The life cycle of an emergency
Learning from recent experience
Foreword

Councils that have had to respond to emergencies know that from the public’s point of view, the effects of an incident can be felt long after it first occurs and in different ways over time. In that sense, emergencies can have a life cycle of their own, which calls for local partners to match and adapt their approaches through different phases.

As the types of emergencies that our areas are facing have become more diverse and complex, this has prompted both senior political and managerial leaders to think carefully about local and corporate resilience, and the importance of civic leadership in responding to and recovering from emergencies. Therefore over recent months, the Local Government Association (LGA) has updated its councillor guide on civil emergencies, and Solace has worked with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to update their joint guidance for chief executives from 2014.

But both the LGA and Solace also felt that it would be valuable to take a more in-depth look at political and managerial leadership in the context of how specific emergencies were handled. This document takes two emergencies – the horrific bomb attack at Manchester Arena in May 2017 and a flooding incident across Suffolk earlier the same year – and looks at them during the different stages of the integrated emergency management cycle; preparedness, response and recovery.

Of particular interest was the view from a number of recent emergencies that the line between response and recovery has substantially blurred, with work on recovery being initiated while immediate responses are still being worked through, and both then informing preparation for future emergencies, helping to complete the cyclical nature of integrated emergency management.

The case studies were completed in autumn 2018 through a series of interviews. This guide is not a comprehensive analysis of the debrief of each emergency but aims instead to provide an overview of councils’ reflections on how they and partners responded to the incidents, have been supporting their residents and communities to recover and how they are building the lessons learnt into planning for future emergencies.

The two emergencies are clearly very different, yet common themes and learning emerge from them, which are summarised at the end of this document. We hope that both councillors and officers will find it useful to reflect on these in the context of their own councils’ preparedness.

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Manchester Arena Attack

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; 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.

Preparedness

The 10 metropolitan borough councils in Greater Manchester (GM) are served by a single civil contingencies and resilience unit (CCRU). This was established in 2011 with the objective of developing a single approach to emergency planning and resilience that is broadly consistent across all the councils within the footprint of partners, such as GM Police and GM Fire and Rescue.

The approach recognises that many emergencies have impacts across boundaries and ensures that individual boroughs benefit from a shared unit and expertise that would be difficult to maintain individually. Since 2013, emergency preparedness, resilience and response support to GM directors of public health has also been integrated into CCRU service delivery.

The CCRU is hosted by Manchester City Council, based at Greater Manchester Police headquarters and is on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a week; the head of service is the GM Chief Resilience Officer.

Leadership for resilience in Greater Manchester is provided through a lead politician (the Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester), lead chief executive, lead director of public health and a lead coroner, appointed from within the 10 local authorities. The lead chief executive is supported by a Civil Contingencies Chief Officers Group comprising lead resilience officers from each of the 10 GM councils: Manchester is represented by Fiona Worrall, Director of Neighbourhoods, and Chief Officer for Civil Contingencies and Resilience at Manchester City Council.

The lead politician, lead chief executive, lead director of public health and lead coroner represent councils on the Greater Manchester Resilience Forum, the strategic multi-agency forum which oversees and coordinates multi-agency civil resilience activity across Greater Manchester. The forum commissions delivery of work through the multi-agency Resilience Development Group (RDG) and a number of work-stream groups which form part of the forum’s partnership arrangements. Manchester City Council chairs the RDG and some of the working groups, including the Risk Assessment Working Group.
Manchester City Council’s own work programme for emergency preparedness is informed through the annual business plan for GM local authorities (overseen by the Civil Contingencies Chief Officers Group) and the multi-agency work programme (overseen by the Greater Manchester Resilience Forum). The council undertakes an annual assessment of the internal arrangements critical to emergency preparedness in order to identify any areas for development.

Reflecting the importance of emergency preparedness to the city, they also provide additional funding to the CCRU for enhanced services, and have worked with CCRU and partners to develop a range of plans; the GM Generic Response Plan, GM Mass Casualties Plan, and the Manchester Borough Evacuation and Shelter Plan, all utilised in response to the arena attack. Rotas were in place to ensure the availability of staff for emergency response, including strategic officers at senior management team level, tactical level officers and operational staff. Manchester City Council’s internal plans also set out the range of operational services which can play a crucial role in emergencies, for example the social care and communications teams were deployed to support the response to the arena attack. An Emergency Control Centre is also maintained as a resource for coordinating internal services in an emergency.

In terms of training and support, CCRU offers a range of training and exercising for both officers and councillors. For officers, it has in the past commissioned a GM wide session of MAGIC (the Multi Agency Gold Incident Command training run by the College of Policing) and a local one day version of the Emergency Planning College gold command course. The CCRU runs briefing, training and awareness sessions in individual boroughs, which each taking responsibility for ensuring senior officers are aware of local procedures.

