

Audit and Governance Committee

22 July 2024

Annual Emergency Planning Report – 2023/24

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr S Bartlett, Planning and Emergency Planning

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary: This is the first annual report on emergency planning, and follows a request from Audit and Governance Committee to receive a periodic update on activity and learnings from events.

The report provides an overview of workplans, exercising of the plans, a summary of the Council's 'Command and Control' structures and highlights a number of significant events that were responded to during 2023/24. It also sets out priorities for 2024/25.

There is a growing demand for improving overall societal resilience. This paper summarises some of the actions that are being taken to support communities in this respect.

Recommendation: To note the annual report and learnings from incidents.

Reason for Recommendation: To provide assurance over the Council's ability to respond to significant civil emergencies.

1. **Background**

- 1.1 The Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) 2004 establishes a clear set of roles and responsibilities for organisations involved in emergency preparation and response. The Act divides local responders into two categories, imposing a different set of duties on each.
- 1.2 Category 1 Responders are those organisations at the core of the response to most emergencies, which includes local authorities, alongside police, fire, ambulance service, health, coastguard, and the environment agency. Category 1 responders 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;
 - 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 authority responsibility).
- 1.3 Meanwhile Category 2 Responders consist of the Health and Safety Executive, transport, utility companies and the voluntary sector organisations. These organisations are generally less likely to be involved in the heart of planning work but will be heavily involved in incidents that affect their sector.
- 1.4 The CCA requires the establishment of Local Resilience Forums (LRF), usually based on each police area, as a mechanism to discharge the above duties. The Dorset LRF therefore covers both Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council areas and includes representatives from each of the Category 1 responders. The LRF provides a co-ordinated cross-partner approach to planning, training/exercising, response, recovery and debriefing. The workplan of

the LRF is informed by the [National Risk Register](#), and the localised [Dorset Risk Register](#). The administration and co-ordination of the LRF is facilitated by the Dorset Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU), which is funded by category 1 responders and hosted by Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service (DWFRS).

- 1.5 In the event of a significant emergency requiring multi partner response, the LRF will initiate a Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG), determining the overall strategy for response), and a Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG) that determines how to deliver the strategy. For certain emergencies, and generally once the response to an incident is concluded, a Recovery Co-ordinating Group will be initiated. Recovery is the process of rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitating the community following an emergency. This would most often be led by a local authority.
- 1.6 Emergency Planning at Dorset Council has an identified 'Command and Control' structure set out within the councils' [Emergency Response Plan](#) (internal link), which is reviewed and updated annually. 'Command and Control' is essentially the term used to describe how designated Gold and Silver commanders can effect their authority and direction in an emergency situation, outside of the usual management structures of the organisation. There are 24/7 tours of duty for both Gold (Strategic) officers (Executive and Corporate Directors level), and Silver (Tactical) officers (Heads of Service level).
- 1.7 The Emergency Planning team are part of the Assurance Service, the Legal and Democratic Directorate, and deliver planning, exercising, response and debriefing post incident, as well as facilitating the Council's business continuity arrangements. The team consists of 4.5 fte Emergency Management and Resilience Officers who, together with the Service Manager for Assurance, provide a 24/7 Duty Emergency Planning Officer function for the Council. The Council also hosts the LRF funded Community Resilience Liaison Officer (CRLO), whose main role is to work with and within communities to help improve societal/community resilience.

2. **Emergency Planning and Exercising**

- 2.1 Each of the Risk and Resilience Officers lead on a range of workstreams, linked back to the Dorset Risk Register. This incorporates both the Council's response and statutory duties, and in some cases multi-agency plans led by Dorset Council. The key workstreams are set out below:

Humanitarian and Communities	Humanitarian response; Vulnerable people data; National power outage; Large scale evacuations; Community hubs and rest centres; Training and exercising; Summer operations; Health resilience; Voluntary organisations; Utility (water) planning; Low pressure gas; Community resilience; Events Safety Advisory Group (SAG) Football safety advisory groups
Weather and Environmental	Severe weather; Dam and reservoir offsite plans; Stranded motorists; Space weather; Wildfires; Climate change; Rockfalls and landslides; Coastal pollution
External Threats	Cyber attack; Chemical Biological Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN); Counter terrorism
Statutory Workstreams	Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations offsite plans; Radiation monitoring units; Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) offsite plans; Major Accident Hazard pipelines
Miscellaneous (incl internal plans)	Business continuity; Operation Bridges (death of a senior royal); Excess deaths; Mass fatalities; Recovery; Fuel disruption planning; Telecoms; Site clearance;

