

Improving Community Resilience Scrutiny Review - Final Report

Summary

1. This report presents information gathered in support of the Community Safety Overview & Scrutiny Committee's review on Improving Community Resilience and asks Members to agree the recommendations arising.

Background

2. At a meeting in September 2012, the Committee agreed they would like to carry out a review on adaptation to climate change. Their concerns centred on the increase in localised surface water flooding (not river flooding) and they questioned what plans the Council had in place to respond.
3. The Committee requested that their potential review be scoped out to include information on:
 - The Changing Climate
 - Current controls/policy decisions, emergency planning, maintenance programmes, planning policy, community resilience etc
 - National best practise
 - Other interested partners e.g. Environment Agency, Drainage Boards, Farmers, Communities etc
4. At a meeting in November 2012, the Committee received a presentation on the changing climate, flood risk and emergency planning in respect of flooding in general. They considered information on York's vulnerability to past events e.g. flooding, snow, wind and storms etc, and, the consequential disruption to Council and/or Partner organisations processes i.e. interference with day to day service delivery and normal operational regime. They also looked at the predicted changes in climate for the future and its potential impact.

5. In January 2013, the Committee considered a report on Surface Water Management which had been considered by Cabinet in December 2012. Members queried if there were ways in which the community could assist the council in identifying flood risks, and learnt that the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy included consultation and engagement with the community. Also, that the council encouraged residents to notify them when persistent surface water problems occurred in order that they could be assessed.
6. Having considered all of the information provided, the committee agreed that a review of Surface Water Management was not required following Cabinet's recent approval of the Council's new Surface Water Management Plan. The Committee queried if surface water management planning was being carried out at a ward/community level, but learnt that the new plan was generic for across the whole city. However, officers confirmed that if there were particular issues in a ward a specific plan could be put in place. This raised the question of community preparedness for any form of emergency, as the Committee perceived a gap in emergency preparedness at community level. They therefore agreed that the focus of their scrutiny review should be on the arrangements in place to enable communities to be more resilient in times of emergency.

Community Resilience

7. The importance of community resilience was highlighted in York during the severe weather in winter 2010. The city experienced the worst weather conditions for around 25-30 years, including heavy snow falls and extremely cold conditions over a sustained period. Many residents were adversely affected, in particular the vulnerable and elderly. The conditions placed services delivered by the council under extreme pressure, and limited day to day activity in the city.
8. During that time, many residents across the city had to fend for themselves because responding organisations had to prioritise their response. Many individuals offered help and assistance to family, friends and neighbours. As a result, there are a small number of communities who now have an emergency plan in place – see example at Annex A. However, it is acknowledged that they may not have been regularly refreshed since their introduction, nor does the Council regularly pro-actively communicate with communities on the benefits of being resilient.

Best Practice Elsewhere

9. Communities in the UK already involved in preparing for emergencies show some or all of the following features:
 - Are aware of risks that may affect them (both nationally and locally) and how vulnerable they are to such risks. This helps motivate them to personally take action to prepare for the consequences of emergencies.
 - Work in partnership to complement the work of the local emergency responders and other organisations before, during and after an emergency.
 - Use of existing skills, knowledge and resources to prepare for, and deal with, the consequences of emergencies.
10. In February 2013, the Community Safety Overview & Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from the Emergency Planning Manager from Humber Emergency Planning Service at East Riding of Yorkshire Council. The presentation detailed the work undertaken by East Riding to improve community resilience across their region through the introduction of Community Resilience Plans. Community Resilience is defined as 'Communities and individuals harnessing local resources and expertise to help themselves in an emergency, in a way that complements the response of the emergency services'.

Information Gathered

11. In the East Riding of Yorkshire, following flooding in 2007, Town and Parish Councils across the region were asked to lead on the development of community resilience through the development of community Resilience plans.
12. A Community Resilience Plan will usually identify:
 - a local emergency co-ordination team
 - a place for the team to work from during an emergency
 - a safe place for any evacuees to shelter
 - a list of the vulnerable people that might need additional support
 - contact details for people with skills or resources that may be helpful during the response to an emergency

13. Every year East Riding of Yorkshire Council asks its Town and Parish Councils if they have a Community Resilience Plan in place, or if they intend to produce one. To assist them in their development of a community resilience plan, East Riding of Yorkshire Council provide a series of guidance documents, a DVD and templates.
14. There are now currently 71 Town and Parish Councils with Community Resilience Plans, and 47 in the process of preparing one, which is 70% of the Town & Parish Councils across the East Riding region. The completed plans are shared with emergency services partners, and the contact details extracted from the plans have been used to provide regular email updates during severe weather conditions.
15. A number of Town and Parish Councils across the East Riding area have gone on to successfully implemented their community resilience plan. For example, in October 2012 Snaith and Cowick Town Council triggered their community resilience plan and worked with the Environment Agency, the Council and other organisations in response to unstable flood defence. The Town Council were able to mobilise a team to assist with alerting the community, to open up a sports hall to act as a shelter as required and to open their Council offices to provide an operation hub for responders.
16. However, it does not have to be a Parish Council that prepares the Community Resilience Plan. It could be a Residents Association, Neighbourhood Watch Group or other community group.
17. Creating a Community Resilience Plan
Building on what is already in place in York in a small number of communities; it would take between 2-6 months to complete a Community Resilience Plan template, subject to the level of community engagement. Asking for the help of community residents is at the heart of community resilience planning, and in most areas it will be possible to find an abundance of skills, resources and equipment that can be used in an emergency.
18. There are a number of methods that can be used to request assistance including:
 - Writing to all members of the community to ask for assistance
 - Placing a request on community notice boards and community news letters