Manchester City Council’s Chief Executive Joanne Roney had been in post for just five weeks when the attack took place, but crucially her induction programme had included a session on this issue with Fiona Worrall. Having quickly established a relationship with the lead officer for emergencies proved important given how soon the chief executive was required to lead the response to an emergency.

Regular briefings and training in relation to civil contingencies are provided for councillors at Manchester City Council. An e-learning tool is also available, and information about emergency planning is usually included in councillor inductions. The role of councillors in an emergency is explored during briefings and training sessions; emergency planning procedures ensure that councillors are notified of incidents where required.

Manchester City Council and the wider resilience forum also ensure that regular simulation exercises are undertaken to test plans and preparedness. At least one multi-agency strategic (gold) level exercise is undertaken annually; in addition, more tactical (silver) level multi-agency responses are exercised at the Greater Manchester level and around the individual boroughs. Previous major exercises included Exercise Winchester Accord (a terrorism exercise at the Trafford Centre), Exercise Sherman (a borough based terrorism exercise), Exercise Triton (a GM wide reservoir failure) and Exercise Ebola (a GM response to Ebola). An event had also been held in Manchester to exchange learning in relation to mass fatalities planning and response, including speakers involved in the response to the Shoreham air crash. These events had all provided significant opportunities to test a range of plans, including many of those relevant to the response to the Manchester Arena attack, and helped strengthen the response to it.
Cooperation with expert organisations and the voluntary and community sector was also well established prior to the attack: Manchester City Council had commissioned training and exercises from organisations such as the Foundation 4 Peace and Disaster Action, resulting in additional sources of support in the emergency response. Following the attack, officers were able to draw on specific and generic plans in relation to humanitarian assistance and working with the British Red Cross to establish a financial support scheme.

In terms of mutual aid arrangements to support individual boroughs in the event of an emergency, Greater Manchester was in a strong position due to an established history of partnership working in the city region (as evidenced by the existing of the joint civil contingencies unit).

Response

The attack occurred at 10.31pm. Within an hour, GM Police had declared a major incident, with armed police and British military personnel deployed to Manchester city centre as part of Operation Temperer. Internal Manchester City Council and wider GM multi-agency plans, procedure and structures were all activated. Initial activation of Manchester City Council’s procedures was self-declared within minutes of the detonation; the on-call gold officer was immediately deployed to GM Police Force HQ and on site by 11.30pm, with strategic officers on site in the Town Hall by 211.40pm. Officers from CCRU were in place on both sites shortly after. Manchester City Council’s Emergency Control Centre was activated within the Town Hall complex; multi-agency command and control arrangements were established, including co-location of partners at the Force Command Module at GMP HQ and convening of the Strategic Coordination Group (SCG) at 4.15am. Council officers, supported by CCRU, were deployed to Force Command for the full nine day response period.

Manchester City Council's immediate operational response focused on the need to provide support to those affected by the attack and to coordinate the wider response to it. In the early hours of Tuesday 23 May, they established a family assistance and reception centre at Manchester City’s Etihad Stadium; it was recognised that the type of leisure or community centre often identified in local authority emergency plans would not be appropriate given the nature and scale of the emergency. Lead officers from the health and social care and children’s services teams were deployed to the Etihad at 1.30am; other staff were subsequently deployed to the centre. Although not in the plan, staff spontaneously brought their mobile phone chargers to the centre, instinctively understanding this would be a pressing need for those trying to make contact with worried relatives and providing a simple learning point for future emergency plans.

In the aftermath of the attack, local restaurants, hotels and taxis all quickly opened their doors or offered their services for free, but there were many unaccompanied young people whose parents didn't know where they were and who were travelling to the city to try to find them. To manage safeguarding issues, the city’s gold command sent officers to check at hotels and places where children had taken shelter, to check they were safe and to clarify rumours. Manchester City Council and GM Police both designated lead officers to coordinate the wider contributions from businesses offering to help in other ways.

Council highways staff were deployed to support the management of the road network, including putting in place road closures, and to provide assistance to those unable to access vehicles and property within the cordoned area. Council staff also arranged hotel accommodation for affected families, friends and professional responders deployed to Manchester from outside of the city region (eg Ministry of Defence officials). This enabled coroners’ staff to focus on the work required to enable identification of the deceased at the earliest point.
Effective strategic leadership was critical to their response. Manchester City Council’s Leader, Councillor Richard Leese, Deputy Leader, Councillor Sue Murphy and Chief Executive Joanne Roney met hourly to ensure they had a complete overview of the response; this leadership stayed in place throughout the response period, while the other Deputy Leader, Councillor Nigel Murphy, assumed responsibility for overseeing normal business. Councillor Leese and Councillor Sue Murphy took responsibility for keeping other councillors adequately briefed, and all councillors received the three hourly SITREP report (information normally shared with senior political leaders only). This enabled councillors to be out in their communities providing information and reassurance, while also ensuring that officers were allowed to lead the operational response without being responsible for briefing all councillors.

