

Audit and Governance Committee

12 October 2026

Annual Emergency Management and Resilience Report – 2025/26 For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

Cllr M Bell, Public Health, Prevention & Communities

Local Councillor(s):

Senior Leadership Team:

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Statutory Authority: Civil Contingencies Act 2004

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1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This is the third annual report on emergency management and resilience and follows a request from Audit and Governance Committee to receive a periodic update on activity and learnings from incidents. It provides a comprehensive overview of Dorset Council's preparedness, response, and recovery efforts in managing civil emergencies. It reflects on key incidents, evaluates performance, and outlines our strategic priorities for 2026/27, moving into 2027/28.
- 1.2 Appendix A to this report sets out background information on the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) legislation; Dorset Council's command and control structure; arrangements for business continuity and community resilience; and the role of councillors. This should provide some context to those members of the committee with limited knowledge of the Council's emergency management arrangements but is not essential reading for wider membership.
- 1.3 Over the reporting period 2025/26, the Emergency Management and Resilience team responded to 36 incidents, mobilising the command and control structure and Incident Management Teams as appropriate, working collaboratively with wider Local Resilience Forum partners where required.

Debriefs form a key part of the emergency response process, and help inform future planning and response. Equally exercising remains a cornerstone of resilience. Dorset Council participate in statutory and multi-agency exercises, which this year included a live multi agency anti-terrorism exercise at Poole Harbour (Exercise Leopardite).

- 1.4 Business continuity remains a key focus, as reported previously to the committee as part of the cyber risk updates.
- 1.5 There is an increasing emphasis on community resilience, and in January 2026 Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils were commissioned by the Council to support roll out, utilising national funding distributed via Local Resilience Forums.
- 1.6 The key legislation relating to emergency planning and resilience is the Civil Contingencies Act, and there is currently a consultation ongoing for changes, to reflect the Governments UK Resilience Action Plan.
- 1.7 Priorities for 2026/27 include:
 - Ongoing planning and response, including climate related events and technological threats;
 - Ongoing strengthening of business continuity;
 - A continuing and strengthened focus on community resilience;
 - Delivery and participating in national and local exercises;
 - Debriefing from incidents and ensuring that lessons learnt are fed back into our planning arrangements.
- 1.8 This report provides assurance of Dorset Council's capability to manage emergencies and highlights its commitment to continuous improvement in resilience planning and response, and in meeting our obligations under the Civil Contingencies Act and other associated legislation. As the risk section notes, our first line response is dependent on a small team of officers operating 24/7 on a rota basis, and team resilience continues to be a key area of focus.

2. **Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 To note the annual report and learnings from incidents.

3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**

- 3.1 To provide assurance over the Council's ability to respond to significant civil emergencies, in meeting its obligations as a Category One Responder under the Civil Contingencies Act and associated legislation.

4. Incidents During 2025/26

- 4.1 During 2025/26, the Emergency Management and Resilience team recorded 36 incidents in which they were mobilised, in addition to a range of call outs not associated with response. Within that number, severe weather responses often involve concurrent responses across multiple locations – with the flooding response following Storm Chandra a good example. In the majority of cases, these incidents will be managed within the team (or by the Duty Emergency Management and Resilience 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 Local Resilience Forum. By their very nature, the most significant events can require ongoing response over a number of days, weeks or even months.
- 4.2 In the event of a significant emergency or business continuity incident, the Emergency Management and Resilience 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. Strategic Coordinating Groups and Tactical Coordination Groups).
- 4.3 Emergency Management and Resilience response during 2025/26 per calendar months is summarised below:

April 2025	Two heath fires; Two commercial fires; Debris on beach
May 2025	None
June 2025	Residential fire requiring evacuation;
July 2025	None
August 2025	Potential pollution risk, from vessel; Major incident declared for a heath fire; Caravan park fire requiring evacuation; Residential property flooding

	Residential (flats) fire requiring multiple evacuations
September 2025	None
October 2025	Response to health and safety incident under the Councils Critical Incident Protocol;
November 2025	None
December 2025	Various responses to named storms and associated flooding; Gas leak requiring significant evacuation; Unsafe building structure
January 2026	Potential pollution risk, from vessel; Three applications of Portland Causeway road closure protocol; Automated cyber attack on legacy system; Chemical leak at industrial site; Significant flood response to multiple locations, resulting from Storm Chandra requiring multiple evacuations
February 2026	Industrial fire; Highways flooding
March 2026	Activation of critical incident protocol following fatality; Proactive work following intelligence around an illegal rave; Residential fire requiring evacuation.

- 4.4 A key Emergency Management and Resilience 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. Whilst light touch debriefing is undertaken for all incidents, a more detailed process is undertaken for more significant incidents, particularly those where an Incident Management Team was mobilised. During 2025/26 the most significant of which was the response to Storm Chandra and subsequent flooding, which was subject to a separate report to Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee and can be viewed in full [here](#) (note – this is separate from the flood mitigation reports considered by Cabinet). In summary, the findings of the debrief included:

- Improving communication channels into Parish and Town Councils;
- Developing a pool of emergency planning volunteers to build resilience into a small team during prolonged and/or concurrent events;
- Ongoing work to improve data sharing across partners;
- Ongoing work to roll out improved community resilience.

