

NAME OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	CORPORATE
DATE OF MEETING	23 MAY 2013
TITLE	EMERGENCY PLANNING
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PURPOSE	Explain the Council's responsibilities for Emergency Planning and report on activity in the past two years.

1. Context

1.1 The Civil Contingencies Act

Following a number of national emergencies around the turn of the century, (fuel dispute and the severe flooding in 2000, and the incidence foot & mouth disease in 2001,) a review was announced of the arrangements for planning for emergencies. This led to the passing of the **Civil Contingencies Act 2004**.

1.2 What is an 'emergency'?

The Act defines an emergency as

- (a) an event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare in a place in the United Kingdom,
- (b) an event or situation which threatens serious damage to the environment of a place in the United Kingdom, or
- (c) war, or terrorism, which threatens serious damage to the security of the United Kingdom.

There is a duty to assess the risk of an emergency occurring, to plan and prepare for emergencies, and to advise as appropriate when the emergency is likely to seriously impede the Council in the performance of its duties.

1.3 Who is responsible?

The Act divides responders into two categories depending on the extent of their involvement in civil protection work and places a set of duties on each.

1.3.1 Category 1 Responders:

These are the organisations at the core of an emergency response, such as the emergency services; Health bodies; Government agencies and Local Authorities.

Category 1 responders are subject to the full set of civil protection duties and are required 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;
- make information available to the public about arrangements to warn, inform and advise them in the event of an emergency.
- share information with other local responders to enhance control and co-ordination;
- co-operate with other local responders to enhance coordination and efficiency; and
- a duty on local authorities to provide advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about business continuity management.

When responding to an emergency, the Council services often support the emergency services, (e.g. road closures and traffic diversions); provision of a rest centre if it is needed; collecting and disseminating information; and leading the recovery. It is good practice to also include the voluntary sector although this is not a duty.

1.3.2 Category 2 Responders:

These are the “co-operating bodies” that are less likely to be involved in the heart of planning work but will be heavily involved in incidents that affect their sector. Such bodies include utilities, distributors of electricity and gas, telephone service providers; transport providers and organizations; the Health and Safety Executive.

2. How the Council fulfils its duties:

2.1 Emergency Planning Unit

The Council has a team of three – a manager and two officers – who are responsible for the work of preparing for emergencies. It is their responsibility to ensure that officers throughout the Council are aware of and understand their duties, and encourage and support them to put in place arrangements to deal with emergencies and their consequences. In an emergency incident, they have a responsibility to co-ordinate the response of the Council.

2.2 Risk Assessment

Working with other local authorities and the other responder agencies in North Wales, and founded on evidence and specialist input, a Community Risk Register has been produced. We then consider the matters therein in a local context and focus on the highest risks to this county, namely:

- 2.2.1 Floods– The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 places new duties on the Council regarding flood management. The Consultancy Department is leading this work in Gwynedd and it is a field of work included in the New Strategic Plan (Responding to the risk of climate change). An element of the work is to prepare plans and familiarisation with arrangements for responding to flooding.
 - 2.2.3 Storms, high winds, snow and severe cold weather;
 - 2.2.4 Widescale Pollution;
Natural Resources Wales leads the work in this field. The Public Protection service has enforcement responsibilities to monitor and control pollution and to control infectious diseases.
 - 2.2.5 Diseases like flu (pandemic);
 - 2.2.6 Effects of industrial action, e.g. fuel strike;
 - 2.2.7 The failure of critical infrastructure e.g. loss of water or electricity supplies;
 - 2.2.8 Highway accident with far-reaching affects.
- 2.3 The preparation of **Plans** outlining how we will respond.
- 2.3.1 The **Major Emergency Response Plan** is the primary plan specifying arrangements for responding to any emergency incident. It gives the procedure for declaring an emergency, responsibilities and accountability, and provides guidance on how the Council will respond. Usually, if the emergency arises from an incident, the Council will support the emergency services at the scene, (most often by personnel from the Highways and Municipal Department;) open and maintain a rest centre for persons in need of refuge because of the emergency incident and arranging transportation to the centre, (the Social Services Department most often lead this element); the provision of information to the public, (arranged by the Customer Care Department via Galw Gwynedd, social media and the press).
 - 2.3.2 To support the Major Emergency Response Plan there are a number of specific plans, such as the Severe Weather Policy; Gwynedd Council Flood Plan and its sub-plans for specific areas; Arrangements for Establishing a Rest Centre; Flu Pandemic plan; and Guidance for Site Clearance.
 - 2.3.3 A major challenge for the Council is to maintain critical day-to-day services through the period of an emergency and that is why each department has its **Service Continuity Plan** which identifies key