In leading the operational response, Joanne Roney attended both gold and silver command; visited the reception centre and scene of the attack, and worked out of the emergency control centre at the town hall, recognising the need to be present at all of these to get a full overview of the response and where any gaps might be.

Manchester City Council’s senior leadership quickly established a successful division of communications responsibilities; although not formally mapped out in its emergency plan, Councillor Leese led communications with the local media; Councillor Sue Murphy assumed responsibility for communications with the international media, and Joanne Roney led on internal and other communications issues. Councillors with an international background or other language were also asked to support some of the international media work. Although the GM Mayor, Andy Burnham, had been in post for just a few weeks on 23 May – relatively little time to update emergency plans to reflect the new civic role – Manchester City Council’s political leadership worked fluently with the new Mayor to provide a joint public face for the city.

Communications was a key part of the response. The scale of media enquiries was unprecedented and members of the world press remained in the city centre for three weeks after the attack. A dedicated team was swiftly set up by Manchester City Council to manage communications – this was established at the same time as gold and silver command – and worked with GM Police to ensure clear lines and key messages were shared across a range of media. Social media proved to be hugely important; a team of five people managed the social media response, including correcting rumours and inaccuracies and providing information and updates.

The communications team was supported by communications staff from across the Greater Manchester councils, an example of the mutual aid Manchester City Council was able to draw on following the attack. In addition to the communications support, social workers from elsewhere in GM provided support at the reception centre, and staff from Salford City Council supported the joint work with businesses who were captured within the cordon area. Those involved in the response emphasised the importance of being clear where councils can get mutual aid from in these situations and of being able to ask for support in a structured way; but also recognised the importance of established and trusted partnership working as a basis for mutual aid.

Civic and community leadership was at the heart of the response, including the community’s desire to hold a vigil the day after the attack. Aware of proposals on social media for people to meet in Albert Square, Manchester City Council recognised the importance of putting plans and management around this, and of providing a focal point for people. They took the lead in arranging the event and managed the delicate job of balancing the presence of many senior politicians at a memorial event during the middle of the General Election purdah period by inviting a local poet to speak. The vigil was just one of a number of visits from VIPs which were managed in the aftermath of the attack.
Following the vigil on 23 May, a minute's silence was held on 24 May, a one week on vigil the following Monday, and a multi-faith We Stand Together event the following Tuesday. Additionally, Manchester City Council staff were on hand 24 hours a day at places of remembrance, providing water and comfort to people.

Immediately following the attack, the Manchester Evening News set up a fund to receive donations via the Just Giving website; a number of individuals had set up similar pages, some seemingly fraudulently. With the Manchester Evening News quickly receiving a substantial sum in donations, Manchester City Council worked with the British Red Cross to bring together all the fundraising under the ‘We love Manchester’ fund, having established that the Lord Mayor’s charity would not be able to make payments to victims from outside Manchester, and recognising that there was a need for proper management around the fund. The fund was rapidly established as a charity, and the first payments from it were made within 10 days, providing financial support to assist with hotel, travel and funeral costs incurred by the bereaved families and people who had been seriously injured. The legal team also secured a trademark for the Worker Bee (the city’s symbol) after becoming aware that another individual had sought to trademark the Manchester Bee and may have been trying to profit from the attack.

As well as enabling a focal point for remembrance, Manchester’s civic leadership was seeking to provide very visible reassurance that the city was still open for business by supporting a strong message that the city will ‘stand together’ and not let terrorism win. As soon as it was possible, Councillor Leese provided assurance to residents and visitors that the city was safe and that people should continue to come to visit the city. Following the increase in threat level, he also publicly explained that there was no specific intelligence to suggest a further attack in Manchester would take place.

It was also agreed that the Great City Games and the Manchester Run would still go ahead on 26 and 28 May respectively. This was especially important in giving a clear message that Manchester was open for business as usual and that participation in events such as this were key to the city’s recovery.

At a community level, from 23 May ongoing community engagement was prioritised to inform, advise and support residents and businesses. This included a meeting with over 200 businesses at the Central Library and visits to city centre residents and businesses, 19 of which were within the area cordoned off following the attack and were supported to implement business continuity measures where required, ensuring no loss of service or employment.