	Animal health; Technology; Website and external communications
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- 2.2 Each workstream also has a nominated deputy, to ensure resilience in the event of absence. Allocation of workstreams is reviewed regularly, and adjusted to ensure a fair caseload across the team. There are also a series of action cards to support responding officers.
- 2.3 In cases of national security, lead on planning and response is provided by central government.
- 2.4 Exercising is a key part of ensuring that the Council (and other LRF partners) are able to effectively respond to incidents. Some exercises are required by law, and hence statutory (for instance, offsite plans for REPPIR and COMAH sites, which are regulated). Other plans are exercised following periodic reviews, or on a risk based schedule.
- 2.5 The risk of a significant loss of power (including a national power outage) remains high on the risk register, due to its significant impacts as well as challenges of responding, at a time when all organisations are so reliant on technology. Dorset LRF participated in a 3 day national exercise at the end of March 2023, and the Council took this opportunity to also test internal planning. An Incident Management Team was role played, and learnings captured to generate and improve plans.
- 2.6 The Emergency Response Plan sets out that all Gold and Silver officers should receive training both before commencing first duties and refresher training every three years. All Gold and Silver officers are provided with an overview of their role by the appropriate emergency planning business partner. In addition to this, multi agency training should be undertaken, together with decision making and inquest/public enquiry training. At present 54% of current Gold officers have received multi agency training within the last three years, and 65% of Silver officers. This is a key priority for the emergency planning team during 2024/25.
- 2.7 Gold and Silver officers are also encouraged (and often required) to participate in exercises, to help boost experiences. The emergency planning team regularly host short workshops to help share knowledge.

3. Emergency Response and Debriefing

- 3.1 During 2023/24, the emergency planning team recorded 39 incidents in which they were mobilised, in addition to a range of call outs not associated with response. In the majority of cases, these incidents will be managed within the team (or by the Duty Emergency Planning Officer out of hours), but larger incidents will require input/support from across a number of Dorset Council services, escalation to Gold/Silver and, in some cases, escalation to the multi agency LRF. By their very nature, the most significant events can require ongoing response over a number of days, weeks or even months.
- 3.2 In the event of a significant emergency or business continuity incident, the emergency planning team will liaise with DC Gold/Silver officers to determine the need for calling an Incident Management Team (IMT). This will bring together decision makers from across all impacted services to understand the risks and determine a co-ordinated response. The IMT will help understand and inform Gold/Silver officers of the latest situation, in advance of multi-agency meetings (e.g. SCG and TCG).
- 3.3 Emergency Planning response per calendar months is set out below:

April 2023	Illegal rave; Modern day slavery issue; Pollution incident (x2); Rockfalls (x2); Residential fire
May 2023	Road closure; Illegal rave
June 2023	Security alert (false alarm)
July 2023	Falling trees
August 2023	Potential evacuation; Security alert; Response to unauthorised event
September 2023	Gas leak; Health and safety incident at DC school; Lightning strike; Security alert

October 2023	Gas leak requiring evacuation; Faulty signage; Flooding
November 2023	Storm Ciaran; Storm damage at school; Rockfall; Flooding (x2) Impacts of substation fire Weymouth
December 2023	Rockfall (x2); Mortuary capacity; Police enquiry – serious crime
January 2024	Residential fire with evacuation;
February 2024	Landslide (x3); Prolonged loss of public utility (gas)
March 2024	Bomb disposal; Rockfall; Flooding

3.4 Those incidents requiring Incident Management Teams and/or multi agency co-ordination are set out below. A key emergency planning discipline is to undertake de-briefing, so that plans and response can be enhanced for future incidents. These de-briefs identify i) what went well; ii) what didn't go so well; iii) what could be done better in future. A summary of key learnings is included, where available, below.

