EXERCISE MEGACYMA

DE-BRIEF REPORT

Draft Report Version 0.1
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INTRODUCTION

The storms which affected the Welsh coastline in December 2013 and January 2014 caused widespread disruption and locally significant impacts, including community evacuation, flooding to properties and disruption to infrastructure.

Following the flooding, Natural Resources Wales were requested to produce a report highlighting a series of recommendations. A large scale evacuation exercise to test our capacity to respond to widespread coastal flooding was put forward as two of the recommendations within the Wales Coastal Flooding Review.

Even prior to the flooding and subsequent review, a coastal evacuation exercise, Exercise Megacyma, was being prepared by a sub group of Wales Flood Group. The group included representatives from Welsh Government, local authorities, Natural Resources Wales, Met Office and the Joint Emergency Services Group.

The exercise was designed to look at a number of the priority areas within the review and, using a major coastal flood scenario, analyse any gaps in current planning and mitigation against the report’s findings.

This was a strategic exercise with some tactical and practitioner input. Although the South Wales and Gwent Local Resilience Forum’s (LRFs) were the main players there was also input from the utility companies, Third Sector, Dyfed Powys LRF, Welsh Government, South West England LRFs, Cabinet Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government.

EXERCISE METHODOLOGY

- The exercise was run as a table-top exercise held in the run up to a potentially significant coastal flooding event with play centring on Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) meetings in South Wales, Gwent and the South West of England. In parallel with these meetings there were Wales Civil Contingencies Committee meetings and representatives from Cabinet Office were available to simulate COBR play. A table including utility and infrastructure companies also took part in the exercise to consider their response and be available for engagement with the SCGs.

- The exercise remained in the room with external contact only permitted by exception on the agreement of the Facilitators.

- Movement between tables was encouraged but, as the exercise was run as realistically as possible, contact was made only through handwritten notes handed to the Facilitators.

- Each table had its own Facilitator to ensure that the meetings remained on schedule and all key areas were covered. Loggists were also designated on each
The log was used as the basis for feedback.

- 15 minutes was built into the schedule at the end of each session for tables to agree:
  - Decisions taken
  - Actions agreed
  - Issues to be escalated

The scenario for Session 1 of the exercise was:

There had been some concern on a weather front which had been moving towards the South Wales and South West of England. From Sunday, 15 March until Wednesday, 18 March this weather front was monitored but there was uncertainty over its likelihood. Session 1 took place on Thursday, 19 March when the various groups met to decide upon their next steps.

The scenario for Session 2 of the exercise was:

The Silver (tactical) Group met at 09.00 on Friday, 20th March to consider the latest forecast and modelling of the high winds and tidal surge. The likelihood and impact had increased since the Silver Group last met and the approach being taken now was to step up preparations significantly to address the risk. Gold was provided a situation report in the form of a common recognised information picture which had been produced by Silver and the issues which the Group had escalated to Gold for decisions and strategic direction.

**AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

**Aim**

To test existing command, control and communication arrangements for the management of a catastrophic tidal flood event affecting the Bristol Channel coastline with a view to utilising the outcomes from the exercise to enhance future response arrangements.

**Primary Objectives**

1. To assess the existing arrangements for organisational notification of potential catastrophic flood events and the interpretation of such notifications at Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG), Welsh Government and UK Government (COBR) levels.
EXERCISE MEGACYMA

2. To raise awareness of the communities likely to be affected by such an event and the possible impacts to those communities.

3. To assess the current arrangements for the co-ordination of major incident management across multiple SCG’s

4. To assess the potential requirements and influences in such scenarios of COBR and Welsh Government on the SCG structures across multiple Local Resilience Forum areas

5. To assess the warning and informing capabilities of the SCG in terms of public and organisational communications

6. To examine the decision making processes for a large scale evacuation including relevant criteria and methodology(s)

7. To examine the processes for prioritisation and allocation of relevant national resources

8. To review the impact of such events upon existing recovery structures and decision making processes

Secondary Objectives

1. To review strategic interpretation of weather and flooding information

2. To test each agency’s ability to respond to flooding incidents

3. To afford responding agencies the opportunity to network on an inter-agency basis against the response scenario
OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Co-ordination

The scenario of the exercise explored not only the significant impact of the coastal flooding event but also the challenges that would arise from such a wide-area impact.

It was evident that for a number of agencies resources would be fully stretched in such a scenario. The question was therefore considered of whether collaborative and co-ordinated working between the South Wales and Gwent Strategic Co-ordinating Groups including potential mergers should be explored in areas where wide-area co-ordination would make the best use of available resources.

Whilst both Gwent and South Wales SCG’s were supportive of increased collaborative working, to ensure co-ordinated approaches to issues such as warning and informing evacuation and recovery, it was also evident that there were differences in views in terms of the staging of such activities, particularly in terms of any potential merger of the SCG’s. It was also acknowledged that a number of key principles for such joint activity lacked clarity, for example the legal implications and accountability issues and should be more fully explored. Consideration should also be given in this work to the benefit of establishing a ‘Platinum’ Command for wide-area emergencies.