4.5 Member scrutiny proposed a number of additional recommendations:

- A named responsibility be established during emergency incidents to ensure information is communicated effectively to ward members and onward to town and parish councils.
- Pre-emptive communications be improved ahead of severe weather events, including targeted communications to areas with a history of flooding.
- The current approach to gully maintenance be reviewed to ensure known flood-prone locations are appropriately considered within planned maintenance programmes.
- Greater clarity be provided regarding the role, responsibilities and expectations of flood wardens, working alongside relevant partner organisations.
- Public guidance on actions to be taken during flooding incidents be reviewed and strengthened.
- Communication failures that prevented information reaching the emergency planning response structure be investigated and addressed.
- A framework be developed for assessing, notifying and supporting communities that become isolated because of emergency road closures.

4.6 This report focuses on 2025/26 responses, however for the committees interest there have been a range of significant incidents since the beginning of this financial year, including an illegal rave; the Meningitis B response; two gas leak evacuations; the seizure of the Russian vessel; the summer heat wave; and a large evacuation following a fire in residential flats. These will be reported more fully in the 2026/27 report, but all of which have been subject to debriefing.

4.7 Not linked to a Dorset incident, but recognising an increase to national security levels, the Council has mobilised a Protect and Prepare Board to ensure that security considerations are built into Council planning, alongside monitoring our preparedness for compliance with Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 (otherwise known as Martyns Law).

5. **Community Resilience**

5.1 There is a significant amount of work being undertaken on community resilience, most notably the commissioning of Dorset Association of Parish

and Town Councils to support delivery, utilising national funding distributed to the Local Resilience Forum. As part of this work, a local risk and community emergency response plan (CERP) survey has been issued to all Town and Parish Councils to understand the level of local preparedness and level of support that they require. The output of this survey is currently being developed into a final report, and will act as a driver for the further work to be delivered through this partnership with DAPTC. In the meantime, where approached, DAPTC have been promoting the benefit of CERPs through workshops and conferences, and started delivering some exercises.

- 5.2 Aside from the work with DAPTC, a range of activities have commenced on both community and personal resilience with young people, including a lesson plan targeted at middle school aged children to be delivered from Spring 2027, and a Duke of Edinburgh award for community resilience to be delivered in upper schools.
- 5.3 A personal resilience document has been developed alongside other Councils nationally, but is being held back pending national guidance that is anticipated during Autumn 2026. Working groups have been set up with both the communities team and the climate and nature team to ensure a joined up approach. It is clear that there is a strong national steer for improving both personal and community resilience, that will help guide the work that has already commenced, including further working with community and faith groups and Town and Parish Councils.
- 5.4 The committee may find it helpful to have a further update on community resilience both once the survey output has been analysed fully, and the national steer is clearly defined.

6. Business Continuity

- 6.1 Previous reports to this committee have updated on the improvements being delivered to the business continuity framework as part of the cyber planning work (but extending to wider risks). Plans are being updated to reflect organisational changes, following restructures and transformation. Once complete, the Business Impact Assessment will be reviewed with Senior Leadership Team to ensure that our key service priorities remain correct.
- 6.2 The intention is to embark on a whole authority business continuity exercise later this financial year, building on the familiarisation work carried out earlier this year. But in the meantime, there are a range of “self service” exercises that teams can utilise to test their own action cards. More detailed reports will be provided to the committee as this work progresses.

7. Priorities for 2026/27 (and onwards into 2027)

- 7.1 The highest priority is to ensure that the Council can continue to both plan for, and respond to, incidents when they occur, and reflecting on the changing risk position that is presented by climate related events, technological threats and global impacts. Recent events have demonstrated capacity resilience as an issue, and the intention is to roll out the emergency planning volunteer scheme ahead of the winter months, particularly noting that El Nino is likely to present some challenges;
- 7.2 Priority workstreams, linked to the Local Resilience Forum workplan, are:
- National power outages;
 - Humanitarian response;
 - Communicable disease and pandemic planning;
 - Counter terrorism and Martyns Law;
 - Unexpected arrival of migrants via small boat crossings;
 - Reservoir offsite planning;
 - Animal disease;
 - Severe weather;
 - Major Accident Hazard Pipelines;
 - Compliance with COMAH and REPPiR legislation for offsite plans, including exercising;
 - Fuel planning;
 - Mass fatalities;
 - Evacuation and shelter;
 - Excess deaths;
 - Cyber resilience;
 - Support to Safety Advisory Groups
- 7.3 Further development and communication of personal and community resilience, ensuring a joined up approach with wider Council services and flexibility to engage with any national initiatives.
- 7.4 Improving our mechanisms for communication during an incident, via our elected councillors;
- 7.5 Ongoing strengthening of business continuity across Council services, including supporting plan revisions following structural changes, leading to a whole authority exercise;
- 7.6 Delivery and participating in national and local exercises, including statutory offsite exercises;
- 7.7 Debriefing from incidents and ensuring that lessons learnt are fed back into our planning arrangements;
- 7.8 Respond to any changes that may arise following the consultation on the Civil Contingencies Act and developments following the Strategic Defence Review.

