

TITLE OF REPORT: Resilience and Emergency Planning Annual Update

REPORT OF: Alice Wiseman, Director of Public Health and Wellbeing

SUMMARY

Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive regular updates on the Council's Resilience and Emergency Planning activities. This report provides a summary for 2021 through to the current date in 2022, including a specific focus on recent storm events.

Background

1. The Council's Resilience and Emergency Planning functions continue to operate in adherence with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, ensuring that we perform our statutory duties in collaboration with our partners and communities.
2. Gateshead Council along with other Local Authorities are defined as a Category 1 Responder - an organisation likely to be at the core of most emergencies. Other Category 1 Responders include Northumbria Police, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service, North East Ambulance Service and NHS England. Category 1 Responders are subject to the full set of civil protection duties which requires them to:
 - assess the risk of emergencies occurring and use this to inform contingency planning;
 - put in place emergency plans;
 - put in place business continuity management arrangements;
 - put in place arrangements to make information available to the public about civil protection 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 co-ordination;
 - co-operate with other local responders to enhance co-ordination and efficiency;
 - provide advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about business continuity management (local authorities only).

Emergency Response Team

3. The Councils Emergency Response Team is led by the Service Director for Transformation, System Resilience and EPRR and the Resilience & Emergency Planning Coordinator during the In-Hours period.
4. During the Out of Hours period, a rota is in place which is covered by Executive Directors/Service Directors (who are contractually obliged to undertake this role) and a Duty Officer. Should an incident be declared, the Director would assume the role of Incident Director and provide strategic leadership and commit resources as appropriate whilst the Duty Officer would gather information about the incident,

advise the Incident Director on the appropriate strategy/response as well as coordinate Council assets to assist in the management of the incident. Dependent on the severity or impact of the incident, it may also be necessary to bring in other personnel to assist. All other roles within the Emergency Response Team are provided on a voluntary basis by Council employees below the grade of Service Director although a standby payment is made to anyone undertaking this role.

5. Care Call is the initial point of contact for incident reporting to ensure a 24/7 response. In many instances, operational services will respond as part of business-as-usual arrangements via well-established duty arrangements. If however, a critical or major incident is declared or a response is required beyond the capacity or capability of normal arrangements or a corporate response is required, the Emergency Response Team will be contacted to provide advice, guidance and where necessary a coordinated, proportionate response.
6. Duty Officer Team numbers had reduced over the last 2-3 years due to employee retirements and changes of employer, so it was necessary to undertake a team recruitment campaign in 2021. This very successful campaign resulted in a further 17 new members joining the team, taking the overall team membership number to 72. Some existing members of the team also stepped up to the role of Duty Officer to strengthen the Council's 24/7 cover arrangements.

Training

7. Role based refresher training was offered to all existing members of the Emergency Response Team and provided to those who'd expressed an interest between July and November 2021. All of the new recruits also received training specific to their roles in October 2021. All sessions were facilitated by an external trainer in collaboration with the Council's Resilience and Emergency Planning Team.

Exercises

8. Multi-agency exercising has been limited over the course of the last two years due to ongoing COVID restrictions. The Council's Emergency Response Team was however able to take part in the following 'table-top' exercises via Microsoft Teams:
 - **Exercise Mermaid, 18th March 2021:** This, the first of two statutory exercises for the Gateshead area, tested multi-agency responders using the scenario of an explosion at the Rust-Oleum Europe site at Follingsby under Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) regulations.
 - **Exercise Eagle, 21st April 2021:** Designed to test local Outbreak Management Plans using COVID as the scenario.
 - **Exercise Panama, 12th May 2021:** The second statutory exercise, also under COMAH regulations, tested responders at the International Paints site in Felling using a chemical fire scenario.

Incidents

9. The Emergency Response Team has responded to the following incidents during 2021 and up to the present date:
 - **February 2020 to present – COVID-19:** This long-term issue has required significant resources regarding planning, coordination, and response. This has included regular representation at Strategic and Tactical Multi-Agency Coordination Groups on behalf of the Council and at internal Coordination meetings. Significant planning time has also been spent on Surge/ Outbreak Planning, Excess Deaths, and planning for concurrent events, which has resulted

in all emergency plans and action cards being updated to incorporate pandemic considerations.