However, the South West LRFs did not welcome the idea of joint SCGs. Instead, they would rely upon the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Resilience and Emergencies Division (RED) using teleconferences involving the chairs of the SCGs and national responders which was used during the 2013 floods. This could be used to ensure all SCG Chairs and those providing national assets can agree priorities across borders without the need for joint SCGs.

Recommendation 1

The principles underpinning the collaboration between Strategic Co-ordinating Groups and their working groups in managing the response to an incident impacting upon multiple areas should be fully explored with a view to embedding these arrangements into plans. The legal aspects of accountability should be included in this work.

The principles of a collaborative SCG should be considered across all Welsh LRFs, where this is practicable, and the Pan-Wales Response Plan should reflect any changes at the local and regional level. The merits of introducing a similar body to the Response Co-ordinating Group used in England should also be examined.
Government Roles and Responsibilities

In testing the linkages between the SCGs, Welsh Government and COBR there was a lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities. Greater clarity is therefore required on devolved and non-devolved powers during emergencies to avoid any confusion or delay at SCGs.

Whilst it is not captured as a specific recommendation from this exercise it was felt that both governments should be encouraged to work together to provide this clarity. In this respect, it should be noted that the St David’s Day announcement made by the UK Government stated there was consensus to accept the Silk Commission recommendation that there be a clear understanding of respective roles in relation to civil contingencies and emergencies. The UK Government agrees with this and will work with the Welsh Government to ensure clarification as part of the move to a reserved powers model.

Feedback at the end of each session and following the exercise identified that there was also a lack of knowledge of the Emergency Co-ordination Centre (Wales), the Wales Civil Contingencies Committee and how the Welsh Government operates during emergencies.

In the course of the exercise when the likelihood and scale of the potential event increased significantly a meeting was called by the Chair of the Wales Civil Contingencies Committee and the Chairs of the SCGs to consider the response from the various levels. This built upon a practice established during the response to swine flu but has never been matured or included in any plans. It was thought that the principle of such meetings should be explored further with a view to including it as an option in existing Wales and SCG plans.

Recommendation 2

The concept of a joint-chairs meeting between the Chair of the Wales Civil Contingencies Committee and the Chairs of the relevant Strategic Co-ordinating Groups should be explored further with a view to embedding the arrangement in plans where this is feasible.

Recovery

Recovery was one area where the possibility of implementing a joint group was considered. It was acknowledged that local authorities would normally lead on recovery and chair a Recovery Co-ordinating Group at the earliest opportunity for all emergencies. However, the mechanics on how recovery operations should best be structured in such a wide area incident would operate needed to be examined. Also, the merits and processes required to establish a ‘Lead Authority’ needs to be
considered as part of this process. There was also a need for greater clarity on the role of the Welsh Government in recovery and what various Welsh Government Departments could provide in terms of support.

**Recommendation 3**

The Wales Recovery Framework needs to be revised based on the findings of the exercise to bring more clarity to the role of the Welsh Government. The principle of wide-area recovery groups should also be explored and examined through exercise following an update of the Wales Recovery Framework.

**Critical National Infrastructure**

In understanding the risks to assets within their areas that are categorised as Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) the exercise demonstrated how most agencies at the SCG had no direct access to information on CNI.

It was felt that even providing access to such information during the run up to such events would not provide sufficient time for effective multi-agency response arrangements to be put in place.

Local responders need to be engaged with CNI asset owners on developing multi-agency response plans to protect the sites and to ensure that priority is given. They also need to be aware of any external dependencies which need to be covered by such planning. To achieve this there must be better information sharing in a controlled and managed way.

Early engagement by the SCGs with utility companies is crucial in understanding the risks to infrastructure. Included in this are road and rail infrastructure and the plans in place to divert traffic using alternative routes.

**Recommendation 4**

Further work is required to provide clarity on the planning and response requirements for the protection of critical national infrastructure at the local level.

**Evacuation**

Evacuation planning at the local level needs to take account of large-scale events such as these where the evacuation of large numbers of people across multiple areas is required. In particular, such planning will need to examine how the public are informed, the messages to be delivered and how unaffected areas can provide support.
**Warning and Informing/Communications**

It was recognised that warning and informing was a priority for the SCG and needed to be firmly embedded in all SCG meetings.

There were questions raised about how the co-ordination of multi-agency communications would be managed and who would lead.

**Recommendation 5**

The Wales Evacuation Framework and Warning and Informing Framework need to be revised and updated to take into account response structures and roles and responsibilities around wide-area evacuation and communications.

**Third Sector**

It was noted by the Gwent SCG that the full potential of the Third Sector to support statutory agencies during emergencies has yet to be realised and clarified in terms of to what extent the third sector can be depended on in such wide scale and protracted situation. Where resources within responder agencies are stretched there is a role for Third Sector organisations to assist in some areas of the response and recovery work to allow responder agencies to focus on their core services.

In using Third Sector resources, the liability and duty of care responsibilities must be taken into consideration. There also needs to be close management of Third Sector resources to ensure the maximum value can be made of their support. In the same way, members of the public who arrive to assist (convergent volunteers) must also be managed closely.

