MACA (Military Assistance to Civil Authorities) request. This included the planning, management, and strategic command and staff procedures in a multi-agency environment in the consequence of severe weather and flooding.
- **Exercise Border Reiver** [October 2017] – this was a multi-agency national safety and security exercise led by Police Scotland supported by Northumbria Police and the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum and was held between Tuesday 3rd and Thursday 5th October 2017.

The exercise, which forms part of a national (UK) Exercise Programme, was jointly developed and planned over the last 9 months by the Home Office, Office of Security and Counter Terrorism (OSCT), Scottish Government, Police Scotland and Northumbria Police with partners from government departments and agencies, emergency service organisations, and Local Authorities including Gateshead Council.

The exercise was Tier 1 and involved the activation of COBRA [Cabinet Office Briefing Room A] to test the collective central government response to an emergency. The scenario involved a large-scale test of UK and Scottish contingency plans, and co-ordination of the response to a major incident. It drew on resource from both Scottish Ministers and Ministers from Whitehall with the aim of testing a UK-devolved administration interaction in response to a Marauding Terrorism Firearms Attack [MTFA] at various locations in both Scotland and England.

Debrief Process

5. As part of all operations, exercises and incidents that are managed by the Council, a debrief process is completed to ensure a thorough analysis of the actions undertaken can be reviewed. This allows us to identify areas of good practice and also enables us to learn from issues identified that will help us to improve our future response and planning.

Update on Progress

6. 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 in conjunction with Northumbria Police has established a Gateshead Business Resilience Forum. The purpose of the group is to bring key organisations and businesses within the Gateshead area to collaboratively work together within the resilience and emergency planning arena. Various organisations are supporting this including Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service; Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust; The Sage Gateshead; Intu Metro Centre; the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art; Northumbria University; Trinity Square; Nexus and Gateshead College.

- Following the tragic Grenfell Tower Block Fire, a seminar was provided for councillors in October 2017 with an insight as to how a similar emergency and resilience situation would be responded to within Gateshead along with a reminder of the Emergency Response Guidance for Councillors. This was well received by members with positive feedback provided by all attendees.
- A Northumbria Voluntary Emergency Liaison Group has been established which is chaired by the council. The purpose of the group is to work with key organisations within the Northumbria area to look at the voluntary sector coordination in emergency response and recovery and to consider the various capacities and capabilities that exist within this sector.

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

- The council's new Pandemic Influenza Plan was endorsed by Cabinet in January 2018. Work is currently ongoing, being led by Gateshead, to look at reviewing options of the provision of Personal Protection Equipment. A task and finish group has been established and work is progressing to explore a regional approach. A member's seminar has been scheduled to present the new plan and council's approach in April 2018.
- Over the last 18 months, a sustained volume of work has taken place to review as to how the Council would respond to a terrorist attack situation. This has involved looking at the lessons learnt from exercising over the course of this year and incorporating them into the council's plans and protocols to improve the response to these types of incidents. Work is now currently ongoing with groups and services within the council to develop employee guidance and undertake the necessary training and awareness with employees of the revised arrangements.
- The Resilience and Emergency Planning Team provided a recent report and presentation at the Audit Standards Committee in March 2018. The purpose of the report was to provide an overview of the risks associated to the Council within the Resilience and Emergency Planning function; provide an overview of the statutory legislation; provide an overview of the Community Risk Register and how the Council operates to mitigate and manage these risks. This was well received by members and raised the awareness of the cross cutting themes between committees.

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:

- An out of hours Duty Officer System has now been implemented within the council's Emergency Response Team. A rota has been implemented with the current HQ Co-Ordinators which ensures that the same person isn't receiving all the calls and responding to issues. This will provide the assurance that there is someone available on behalf of the Council to respond 24 hours, 7 days a week.
- Following a presentation from the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum in 2017, the seven Chief Executives within the North East Combined Authority [NECA]

area requested a Strategic Table Top Emergency Response Exercise. This was led by the council and provided an opportunity for the Chief Executives to discuss strategic level responses to a major emergency and develop a shared understanding of mutual aid arrangements and assistance between local authorities. This incorporated the impacts of response, recovery and restoration, to demonstrate the collective required response in a safe but pressured environment. The fictional scenario occurred in a virtual local authority that bordered on all of the Local Authorities within the NECA area.

Overall, the Chief Executives provided positive feedback from the session which promoted the necessary thinking and consideration, the subject matter was good and realistic, however commented they were constrained for time and could have benefitted from another hour or so to participate. It was agreed that this should become an annual exercising event for Chief Executives.

- The council has strengthened its working arrangements with the Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. This was tested during the adverse weather very recently during February and March with regular teleconferences and the sharing of response arrangements and plans as the incident developed.

Recommendations

7. 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 2018.

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