Officers and members met with community groups within the first few days to understand the key issues they were experiencing, including individuals from the Libyan community who had been particularly impacted by the incident following the news that the bomber was of Libyan descent. Two days after the attack, Manchester City Council held an open event with Councillor Leese, Councillor Sue Murphy and Fiona Worrall where people could feedback their concerns and feelings. This provided an opportunity for the council to listen to what people were saying and understand community feelings.

An important role for ward members was to provide support in the communities where the police subsequently raided homes to make arrests in the days following the attack. Each of these required reception facilities for displaced families to be set up and in some cases support was given to help evacuate local schools within the area. There was good communication from the police, with ward councillors emailed to make them aware of the raids immediately after they had taken place. With a spike in hate crime following the attack, councillors also had a crucial role in providing reassurance to all parts of the community, and in understanding where tensions were, to help support long term recovery.
Given the disproportionate impact of the incident on young people, considerable work was undertaken to ensure that school staff and pupils received the information and advice they required to provide reassurance and access support if needed. Head teachers, college principals and early years’ settings were kept aware of the events both immediately following the incident and during the nine day investigation, particularly where activity was taking place near schools. Manchester City Council provided details of how to access educational psychology support and the employee support helpline, arranged drop-in events during half term for children looking for support following the attack, and provided links to practical advice such as attendance, polling day and examination information.

Recovery

Manchester City Council had previously taken a lead role in developing the GM Strategic Recovery Guidance. This meant they recognised the value of early consideration of the recovery phase, and began to implement recovery arrangements as soon as possible in the response phase (the formal handover from GM Police and transition to recovery took place on 31 May). Their approach during both response and recovery was based upon two underlying principles. The most important was the need to put victims at the heart of their work, providing support no matter what the cost was. Normal rules, the usual need to understand which budget or cost centre was funding something, did not apply; and this was instinctively recognised.

At the same time, there was an appreciation of the need for the wider city – and Manchester City Council itself – to try to restore business as usual as soon as possible. Internally, this was reflected by the decision to go ahead with a regular staff engagement session on Wednesday 24 May, and the recognition of the need to maintain business as usual activities alongside the response.

This approach was more publicly reflected in the decision to continue with events such as the Manchester Games, and by supporting arrangements for the One Love Manchester fundraising concert, which was attended by 50,000 people at Old Trafford cricket ground less than two weeks after the arena attack.

A recovery coordination group, chaired by Manchester City Council, was established to oversee the recovery process. An initial priority of the group was to commission an impact assessment to enable a better understanding of the issues and the pathways which individuals, organisations and communities would be likely follow on the road to recovery, drawing on national and international experience of previous incidents.

Manchester City Council developed a recovery action plan with six work streams; welfare and health, community recovery, business and economic recovery, communications, finance, debrief and learning.

On welfare and health, bereaved families were supported by GM Police family liaison officers and entitled to support from the National Homicide Service. For those injured in the attack, and their families, Manchester City Council ensured the provision of a lead worker to coordinate a care and support plan including a wide range of services beyond health and social care. As many of the injury victims were from outside Manchester, this included working with their home councils; Joanne Roney wrote to all council chief executives early on, highlighting the need for their organisations to understand whether any local families had been directly impacted by the attack.

For Manchester City Council staff, and other responders, there was access to employee assistance programmes and occupational health provision; best practice approaches were shared across organisations. The Resilience Hub (contactable by telephone and online) was also quickly set up to provide health and emotional support through a number of different routes including counselling.
This was available for anyone affected by the attack, such as those who attended the concert or members of the public.

Manchester City Council has consistently promoted the support and followed up with its staff and councillors on using the service. The significant impact on staff who were closely involved in managing the response – managing tasks council officers never normally expect to have to undertake – was recognised and has been repeatedly acknowledged by the organisation’s senior leaders. Again, as with budgets, it was recognised that different rules applied; sometimes people just needed the support offered in a hug.

The community recovery work stream has been overseen by a community recovery group, which has built on earlier engagement activities to promote cohesion. The group worked with ward councillors, communities, stakeholders and partners to undertake a community impact assessment and develop a GM Challenging Extremism and Building Community Cohesion Action Plan. The plan included building community (and particularly youth) resilience, countering extremism, engaging faith and diverse communities and supporting schools and the further/higher education sector.

Alongside a wide range of other activities, work has focussed on continuing to engage and build relationships with communities impacted by the attack, through one-to-ones, dialogues and workshops. The plan has been supported by a pre-existing campaign and grant programme aimed at building community resilience to prejudice, hate and extremism, RADEQUAL. Small grants have been allocated to: support groups and communities impacted by the attack; work across communities to identify and counter all forms of extremism; and work with young people outside of school to build their understanding of extremism, enable critical thinking and help to build resilience to hate and extremism.

A significant amount of work was undertaken during both the response and recovery to promote information about how hate crimes could be reported. Alongside getting messages about this into the media, council staff visited local high schools to promote reporting tools.