services which must be maintained despite the emergency and outlines how that will be achieved.

- 2.3.4 The Local Authority's **Recovery Plan** sets down the guidance on recovery, which is the process of rebuilding communities and supporting affected groups. It encompasses the effects on people, infrastructure and the environment. Experience from other areas has shown that it is important to consider planning recovery at the earliest opportunity and this work should run in parallel with the response activities themselves. Recovery work can last for months or even years.

2.4 Training

- 2.4.1 Since January 2011, 136 staff members have attended 31 training events. These have varied from sessions for senior managers of the Council who will lead the response or represent the Council in multi-agency control centres during an emergency, through to training on minutes-taking and logging information during an emergency.

2.5 Exercises since January 2011

- 2.5.1 There have been three Corporate Exercises (March and November 2011 and October 2012). These exercises focused on the procedures as set down in the Major Emergency Response Plan to respond to specific situations presented on the day. About 50 officers participated in each exercise, (including the Chief Executive, Directors and Heads of Service). In two of the exercises a Rest Centre was opened and Red Cross volunteers playing a supporting role.
- 2.5.2 Joint exercises with other agencies.
March 2013 – the Welsh Fire and Rescue Services arranged a major exercise in Bala and the Council took advantage of this to exercise our arrangements for providing a rest centre, where accommodation was provided for over 100 personnel participating in the exercise. In addition, officers were present in the control centres for this exercise.
October 2011 – Multi-agency exercise to test arrangements for closing the Britannia Bridge during high wind speeds.
June and November 2011 – desk-top exercises jointly with other agencies to rehearse arrangements in place for a major event – exercise arranged by the event organizers.
- 2.5.5 Small exercises have also been arranged focussing on specific aspects of response, namely establishing a rest centre and loss of use of an office building.

3. Incidents

During the same period we responded to a number of emergency incidents:

- 3.1 Snow, December 2010/ January 2011 – The Emergency Response Group was convened to co-ordinate arrangements and prepare for the period of the Christmas holiday closure.
- 3.2 Threat of Fuel Strike, March/April 2012 – Much of the planning work was undertaken in conjunction with other agencies. Work was undertaken to identify fuel needs and how we would prioritise use of the Council's fuel stock.
- 3.3 Threat of a water 'reservoir' at Pennal failing following heavy rain and a landslide, June 2012 .
- 3.4 Rain and Storms, July 2012 – An early meeting of Strategic Co-ordinating Group was convened which was of benefit to inter-agency arrangements.
- 3.5 Floods affecting Llanberis area and A55, November 2012 – The Council's Emergency Response Group was established and two rest centres were opened.
- 3.6 Snow, January 2013 – Heavy snowfall on a Friday and over the week-end. As usual, personnel from Highways and Municipal were out dealing with the situation, but great emphasis was also given to communication via the social media over the week-end to distribute information. There was good co-operation between departments to make use of the Council's 4x4 vehicles to carry essential staff to their workplace, (e.g. ensure that care staff were able to undertake work and to carry staff to and from Galw Gwynedd.)
- 3.7 On the 21 March 2013 there was a cut in the electricity supply to Penrhyndeudraeth and as a result Galw Gwynedd was without power. The service continuity plan was implemented and a temporary call centre was established in Caernarfon to successfully maintain a service to the public throughout the powercut period.