- **15th January 2021 – Care Call System Loss:** This system failure occurred out of normal working hours requiring the Emergency Response Team to liaise with the Council's IT Team to resolve the issue and restore services.
- **28th February 2021 – Campground Fire:** The response to the fire at the Campground waste site in Wrekenton was largely driven by the management of the Council's Highway's and Waste Service in partnership with Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service. This did however require additional coordination from the Emergency Response Team regarding public communications and health assurances.
- **5th March 2021 – Police Operation Blencathra:** Northumbria Police proactively contacted the Emergency Response Team in planning a raid on some property in the Chopwell area, regarding intelligence received about chemicals potentially being stored that could pose a danger to the public with a risk of evacuations. Representation was provided to the Police Silver Command Room and the Council operated using a full Emergency Response Team from the Council's Incident Room until the situation was resolved.
- **31st March 2021 – Eslington Court Flooding:** Eslington Court, one of Gateshead's largest high-rise blocks, was flooded following a water main failure on the fifth floor leaving the entire block uninhabitable for up to 3 weeks due to water damage or electrical failure. The 120 properties within the block all needed to be evacuated with immediate effect, resulting in the Council providing transportation, temporary accommodation, catering and welfare arrangements for all displaced residents for the duration. At the time, this was one of the most complex and resource intensive response operations provided by the Council.
- **9th April 2021 – Operation Forth Bridge:** The passing of the Duke of Edinburgh led to national and regional plans being invoked for 'Operation Forth Bridge'. The multi-agency coordination that followed ensured that all local authorities within the Northumbria Police area provided a consistent approach to the provision of books of condolence, flag raising, public messaging and lighting of public buildings, including the Millennium Bridge.
- **5th June 2021 – Redheugh Court Fire:** A minor fire in one property led to the short-term evacuation of the residents of one floor of Redheugh Court, who required welfare arrangements for a short time before being allowed back into their properties.
- **26th November 2021 – Storm Arwen:** Please refer to paragraphs 7 to 31 for an overview of the Council's storm responses.
- **24th January 2022 – Ouseburn Farm Avian Influenza Outbreak:** Although this outbreak took place on the Newcastle side of the river, a 3km exclusion zone was established incorporating a large area of the Gateshead borough. A letter drop was carried out to around 25,000 Gateshead residents at the request of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to advise on safety and the requirements on those residents with their own live poultry.
- **29th January 2022 – Storm Malik:** Please refer to paragraphs 7 to 31 for an overview of the Council's storm responses.
- **7th February 2022 – Shee Recycling Centre Fire:** A fire at this privately owned site in Birtley required significant multi-agency coordination to protect public health in the vicinity of the fire due to the presence of asbestos, which became airborne during the fire. The response was further complicated by initial difficulties in identifying site ownership and liability and the requirement for specialist contractors and equipment to make the situation safe.

- **16th – 22nd February 2022 – Storms Dudley, Eunice and Franklin:** Please refer to paragraphs 7 to 31 for an overview of the Council's storm responses.
- **21st February 2022 - Rowlands Gill Avian Influenza Outbreak:** This incident was of a very similar size and scale to the Ouseburn Farm outbreak in January, only this time the outbreak zone affected only Gateshead residents. A letter drop was again requested by DEFRA, this time to around 27,000 residents.
- **23rd March 2022 – Present – Ukraine Situation:** The present situation in the Ukraine resulted in the establishment of multi-agency coordination groups to ensure all safeguarding issues were being considered for arriving evacuees. Presently any issues being identified by our Housing and Social Care teams are being fast tracked by the Emergency Response Team to other agencies including Northumbria Police and Border Force to protect evacuee welfare and to resolve issues without delay.
- **31st March 2022 – Civic Centre Lightning Strike:** The Emergency Response Team Duty Officer was contacted in the early hours of the morning to advise that Care Call systems were out of operation at the Civic Centre due to a lightning strike. The Duty Officer liaised with the Council's IT Team to restore the issue while the Care Call Team relocated to a secondary site to continue operations.
- **5th April 2022 – Angel Court Fire Safety:** Although no incident had occurred, the Council's Emergency Response Team was consulted on the potential evacuation of this premises due to fire safety concerns, housing predominantly older residents with complex needs. The situation was resolved without an evacuation due to improved safety on site.