Identifying and addressing the impacts on businesses and the economy has required a coordinated effort by a number of organisations, including city centre businesses, CityCo (the city centre management company for Manchester and Salford), Marketing Manchester, Salford City Council and Manchester City Council. Early work was also undertaken to determine the short and medium term impacts on retail businesses, hotel operators, the music economy and the wider visitor economy within the city and city region. To achieve this, Marketing Manchester, CityCo and local businesses all helped to obtain and share information regarding footfall, reservations, flights and trading. Engagement with businesses was supported heavily by CityCo’s reach across the business community, particularly in the vicinity of the Manchester Arena.

The communications work highlighting that Manchester was open for business was designed to support business and economic recovery in the city: Marketing Manchester worked closely with Visit England to seek to ensure that perceptions of Manchester as a place to visit suffered no long term impact. Manchester City Council provided direct support to a number of people employed by the arena who would have struggled financially without employment after the arena was closed until September; efforts were made to reschedule within Manchester as many as possible of the events cancelled due to the closure.

Work was undertaken to collate the costs incurred by Manchester City Council, other GM local authorities and partner organisations and make a request to government for additional funding to cover this. With the identified costs across all partners totalling £28 million, this was a sum that partners needed support with.
Securing funding from government proved to be a more time consuming task for the city's political leadership than expected.

Management of the We Love Manchester fund has proved to be a complex and resource intensive challenge. Manchester City Council worked with the British Red Cross to establish appropriate governance for the fund, including a group of trustees that combined financial and legal expertise from the local business community as well as democratic oversight through Deputy Leader, Councillor Sue Murphy. It was key that this group had the right skills mix and it was also imperative that the trustees were actively involved, accessible and acting quickly to ensure no delays in decision making.

Decisions about awarding the £22 million funds raised have been complex. Managing the fund and allocating resources in some cases became intertwined with the victims' anger and grief about the incident. Manchester City Council recognises the need for a process to manage donations in these circumstances. More needs to be done in advance about the lack of support, and particularly support that kicks in immediately, for victims of this type of incident.

Debriefing and understanding the lessons learnt from this emergency is just one strand of the recovery programme, but has been an important focus. GM Mayor Andy Burnham commissioned Lord Kerslake to undertake an independent assessment of the preparedness for and response to the attack, alongside the routine single and multi-agency emergency planning debriefs. The report praised the GM multi-agency approach and preparedness, highlighting the exceptional civic leadership shown by Manchester City Council and the GM Mayor in response to the attack, but made a number of recommendations for the GM Resilience Forum to enhance future preparedness and response.

One example of learning being built in since the attack is the revised mass fatalities plan for GM, with the important role bereavement nurses have to play in such incidents now incorporated in a clear procedure. GM resilience partners, including Manchester City Council, are continuing to work on the recommendations, and it was felt that eighteen months on a lot had already been done.

But it was also noted that a huge amount of work and resource is required after an emergency to address lessons learnt; there is recognition that there is a difference between identifying lessons, and learning them by actually changing behaviours. The important role of councillors in terms of advocacy and resourcing, ensuring the issue does not slip off the agenda as time passes, and using soft powers to ensure multi-agency and interoperability lessons are addressed, were highlighted.
On Friday 13 January 2017 through to the early hours of Saturday morning the East Coast experienced a North Sea tidal surge. The preparation, response and recovery activities in Suffolk were led by the Suffolk Resilience Forum in conjunction with a number of Suffolk local authorities. In 2013, areas in Suffolk had suffered devastating effects from the most serious tidal surge in over 60 years. This case study details how ongoing learning from 2013 informed the 2017 response.

Preparedness
The Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Unit (JEPU) is responsible for assisting with emergency preparedness for local authorities in Suffolk, comprising Suffolk County Council and all seven district and borough councils. The unit was established in 2005 in recognition that pooling resources would increase capacity and strengthen capability when responding to incidents or emergencies. JEPU works with multi-agency resilience partners and voluntary and community organisations to ensure that Suffolk is prepared for emergencies. To mitigate the coastal flood risk JEPU works with the Environment Agency and Coastal Partnership East, comprising all coastal facing local authorities in Norfolk and Suffolk, to improve flood defences, develop planning and conduct training.

The Suffolk Resilience Forum and JEPU offer a range of training and exercises for responders, including officers and councillors across the local authorities. The regular events, including a recent recovery exercise and consequence management workshop for heads of service and corporate management, improves interaction, ensuring that partners and agencies are familiar with each other’s capabilities.

The relationship between the authorities offers a trusted partnership in the event of an emergency and ultimately enhances effectiveness in both preparation and response. The close working relationship between councils through the JEPU provides a good basis for the provision of mutual aid, with all procedures standardised to simplify support arrangements. There is a fostered sense of shared responsibility.