8. Alternative options considered

8.1 None

9. Legal considerations

9.1 The Council meets its obligations under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 as a Category One Responder, alongside associated legislation (Major Hazard Pipelines; = Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2019 (REPPIR); Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations 2015 (COMAH); Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act etc).

10. Financial implications

10.1 The financial impacts on an organisation of a significant emergency response can be extreme, and an unplanned / unbudgeted expenditure. This puts pressure on both the emergency planning budget, or potentially contingency. This data has not been compiled for 2025/26, as spread over different budget lines, but includes additional hour payments for teams working out of hours; transport costs; signage as an example. For the most exceptional incidents, some protection may be provided via the Bellwin scheme, which is a government emergency financial assistance programme designed to help local authorities recover from the immediate costs of responding to major emergencies. When a local authority incurs significant unbudgeted expenditure while protecting life or property during a disaster—such as flooding, severe weather, or major fires—it may be eligible for reimbursement under this scheme. The scheme typically covers up to 85% of eligible costs above a set threshold, which is calculated based on the authority's annual budget. The scheme only applies to immediate response costs and does not cover longer-term recovery or infrastructure repair. Activation is at the discretion of Government, so is not guaranteed. As a rule of thumb, the threshold is approximately 0.2% of the authority's annual revenue budget, this is likely to be several hundred thousand pounds before Bellwin reimbursement becomes available.

11. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

11.1 The changing climate informs weather events, and as an example 2025/26 and months since have presented a significant number of named storm challenges, widespread flooding alongside the challenges presented by a record breaking heatwave. Emergency response plans need to keep pace with the changing environment. A Climate Decision Wheel has been completed, but as this is an information paper rather than a proposal, it does not identify any issues.

12. Well-being and health implications

- 12.1 Protecting life is a key objective for Local Resilience Forums, containing and mitigating the impacts of an emergency and creating the conditions for a return to normality.

- 13. **Other implications**

- 13.1 None

- 14. **Risk implications**

- 14.1 Having considered the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

- 14.2 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 a very high 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. The risk register all recognises capacity challenges across the emergency management and resilience structure.

- 15. **Equalities**

- 15.1 None, but this will be a clear area of focus during the ongoing personal and community resilience rollout.

- 16. **Appendices**

- 16.1 Appendix A – Background Information

- 17. **Background papers**

- 17.1 None

- 18. **Report sign-off**

- 18.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Assurance & Governance (Monitoring Officer), the Director for Resources (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Cabinet Member(s)

Emergency Management and Resilience – Dorset Council

Civil Contingencies Act

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.

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).

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.

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).

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.

A range of other legislation also apply. Both REPPiR and COMAH are referenced in the main report. The Council also has duties under the PSR (Pipeline Safety Regulations) which are being discharged via Major Accident Hazard Pipelines (MAHP) planning. Dorset Council is the lead duty holder authority for both REPPiR, COMAH and MAHP offsite plans.

Emergency Management at Dorset Council

Emergency Management and Resilience at Dorset Council has an identified 'Command and Control' structure set out within the councils' Emergency Response Plan, 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) and Silver (Tactical) officers. Gold is performed by Senior Leadership Team, whilst Silver is a mix of Corporate Directors, Heads of Service and Service Managers.

The Emergency Management and Resilience team are part of the Assurance Service, within the Assurance and Governance 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 Management and Resilience Officer function for the Council.

Dorset Council Emergency Plans / Workstreams

Each of the Emergency Management 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; Communicable disease, pandemic and public health emergencies National power outage;
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	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; 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 (incl Martyns Law)
Statutory Workstreams	Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations offsite plans; Radiation monitoring units (not in itself statutory, but associated with REPPiR); 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; Op Spool (migrant arrival) Animal health; Technology;

	Website and external communications Events Safety Advisory Group (SAG)
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Allocation of workstreams is reviewed regularly, and adjusted to ensure a fair caseload across the team.

In cases of national security, lead on planning and response is provided by central government.

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. REPPIR = Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2019; COMAH = Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations 2015.

The Role of Councillors

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 Management and Resilience sits within the “Planning and Emergency Management and Resilience” 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.

In the event of incident notification, the Duty Emergency Management and Resilience Officer will endeavour to inform the portfolio holder, Leader and relevant ward members. However, the level of contact will vary, as the primary focus of the officer is to respond to the incident.

Business Continuity

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.

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 Management and Resilience 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.

The '[Dorset Prepared](#)' website provides tools and guidance to support businesses and voluntary organisations.

Societal resilience

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.

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

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, however this contract expired and future funding is currently unclear. Prior to the contract, the CRLO was engaged in the development of several Community Emergency Response Plans. Community resilience remains a team priority, but is

being delivered on a “best endeavours” basis by team members at present, as the work is primarily outside of normal working hours.

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