2021/22 Storm Responses and Debriefs

7. As alluded to in paragraph 6, the Northeast was subjected to some significant storms between late November 2021 and late February 2022. The following paragraphs provide an overview of the Council's response to each of these storms, the major learning points and the development work that has since been undertaken to strengthen future responses.

Storm Arwen: Overview of Response Arrangements

25th November

8. On Thursday 25th November the Met Office issued Yellow and Amber Warnings for Wind for the 26th November. These categories of warning are fairly commonplace and were circulated as per normal to key representatives in the Resilience and Emergency Planning Team, Care Call, Customer Services, Highways, Waste and Drainage and Environmental Services.

26th – 27th November

9. The Met Office updated their warnings on the morning of the 26th to Red for the latter part of Friday 26th. Red warnings are very unusual, so the service recipients were allowed time to put contingency arrangements such as duty teams and escalation plans in place to deal with the potential impacts of the forecasted weather. Information was also provided to the public at this point via the Council's social media pages.
10. During the evening of the 26th and the day of the 27th the Care Call service was inundated with calls relating to damaged buildings and fallen trees, which were allocated to services and prioritised and managed based on the highest risks to the public. Multi-Agency Coordination meetings were also held during this period, with all areas in the Northumbria Police Constabulary area reporting significant damage. At

this stage it was not apparent that Gateshead or other local authority areas in the region had been badly affected by power cuts.

28th November

11. Multi-agency coordination meetings continue throughout the day and the scale of issues caused by the loss of electrical power begins to emerge, which at this point indicates that Northumberland is the worst hit area. The Council escalates to emergency response arrangements and coordinates the response to known issues from the Major Incident Room. Clean-up work continues across the borough, but at this stage little is known about the scale of electrical power loss in the Gateshead borough.

29th November – 8th December

12. Information was received from Northern Powergrid on the 29th November to confirm that there was in excess of 800 properties in Gateshead that had been without electricity since the storm. Internal Tactical Group meetings were stood up with immediate effect to quickly manage and respond to all known issues. This group remained active until the 8th December when all known issues had been dealt with.
13. Regular communications were issued to councillors to provide updates on known issues and teams of Council volunteers started to 'door-knock' known affected areas to undertake welfare checks and to provide information where possible. The Council also worked with health bodies and local GPs to coordinate efforts to reach the most vulnerable of those affected. The Council started to work with representatives from local community run facilities to provide places to shelter for those without electricity.
14. Throughout this period the Council provided information updates and response arrangements that were thought to be appropriate based on the information provided by Northern Powergrid, which turned out to be wholly inaccurate and unreliable for a significant part of this time.

Storm Malik: Overview of Response Arrangements

29th January

15. Storm Malik had been forecasted using a Yellow Warning for Wind from the Met Office, which as alluded to in paragraph 8 was a fairly common occurrence and this warning was circulated to all relevant key services as usual. The gusts of wind encountered did however cause further damage, particularly to roofs, solar panels, fences and trees that had already been weakened during Storm Arwen.
16. Although far less destructive than Storm Arwen, Emergency Response Team personnel worked throughout the day with key service personnel to ensure that reported issues were being responded to appropriately.

Storms Dudley, Eunice and Franklin: Overview of Response Arrangements

17. Storms Dudley, Eunice and Franklin were officially three separate storms, but as they occurred concurrently over several days, they were responded to at single and multi-agency levels as if this was one storm.

16th February – 22nd February

18. These storms were far less impactful than those previously encountered, despite Yellow and Amber Wind Warnings being issued by the Met Office. The Council's internal Tactical Group was proactively stood up to manage the incident, but all

issues were managed as part of business-as-usual arrangements without the requirement to escalate to emergency response arrangements.