4. Lessons

- 4.1. Following the snows of 2010/2011 a formal Severe Weather Policy was adopted to clarify when offices/establishments would need to close; arrangements were strengthened regarding responsibilities for offices and a procedure was introduced to commandeer the use of the Council's 4x4 vehicles to transport essential staff during the period of crisis. The procedure was implemented during this year's snow period. Since 2010 facilities for salt storage have been enhanced.

- 4.2. During the flooding of 2011 it was felt that we did not provide enough **information**. We reviewed the arrangements and during the snow early this year one person was designated to co-ordinate information and effective use was made of the web site and social media to do this. But there is room yet to formalise these arrangements and develop procedures to quickly obtain information from frontline officers to the Response Centre and out to the public.
- 4.3. In the exercises we have followed the procedures set down in the Major Emergency Plan for establishing a **Response Centre** and membership of the **Emergency Response Group** – when responding to the incidents there have been some variances to the procedures and some feel things went better. The procedure in the Major Emergency Plan is presently being reviewed.
- 4.4. The dissemination of information in the Emergency Response Centre was problematic in the early exercises. By the time of the last exercise the arrangements had been improved by developing information logging, minuting and the use of technology to share information, but there is room to develop these arrangements further.
- 4.5. There are concerns about the ability of the Council to maintain a response over a long period of time – many of the teams which are key to the response are small teams without enough personnel to maintain continuous operation over a long period. Work is needed to identify which other officers are available to support the teams and to provide them with training.
- 4.6. Communication between agencies has been a challenge during incidents : in the Pennal case two police forces and two councils (Powys and Gwynedd) were involved in the response. This matter has been given attention in joint meetings between the Council and Emergency Services and has been formally recorded as an issue needing to be addressed.
- 4.7. Comments have been made about the use and availability of sandbags during flooding events. This matter will receive attention within the flood work which is included in the Strategic Plan.
- 4.8. We commenced looking at Recovery matters immediately after the flooding in November 2012 but after the first week matters were left to individual departments. An overview of the situation should have been maintained.

5. Report of the Wales Audit Office– Civil Contingencies in Wales (December 2012)

- 5.1 The officers of the Wales Audit Office (the report is attached in Appendix 2) did not visit Gwynedd to collect evidence for the Report and its content has been challenged by the Wales Local Government Association, who argue that it is based on data and plans dating back to 2010 and that it does not reflect more recent experience regarding responses to emergencies and planning for major incidents, therefore the recommendations are not relevant to the true situation in Wales today. However it does contain valid learning points for us.
- 5.2 Action points for Gwynedd Council arising from the report:
 - 5.2.1 Ownership of performance and the need for procedures to formally report to the Management Group and Cabinet Member lessons learnt following incidents.
 - 5.2.2 The need to have a formal programme in place to review and approve our plans and documentation , benchmarked against reviewed criteria, e.g. experience of exercises/incidents, Home Office guidance.
 - 5.2.3 Develop a local Risk Register for Gwynedd – a Regional (North Wales) Risk Register presently exists and work is progressing to develop a specific register for Gwynedd.

6. Collaboration

- 6.1 At its meeting on 9 April 2013 the Council Cabinet decided to adopt a business case to form a single Regional Emergency Planning service. This will bring about a change to the means of providing this Service and work to establish this new service will commence shortly.

7. Efficiency measure for the Service

- 7.1 As part of measuring the efficiency of emergency planning within the Council individuals who had participated in exercises were asked for their opinion about how ready is the Council to respond, and senior managers with key roles to perform were asked how ready they felt to fulfil their role. There was a general feeling that progress had been made in the last two years and the experiences of exercising and responding to incidents had been very beneficial.

8. Emergency Planning Work Programme 2013-14

- a. Contribute to the work of establishing a regional emergency planning service;
- b. Provide exercises;
- c. Establish an emergency planning risk register for Gwynedd Council;
- d. Establish an information database for those posts within the Council which are key to responding to emergencies and identify deputising arrangements;
- e. Review the composition of the Emergency Response Group and the arrangements for establishing a response centre;
- f. Develop communication protocols for getting information from the frontline and sharing information with other responders;
- g. Develop the procedures for responding to flooding.