As part of a legal agreement, each authority in Suffolk has a mandatory minimum number of roles which must be filled in the event of an emergency, including rest centre staff, emergency control centre operatives and liaison officers. The performance and capability of each council is monitored and senior officers from each authority meet twice a year to discuss training needs, weaknesses that need to be addressed and lessons identified. Resilience has also been built into the organisational structure with jobs for managers including roles in incident management as part of ‘assisting the council in responding to a Civil Contingency Act emergency or business continuity event’.

For councillors in Suffolk, the JEPU provides training to clarify the role of councillors in emergencies.
Although they are not involved in operational decisions, there is appreciation that elected members benefit from the opportunity to consider potential scenarios given that they will generally have little experience of emergency planning. They are provided with written resources outlining key points of emergency response and recovery and their essential public-facing role within the community.

The JEPU advocates the Government initiative for community resilience through local volunteers. There are numerous community emergency planning groups (CEPGs) throughout Suffolk which are available to support the council and emergency services in the event of an emergency. Within the Suffolk Resilience Forum Flood Plan, there are bespoke arrangements for vulnerable locations with details about the local CEPGs and how their knowledge of the area and of vulnerable residents can assist emergency responders, particularly those unfamiliar with the area. JEPU offers training in rest centre operations for these volunteers, so that they can support the statutory obligations of both the council and emergency services during an incident.

The tidal surge in 2013 caused widespread flooding in Suffolk, damaging 231 properties, contaminating over 500 hectares of farmland and affecting 117 businesses, mainly in the town of Lowestoft. As a result, Waveney District Council purchased a temporary flood barrier which, following receipt of a flood warning, can be erected across four locations to safeguard the town of Lowestoft. As a result, Waveney District Council purchased a temporary flood barrier which, following receipt of a flood warning, can be erected across four locations to safeguard the town of Lowestoft. The JEPU ran a workshop for all those who would be involved in deciding whether to erect the barrier, including the construction crews and local businesses, where parts of the barrier sit on private land.

In the aftermath of 2013, the local councils also encouraged businesses to look at their own business continuity and make simple changes to their operations to become more flood resilient.

The councils promote the Business Efficient Resilience Toolkit (BERT), developed by the CPE, JEPU and Environment Agency, which is a free online tool available for businesses to assess their ability to adapt to impacts of severe weather and other emergencies.

Response

In 2017, early warnings from the Environment Agency were received on Monday 9 January, indicating a low likelihood that high tides might cause minor impacts from Wednesday 11 January through to the end of the week. As a precaution the Lowestoft temporary flood barrier was deployed and construction commenced.

Following the receipt of new flood guidance from the Environment Agency on Wednesday 11 January, the Suffolk Resilience Forum set up the Tactical Coordinating Group to assist with contingency planning and the prioritisation of the multi-agency response. The group was set up on this occasion following learning from the 2013 incident, where the failure to establish a group led to ineffective multi-agency coordination. While establishing the Tactical Coordinating Group worked much better during the 2017 response, learning suggested that the location of the group would be better sited near the police silver command to improve information sharing and situational awareness.

Mutual aid was activated by the responders, with additional staff dispatched from across the country to assist with the response. While the impacts were predominantly assessed as likely to affect Waveney and Suffolk Coastal District Councils, other local authorities provided support and mutual assistance. Suffolk County Council established a hotline and their Emergency Control Centre to assist with coordinating support and other local authorities earmarked volunteers and equipment for rest centres in the affected areas.
To adapt to the needs of the situation, councils implemented a ‘just in time’ training scheme; identifying roles within response structures that require little prior training. Volunteers from within the workforce who are able to provide support are given a short briefing and work under the supervision of experienced staff. This process has mitigated some of the impacts of dwindling resource and staff levels and provides extra support to authorities and the community during an incident.

The communication teams, working collaboratively as ‘Communicate Suffolk’, played a key role in the response, providing messaging and information to residents and councillors throughout the event. With evacuation planning underway, staff identified problems in the mixed messaging that residents were receiving between local updates and national news. While Suffolk made the decision not to evacuate residents until the day of the flooding, national media was reporting evacuations in neighbouring Lincolnshire and Essex, causing confusion in the community. Communicate Suffolk used social media to interact with residents, explain the reasoning behind the decision and quell any fears that there was any need to evacuate immediately.

A number of requests were made by local residents for sandbags and the communications team had to relay the council’s policy, adopted by all Suffolk local authorities, which is not to provide sandbags due to their inefficacy and because it is a home owners’ responsibility to install flood mitigation measure for their property. It became apparent that a large proportion of residents were unaware of the policy or did not know what flood resilience products are available for properties. A key lesson is the need to be more proactive in communicating the policy and providing information on the council website about sandbags and flood resilience products. The councils are also working with the Environment Agency to provide residents living in flood risk areas with information on how to protect their homes and businesses.