3.5 **Poole Harbour Oil Spill**

3.5.1 Although occurring on 26 March 2023, and therefore outside the timescale of this annual report, the response continued into 2023/24. This multi-agency environmental response was in relation to a significant leak of crude oil from one of Perenco's well pipes into Poole Harbour - declared a major incident by the LRF. Dorset Council took the lead on the recovery post incident, which continued until 28 February 2024.

3.5.2 The lessons learnt are not yet available, as not yet released by the Local Resilience Forum.

3.6 Storm Ciaran

3.6.1 England faced a significant storm when Storm Ciaran hit on 2 November 2023. Although Dorset did not suffer the same levels of disruption as neighbouring counties, it still placed a significant impact on Dorset Councils' resources, with road closures, falling trees and evacuations. Dorset Council instigated an Incident Management Team on 31 October 2023 in preparation and remained stood up throughout the storm.

3.6.2 *What went well?* Proactive contact with vulnerable residents, including proactive use of data; establishing multi agency command point for the Portland Beach Road closure; co-ordinated IMT and response; quick response to evacuation at Freshwater Holiday Park; deployment of flood barriers; good co-ordination of highways; well pitched communications; early stand-up of 4x4 capacity; early mobilisation of rest centre capability.

3.6.3 *What will we do better?* The response was generally deemed to be a success. However there were a number of learnings. We will look to provide a great spread of training for loggists; we will ensure that wellbeing of staff has greater emphasis on IMT agendas, for lengthy responses in adverse weather conditions; we will look to improve how we use mapping in response with prepopulated data.

3.7 The Local Government Association has provided a useful councillors guide setting out [their role in a civil emergency](#). In an emergency councillors are not involved in the operational response which is led by council officers. However, it defines the following areas where councillors can provide good leadership:

- *Political leadership* – Ensuring that the Council is meeting its obligations under the CCA, in terms of preparing for and responding to emergencies. By way of this annual report, Audit and Governance Committee has an opportunity to receive this assurance. Similarly, emergency planning sits within the “Planning and Emergency Planning” portfolio;
- *Civic leadership* – Providing a focal point for the local area during an emergency. This was seen to great effect during the Covid pandemic, and also in response to recent storm events;
- *Community leadership* – Helping to increase community resilience, and supporting communities' emergency responses and through

the period of recovery. This is covered in more detail in section 5 of this report.

4. **Business Continuity**

- 4.1 Whilst Emergency Response focuses on the safety and protection of life, assets, and the environment, business continuity is focused on the continuity of Dorset Council's own critical business operations. All services are ranked for criticality, and this 'business impact assessment' is used to focus critical service maintenance, prioritisation and recovery in an emergency.
- 4.2 All services are required to maintain a business continuity action card, which sets out how it responds to a range of consequences, such as loss of staff, premises, systems or data, and critical third-party supplier failure. The emergency planning team seek to drive engagement to educate and embed BC across Dorset Council. A number of mini exercises have been released, allowing teams to test the adequacy of business continuity plans against a range of scenarios. This has included the response to a significant power outage, a cyber-attack and resultant loss of data. It is intended to hold a whole authority business continuity exercise later in the financial year.
- 4.3 The '[Dorset Prepared](#)' website provides tools and guidance to support businesses and voluntary organisations.

5. **Societal resilience**

- 5.1 There is a growing recognition nationally of the importance of establishing greater resilience within communities, so that they are able to respond to incidents affecting them locally. Societal resilience is about empowering the whole of society, including individuals, families, businesses, sporting and social clubs, cultural groups, educational establishments, institutions and religious groups to become involved in developing how they can become more resilient.
- 5.2 The Dorset LRF's strategy includes:
 - Co-ordinating community resilience across Dorset;
 - Providing the knowledge, expertise and tools to support communities;

- Engaging with communities, groups and networks across Dorset, including parish and town councils, faith groups, voluntary groups and community interest groups;
- Encouraging effective dialogue between communities and LRF partners;
- Meet the mandatory requirements and work towards good practice as contained in the National Resilience Standard for Community Resilience

5.3 The LRF Community Resilience Group is co-chaired by Dorset and BCP Council officers, and co-ordinates delivery of the strategy. In 2023 the LRF agreed to fund a pan-Dorset Community Resilience Liaison Officer (CRLO) on a fixed term contract. This position is hosted by Dorset Council, but covering both unitary council areas.