Storm Debriefs: Key Issues Raised and Actions Undertaken

19. An official debrief is undertaken following each incident or exercise that the Council's Emergency Response Team has been involved in. Issues are noted and recorded as they occur and also via debrief questionnaires that are issued to all Council officers that have undertaken a role in the response. As part of the Storm Arwen debrief questionnaires were also issued to councillors and community volunteers, due to their involvement in the incident.
20. The debrief questionnaire format invites responders to comment on what went well, what didn't go so well, and to provide any recommendations for future response arrangements. An overview of the key issues raised via the storm debriefs and the resulting actions undertaken are as follows:
21. Earlier activation of the Emergency Response Team (ERT): The activation of the ERT is generally reliant on contact from partners such as the emergency services to advise that a major or critical incident has occurred. A new Gateshead Council Escalation Process has been drafted to provide clarity of when Council services can request an escalation to emergency service arrangements and the triggers that should be used to guide the appropriate command and control arrangements to manage incidents (e.g., weather warnings from the Met Office).
22. Reliability and accuracy of information from Northern Powergrid: The information provided from Northern Powergrid during Storm Arwen in particular was hugely unreliable and inaccurate, which was a massive concern for all responding organisations within the Northumbria Police Constabulary area and directly informed the response activities undertaken.
23. Gateshead Council raised this issue, along with all other local authorities in the area, to a multi-agency debrief which was held in March 2022. These concerns were officially noted and acknowledged by Northern Powergrid who advised that they were awaiting the formal recommendations of the national review of utility providers responses to Storm Arwen being undertaken by the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OfGem).
24. More effective communications with the public and councillors via formalised protocols: Work has been undertaken with the Council's Care Call service and Customer Services Unit to identify when escalations are required (as alluded to in paragraph 21), how additional resources can be sought to manage demand and how the use of recorded messages and scripts for call handlers can reduce call times and answer frequently asked questions.
25. Councillors also provided feedback to confirm that information updates weren't always available and that reporting arrangements were difficult during Storm Arwen. A new email structure has been put in place to allow councillors to report emergency issues directly to the Emergency Response Team following Storm Arwen, which has since been piloted to great effect in subsequent incidents. A new Councillor Emergency Guidance document has also been drafted, which details how and when councillors would be notified of an incident and the communication routes available. This document is to be circulated to all councillors as part of a consultation exercise.

26. Activation of community volunteers and facilities: During Storm Arwen there was a significant reliance on volunteers, which worked very well under difficult circumstances but wasn't something that we'd previously documented or formalised all of the different aspects of.
27. Some local volunteer-run facilities opened their doors to their communities to provide some respite from the conditions they were subjected to during Storm Arwen, enabling people to stay warm, access hot drinks, charge their phones and see some friendly faces. A 'Community Engagement in Emergencies' guidance document has been drafted to ensure that there is a user-friendly process in place that enables contact with volunteer groups and facility managers who want to help their communities during an emergency. Consultation work is already ongoing with councillors, Neighbourhood Management and Connected Voice to build an up-to-date database of all groups and facilities to enable engagement and form working relationships.
28. Council employees also volunteered to be involved following a request for assistance that was circulated to all staff during Storm Arwen. Volunteers assisted the response by door knocking to carry out welfare checks and to provide up to date information. Many of these volunteers have expressed an interest in being involved in this type of operation in the future, which resulted in Corporate Management Team agreeing to the creation of an emergency staff volunteer database for which a corporate approach is currently being developed.
29. Protecting those most vulnerable: During an incident that effects the whole of the Gateshead borough such as Storm Arwen, identifying those most vulnerable to the impacts can prove difficult and time consuming. Information can be accessed during an emergency from a range of sources, such as Northern Powergrid's Priority Service User database and Care Call and Social Care records.
30. Not all of the information available was current and many of the lists related to different reasons for vulnerabilities so didn't necessarily match up. The debriefs from the storms identified that we need to proactively plan and document who or what the information sources are, how they are accessed and then have a team analysing the information and cross referencing with the known affected areas to ensure those likely to have been impacted are contacted and their welfare is safeguarded.
31. The new process and guidance that is being developed will also include the good practice identified during the Storm Arwen response and incorporate the joint working and information sharing with local GP Practices and other health bodies.

Future Priorities

32. In addition to the ongoing work linked to the storm debriefs, the Resilience and Emergency Planning Team will also be heavily involved in the following projects:

Protect Duty and the Publicly Accessible Locations (PALs) Pilot Operation

33. The Protect Duty is a planned legislation that will require organisations with publicly accessible spaces to formally assess the potential risks and mitigations required to protect the public against terrorist attacks. The proposals within the duty have been driven by terrorist attacks in recent years both at home and abroad, but with a particular focus on 'Martyr's Law' and the Manchester Arena bombing.