On Friday 13 January evacuation of some residents began. The Environment Agency recommended the evacuation of people from the severe flood warning areas and social media, leafleting and door knocking by Suffolk Constabulary was used to alert affected residents. The flood zone postcode data, developed by the Environment Agency following the 2013 incident, was invaluable in coordinating the evacuation, with enhancements including: the ‘sectorisation’ of the flood zones into distinct areas based on the flood risk to individual properties; the inclusion of the total number of commercial and residential properties within each flood zone and alterations to the postcode data to allow the results to be collated; plus the sharing of maps showing flood zones, transport hubs and rest centres with CEPGs to enhance their support during evacuations.

Four council rest centres were set up by Waveney and Suffolk Coastal District Councils and Suffolk County Council arranged transport for evacuated residents. Volunteers from the councils ran the emergency control centres, rest centres and helpline and non-affected councils earmarked staff for second and subsequent shifts, including volunteers trained under the ‘just in time’ scheme.

A number of community emergency planning groups activated town or parish response plans, including setting up village halls/sports clubs as places of refuge. In retrospect, the councils realised that they could have made better use of the community’s leadership and goodwill. There is a need to properly use the CEPGs and integrate them into the response. For example, there are now plans to engage with CEPGs and provide local authority trained staff to resource community rest centres. This would make far better use of local resources, reduce some of the strain on the council and improve the evacuation response rate for local residents. This was due to be explored further in an exercise being held in autumn 2018.
Recovery

The 2013 event highlighted the blurred line between response and recovery and a need to adapt the initial recovery effort to reflect that. In 2017 the forum established a recovery working group during the response phase to collate information from agencies to determine which areas had been affected and the level of impact. A community impact assessment is now completed based upon actual on-scene assessments which are widely shared to complete a comprehensive picture of the results of any flooding. This improves situational awareness and enables the more efficient prioritisation of recovery effort and distribution of resources.

In 2013, the council received criticism for not being visible at the start of the recovery phase to support residents affected by flooding. The JEPU devised the concept of a community help point to provide a physical presence within communities and deliver situational awareness. The community help point is set up quickly to help determine what local support is required, signpost where support is available and to provide a focal point for councillors and other services, such as housing or insurance companies, to work through. This helps to ensure that councils are aware of any ongoing issues and remain actively engaged within the community as part of their leadership role.

Fortunately, in 2017 the threat from the tidal surge subsided and very little flooding occurred; there were no deaths or serious injuries, although on Saturday 14 January, a walker was killed after a section of cliff collapsed. In the immediate aftermath the councils emphasised the importance of learning lessons to improve procedures and the effectiveness of decision making.

A culture of continuous learning is embedded in the local authorities so that lessons from each event are applied in the preparation, response and recovery of the next one. Particular lessons in community leadership and visibility informed Waveney District Council’s actions following a large fire on the high street in Halesworth in June 2018 which destroyed two historic buildings and caused significant disruption to numerous businesses and the surrounding area.

A community help point was set up by JEPU during the response, with visible presence both within and outside the cordon zone. This facilitated high levels of engagement with both the incident commander and business and residents outside of the cordon. Building control provided structural advice, highways implemented diversion routes around the town centre and the local councillor, supported by the town council and communications, provided reassurance and advice. In the immediate aftermath, the council convened a public meeting to engage with local residents and start to consider the longer-term support to businesses affected by the fire. Through regular meetings the local authority has remained engaged with the recovery process and taken a leading role in promoting the high street as ‘open for business’ to encourage footfall and regenerate a thriving community.
Summary of key themes

No two emergencies are identical and all incidents will inevitably require tailored responses. However, this section draws out a number of the key themes that have emerged from both case studies in this guide for consideration by other councils as they consider their own strategies for emergency management from preparedness through to recovery.

**Established, trusted relationships enhance the effectiveness of response.**
The level of trust that has to be present to enable multi-agency responders to operate as a team at a moment of crisis cannot be underestimated and requires proper investment of time beforehand. Local resilience forums offer a ready platform for developing these relationships, and senior leaders should be encouraged to participate to help solidify relationships and understanding that will be needed during the response to an incident.

This principle applies not only to relationships between organisations, but also within them. In a council context, good working relationships between the council executive, senior management team and emergency planners will lay the groundwork for an effective response.

**It pays off to invest time in training.**
Training is a crucial element in building both individual and collective capabilities to deal with emergencies. The building blocks for useful training can be laid with the induction process for both members and officers, to ensure that they are aware of agreed procedures and plans as well as what will be expected of themselves and others if an incident should occur.