5.4 The CRLO engages daily with numerous organisations and groups interested in the development of resilience across Dorset and the wider UK. These engagement activities occur in person within communities and online locally and nationally; taking the form of events, festivals, county, and local shows, drop ins, exercises, advisory groups, talks, presentations, assemblies, meetings and webinars. The CRLO visits and engages with local communities and UK organisations within working and outside of normal working hours during evenings and weekends, throughout the year, at the request of the specific group. The CRLO has been engaged in the development of several Community Emergency Response Plans.

5.5 The '[Dorset Prepared](#)' website has been redeveloped and provides tools and guidance for communities.

6. **Priorities for 2024/25**

6.1 Plans relating to a number of workstreams are currently actively being reviewed and updated, notably: coastal pollution; excess deaths; rock falls and landslides; fuel; loss of utilities (water / gas); wildfires; dam and reservoir inundation; vulnerable people data sharing; operation bridges and telecoms.

6.2 There remains focus on planning to respond to a national power outage, including resilience communications and establishing community hubs.

- 6.3 The REPPiR and COMAH regulations set out the requirement for statutory exercises for testing offsite plans. In particular, significant planning and exercising is required for the Portland Port submarine berth at least every three years to satisfy the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR), and Defence Safety Nuclear Regulator (DNSR). This also allows the MoD to maintain Portland Port as an asset for the Royal Navy's nuclear powered warships. The next REPPiR is due at the end of the financial year, and is the largest multi agency exercise held by the LRF. Whilst not as onerous, COMAH sites are also subject to regular exercising/testing, to satisfy regulators (Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency) and maintain the operators' licenses. An exercise is scheduled in September this year for one of the two current COMAH sites. Dorset Council is the lead duty holder authority for both REPPiR and COMAH offsite plans.
- 6.4 The business continuity framework continues to be improved, with the provision of new material to further drive engagement and facilitation of review and update of plans. It is intended to enable a whole authority business continuity exercise later this financial year.
- 6.5 Training and exercising remains a priority, and the emergency planning team will be working with Gold and Silver officers to improve take up. Aside from the statutory exercises, a further two multi agency exercises are scheduled for this financial year, in addition to smaller exercises linked to larger community events.
- 6.6 There will remain a concerted effort to engage with communities and improve societal resilience.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 The financial impacts on an organisation of a significant emergency response can be extreme, and an unplanned / unbudgeted expenditure. Some protection is provided via the Bellwin scheme, which is a government financed assistance to reimburse local authorities for costs incurred on, or in connection with, their immediate actions to safeguard life and property or to prevent suffering or severe inconvenience as a result of a disaster or emergency in their area. Where the criteria are met, the grant is normally payable at up to 85% of eligible costs.

8. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications

8.1 The changing climate informs weather events, and as an example 2023/24 presented a significant number of storm challenges. Emergency response plans need to keep pace with the changing environment.

9. **Well-being and Health Implications**

9.1 Protecting life is a key objective for LRFs, containing and mitigating the impacts of an emergency and creating the conditions for a return to normality.

10. **Other Implications**

10.1 None

11. **Risk Assessment**

11.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this report the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

11.2 As this is a report setting out activity, the risk has been ranked as low. However it should be noted that a number of high risks are defined within both the Dorset Community Risk Register and Dorset Council's Risk Register. In particular for Dorset Council, the threat of cyber-attack is identified as an extreme risk, and the impacts of a national power outage identified as high risk. In both instances, this recognises that there are significant controls in place, but that both provide high level impacts should they arise.

12. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

12.1 The Emergency Response Plan has been subject of an Equality Impact Assessment.

13. **Appendices**

13.1 None

14. **Background Papers**

14.1 None

15. **Report Sign Off**

15.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)