34. In 2021 the Government launched a public consultation on the proposed Protect Duty to gauge opinion on the potential physical locations and organisations to be included in the legislation, how this would be administered and what support would be required from Government.
35. The Resilience and Emergency Planning Team and other Council service representatives has since attended several workshops and briefing sessions, which have been hosted by the Regional Counter Terrorism Team for the North. This has been in preparation for the initial Pilot stage of the proposed Protect Duty, which is the Publicly Accessible Locations (PALs) Pilot, which began on 1st April 2022 and will continue to be developed throughout the remainder of the current financial year. PALs is being piloted in the North and is being undertaken by the 33 local authorities in the Counter Terrorism Team for the North's area.
36. The focus of the PALs Pilot will be to identify publicly accessible 'Zones' within the Gateshead borough, prioritise them based on perceived risks and local intelligence and then identify current security gaps and develop plans for mitigation based on a Government framework. The initial definition of a 'zone' is currently ambiguous and could range from large geographical areas to smaller areas such as parks or business and industrial areas. This definition will be updated nationally as the pilot develops and identifies areas of good practice over the course of the year.
37. This work will be overseen in Gateshead by a Protect and Prepare Group (PAPG), a mechanism that is being mirrored in the other 32 local authorities participating in the pilot. The Gateshead group is chaired by Marc Hopkinson and includes membership from the Counter Terrorism Team, Northumbria Police and from the Council's Resilience and Emergency Planning, Community Safety, Economic Development, Highways, Planning and Trading Standards Teams.
38. Following the initial work on 'Zones' this year, it is anticipated that the PAPG will then be tasked in the following financial years with reviewing Zones periodically. The group will also be addressing the other categories within PALs, which will incorporate the identification, prioritisation, assessment and development of security arrangements at 'Sites' (individual buildings or developments), 'Groups' (locations used by the military or religious groups for example) and 'Sectors' (locations receiving their own guidance from Government departments such as schools).

Emergency Response Team recruitment, training and exercising

Recruitment

39. Following on from the success of recruitment for the Emergency Response Team in 2021, this will now be an annual campaign to ensure that we have sufficient resources to comfortably staff the Council's 24/7 Emergency Rota. As alluded to in paragraph 28 a recruitment campaign is also to be launched to add employees who'd be interested in assisting emergency arrangements by undertaking activities such as door knocking to check on vulnerable people. Both of these campaigns will be launched in September 2022, with training for new staff made available in October and November 2022.

Training

40. Many members of the Emergency Response Team may only be asked to perform their duties within the team from time to time, as and when required. It is therefore of

the utmost importance to ensure that regular training is provided to ensure team members remain familiar with their roles and any protocols and procedures they could be asked to use.

41. Role based training will be offered to all members of the team, which will take place throughout October and November using our regular external training provider. This training provides an opportunity for team members to work through a scenario focussing on an incident/emergency, using role-based documentation specific to them and any systems, procedures and protocols they'd be expected to use during a real incident.

Exercises

42. Opportunities to facilitate and participate in multi-agency exercises have been scarce over the last two and half years due to COVID restrictions and a lack of resources from all partner organisations. Exercises are now however being planned, with what should hopefully be a return to a full calendar in 2023.
43. The first large scale multi-agency exercise planned for 2022 is the 'Flood Ex' exercise, which is due to take place nationally from the 19th to 23rd September. The scenario for this exercise is a tidal surge affecting the whole of the east coast and will be played out using table-top and live elements involving deployment of equipment and personnel. Further large-scale exercises are in the early planning stages, but details around scenarios, dates and locations are still to be confirmed.

Incident Management System

44. In 2018 the Resilience and Emergency Planning Team procured an Incident Logging system, which has enabled the decisions and actions undertaken during incidents and exercises to be logged to a standard suitable for scrutiny in a court of law. The Team is currently working with the system providers on bespoke upgrades, which includes the provision of a 'command centre' screen, designed to provide an overview of a situation to Council Incident Directors and to assist in shift handovers.
45. Once completed, the newly upgraded system will also act as a communication tool, enabling real-time contact via text or email with Ward Councillors, Emergency Response Team members and volunteers, who's details we've recorded on a central database.
46. When the system developers have completed the system upgrades, they will be tested by the Resilience and Emergency Planning Team, who will provide training to the Emergency Response Team membership.

Recommendations

47. Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to:
 - Consider and comment on the report
 - Indicate whether it is satisfied with the work undertaken
 - Agree to receive a progress report in a further six months