Simulation exercises offer an invaluable opportunity for local resilience partners to test their plans and adapt them as necessary. In particular, they provide a chance to consider how changing environmental conditions need to be factored in, for example, roadworks, special events, time of day.

Training does not have to remain within the organisation. If there are local community or voluntary organisations which could be utilised in the event of an emergency it is worth thinking about whether training could be tailored to enable them to provide a support function as well.

**Clarity of roles and responsibilities is vital, but not at the expense of being able to adapt as conditions require.**
Being clear about who is expected to do what provides a head start at the time of an emergency. But effective leadership also means being flexible about what is needed and adapting roles and responsibilities accordingly. This principle particularly holds in the case of senior officers leading the managerial response to an incident, whose leadership may need to be visible in different forums with varying stakeholders at different points in the response and, especially, the recovery.

It is important to ensure good situational awareness for members and community voluntary groups through regular updates as an incident unfolds. Assurances about when they can be expected to be briefed, their role and to what extent they can assist by providing community leadership and engagement should be explained.
Communication with the public has to be timely, sensitive and accurate but the biggest risk may be in waiting too long to give out messages. Depending on the nature of an event, messages may start to circulate even before an emergency has occurred, for example in a weather-related incident. There is a delicate balance between making sure that information given out is accurate and being fleet of foot. Particularly against the backdrop of social media, others can start to fill a perceived communications gap in almost no time at all.

Being clear in advance about what channels people should turn to in the event of an emergency can help direct traffic to appropriate communications, for example, the council website, dedicated hotline, social media account or local radio station. Credibility has to be established well before an emergency hits; people will naturally turn to whom they trust the most during an emergency.

**Being on top of basic details should be a fundamental part of emergency preparedness as it gets the response off to a stronger start.**

Having a list of contact details for key council officers and partner organisations and knowing who is on leave and authorised to act in their place are the basics that ensure that valuable time is not lost when an incident occurs. As council workforces shrink, teams get restructured and officers move to new roles, the task of keeping on top of such details gets more challenging, but is worth investing in.

Other practicalities are also worth considering in advance. For example, if a rest centre had to be set up, how would they be equipped and staffed. If the response takes a number of days, how would staffing resource be planned and mutual aid activated.

**Plans have to be in place for how business as usual will continue.**

Being able to maintain as much normality and continuity as possible when an emergency has occurred is a fundamental element of sound emergency preparedness. Apart from rare occasions, normal council business does not completely stop during emergencies. Having alternate arrangements in place for both political and managerial leadership of day-to-day business while the leader and chief executive may have to focus on the emergency can help to ensure continuity. These arrangements may be different from the traditional ‘business continuity plans’ that councils have in case of service disruption.

**Work with the grain of your community’s response.**

For the most part, emergencies draw out the best instincts of residents and communities who want to help, contribute and come together. There is a lot to be gained from letting communities take the lead in what healing and recovery looks and feels like to them. It may not always be 100 per cent possible to accommodate every plan or idea, but working with the spirit of what is sought can ensure a positive outcome.

Voluntary and community sector organisations can play a particularly helpful role in providing a bridge between councils and residents. These relationships are most effective when they are established well before and outside of the context of an emergency.

**Be prepared to ask for help.**

Effective leaders are able to look clearly at a situation and identify when they need additional support. Some parts of the country have established mutual aid arrangements, while others have tended to call on peer support on an ad hoc basis. It is a good idea for all councils to have discussions with neighbouring authorities about how they might be able to support each other in the event of an emergency. National organisations such as the Local Government Association (LGA) and Solace are always on hand to try to broker support as needed.

Asking for help also extends to the personal level. Emergencies can be taxing for individuals, both emotionally and physically. It is important to reach out to peers for personal or professional support in order to be able to lead recovery over the long haul.
Being able to lead effectively at the time of an emergency is as much about culture as strategy.

Plans and strategies may be the blueprints of a response, but flexibility and a strong collaborative culture will be the glue that binds it all together and brings it to life. That is why it is particularly worth reflecting on the values and behaviours demonstrated during response and recovery so that future planning in its widest sense also takes into account broader learning and development needs to improve resilience.

Keep an eye on lasting impacts on residents and businesses.

After an incident has occurred, there may be issues that are outside of councils’ control, but will have an indelible impact on our communities’ experience of recovery. For example, difficulties in getting insurance companies to pay out, challenges in accessing mental health services or delays in receiving compensation from government schemes can prolong a sense of trauma. Although councils may not have direct levers in these cases, it is worth keeping track of them so that council leaders can try to use their soft influence and leverage to secure a positive outcome for residents wherever possible.
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