- Holding an open day for the emergency plan and requesting support from people as they pass
- Targeting businesses that operate in the community and requesting support
- Targeting community groups who help people, or who have resources or skills that could be useful in an emergency

19. Available Resources

There are no specific financial or HR resources available to the Council for assisting communities to develop a Community Resilience Plan. However, the focus is on each community to create their own plan so the cost to the council and CYC officer support would be minimal. At the time when East Riding of Yorkshire Council were introducing Community Resilience Plans, local communities across their region were able to access some funding from a number of new funding schemes. so it may be possible to work with community groups across York to help them identify available external funding.

20. Interaction with the Emergency Plans of other Responding Organisations

All other responding organisations will have their own emergency plans. East Riding produced a DVD which gave an overview of how they fit together – this is available to view at www.heps.gov.uk

21. The DVD also provided information on:

- The benefits of producing an emergency plan
- Running an emergency shelter
- Running an incident room
- Running an exercise to test the plan

22. Informing Town and Parish Councils of an Emergency

There is often an information vacuum at the start of an emergency, with responding organisations trying to ascertain exactly what has happened and what the consequences are. However, the Local Authority should provide notification as soon as possible after their arrangements have been put in place to implement their response to the emergency. The type of notification will always depend on the type of emergency e.g.:

- In the event of a localised emergency that impacts on one or a small areas, the designated person e.g. parish clerk or a member of the local emergency co-ordination team, would be telephoned by the Head of Service who is co-ordinating the Council's response to the

emergency. The Head of Service would be designated as the Control Centre Manager when they are in this co-ordination role.

- In the event of a wide area emergency that impacts on many wards initial notification is likely to come from an email sent from the Emergency Planning team or from the Control Centre Manager.
- A text alert service could also be utilised to send notification by SMS to a member(s) of the local emergency co-ordination team

23. Identifying Local Risks

The emergency services, local authorities, NHS, Environment Agency and other key organisations such as Yorkshire Water complete a regular risk assessment looking at the type of hazards that might create an emergency in the area. Some of the higher risks are:

- Industrial Accidents
- Seasonal & Pandemic Influenza
- Severe Weather
- Flooding

24. Completed Plans

Once a plan is completed, it needs to be distributed. It is likely that it will contain confidential information e.g. addresses of vulnerable people, so it needs to have a restricted distribution list. It is recommended that key members of a local emergency co-ordination team keep a copy, that a copy be provided to the Council to share with the emergency services, and that a copy be kept in an emergency box together with a copy of all the other information and equipment that might be needed during an emergency e.g.:

- a street map of the area
- maps showing areas likely to flood
- the register of electors (this can be provided by Electoral Services)
- paper and pens
- battery operated radio
- battery operated torches

25. Community Plans for Areas with Insufficient Resources

If a community is not in a position to prepare an emergency plan due to insufficient resources in the area, they could be encouraged to contact a neighbouring area and suggest preparing a joint plan in advance and splitting the work required.

Review Conclusions

26. Having received a detailed presentation on the approach taken by East Riding of Yorkshire Council, the Committee agreed it could be adapted and combined with current practices e.g. Snow Wardens, Flood Wardens etc, for introduction across York.
27. They also suggested that the introduction of community emergency plans could be supported by the Council's Emergency Planning Unit and the Communities & Equalities Team, and the completed plans could lie beneath the Community Contracts currently being drawn up.
28. Officers confirmed that a number of the council's partners i.e. North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue and Yorkshire Water, would be willing to support and help fund the process of introducing community resilience plans.
29. Finally, the Committee agreed it would also be useful to provide individual households with advice and guidance on emergency preparedness.

Council Plan 2011-15

30. The introduction of Community Emergency Plans would support the Council's aim to make Communities safe, resilient and cohesive.

Implications & Risk Management

31. During their development project, East Riding of Yorkshire Council successfully managed the associated risks and addressed the issues around insurance. If such a project were to be undertaken in York, the risks, and financial and HR implications could be similarly managed.

Recommendations

32. In order to ensure community preparedness for any form of emergency and enable communities to build their own resilience, the Cabinet are recommended to instruct officers to:
 - i) Strengthen community resilience by following best practice as implemented by others (e.g. East Riding of Yorkshire Council) through the introduction of Community Resilience Plans

- ii) Work with Communities to help them identify any available external funding
- iii) Work with appropriate partners to encourage their support and assistance.

Reason: To conclude the work on this review

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Wards Affected:

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All

Background Papers: N/A

Annexes:

Annex A – Example of a current Community Emergency Plan in place in York