Clarity is also required on how Third Sector assets are co-ordinated at a national level so that deployment and prioritisation of deployment can be agreed. In this respect, the role of the Voluntary Civil Protection Forum needs to be considered.

**Recommendation 6**

The involvement of the Third Sector in emergency response and recovery to provide added value and support needs to be explored further and how this support can be co-ordinated and delivered across wide-area or multiple-area incidents. This work should include the management of convergent volunteers.
Vulnerable People

As evidenced in a number of exercises and real events in recent years the way in which we identify and respond to the needs of vulnerable people affected by emergencies has proved difficult. It is recognised that there are a number of initiatives being taken forward at a local level but there is a need for this work to be co-ordinated.

Recommendation 7

Further work is required in drawing together all existing initiatives of dealing with vulnerable people into a single, national planning group to take this work forward in a co-ordinated way.

Logistics

The scenario of the exercise deliberately tested the ability of the Gwent and South Wales SCGs to compete for national assets when the larger impact was in the South West of England. The exercise identified an issue of how national assets would be provided in the event of multiple areas of the UK having competing demands. Whilst the emergency services have national co-ordination centres to draw together mutual aid for their services, a common strategy for identification and deployment of national assets is not clear.

Recommendation 8

How national assets are deployed during wide-area coastal flooding events needs to be examined and the agreed response structure communicated to all LRFs.

At the local level, there was recognition that each agency needs to consider its own resources in responding to such an incident and that business continuity plans are in place and tested regularly. There is also a requirement to develop a greater awareness of mutual aid in terms of what is available, from whom it can be obtained and the legal and financial arrangements needed to support it.

Flood Framework

The National Flood Emergency Framework produced by DEFRA for use in England (December 2014) was seen as a useful document in setting out consistent arrangements for responding to flood incidents. The Wales Flood Response Framework already provides this information for Wales, however it may not be recognised as the document to use. It can be found at www.wales.gov.uk/flooding
Recommendation 9

Update the Wales Flood Response Framework in light of the outcomes of Exercise Megacyma and publicise this document with Welsh partners.

Command, Control and Co-ordination

In setting the strategic direction, the South Wales SCG drew upon the list of strategic “objectives” included in their generic response plan whilst the Gwent SCG considered their strategic “intentions”, with both drawing their origins from ACPO guidance (2009). Similarly, it was evident in the planning phase of the exercise that the ACPO guidance also provided the main driver for the agenda for any initial SCG. There was an acceptance that in these regards this guidance had been superseded and LRF generic arrangements should be updated to encompass the more modern approaches such as that of the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP) where a Joint Decision-Making Model has been developed to provide standard models which can be adopted by all LRFs.

Recommendation 10

All LRF generic response plans should contain the Joint Decision-Making Model and consideration of the agreed standard agenda for initial meeting of the SCG’s.

The LRFs recognised there needed to be flexibility around the locations of the SCG, RCG and Silver and this needed to be factored into their generic response plans. Technology such as teleconferencing and video-conferencing needs to be included in plans to make attendance at meetings easier for organisations which need to attend multiple SCGs.
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## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Linked to Objective No.</th>
<th>Action By</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The principles underpinning the collaboration between Strategic Co-ordinating Groups and their working groups in managing the response to an incident impacting upon multiple areas should be fully explored with a view to embedding these arrangements into plans. The legal aspects of accountability should be included in this work. The principles of a collaborative SCG should be considered across all Welsh LRFs, where this is practicable, and the Pan-Wales Response Plan should reflect any changes at the local and regional level. The merits of introducing a similar body to the Response Co-ordinating Group used in England should also be examined.</td>
<td>PO3</td>
<td>A task and finish group should be established under the Wales Resilience Partnership Team involving representatives from all 4 LRFs and the Welsh Government to take forward as a specific project on collaborative SCG arrangements and to seek agreement of the LRFs and WRF to embedding the principles in response plans. The task and finish group should feed their findings into the revision of the Pan-Wales Response Plan and respective LRF generic response plans.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>The concept of a joint-chairs meeting between the Chair of the Wales Civil Contingencies Committee and the Chairs of the relevant Strategic Co-ordinating Groups should be explored further with a view to embedding the arrangement in plans where this is feasible.</td>
<td>PO3</td>
<td>To be taken forward under actions for Recommendation 1</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>The Wales Recovery Framework needs to be revised based on the findings of the exercise to bring more clarity to the role of the Welsh Government. The principle of wide-area recovery groups should also be explored and examined through exercise following.</td>
<td>PO8</td>
<td>The Wales Recovery Group should be re-constituted to take forward a task and finish project to review recovery plans in the light of the findings of the exercise and examine the feasibility of wide-area recovery groups.</td>
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<td>an update of the Wales Recovery Framework.</td>
<td>recovery co-ordinating groups.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Further work is required to provide clarity on the planning and response requirements for the protection of critical national infrastructure at the local level.</td>
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<td>PO3 The Wales Resilience Partnership Team to work with LRFs and the Wales Extremism and Counter Terrorist Unit to develop local planning for CNI. This work should be taken forward in line with developments of the UK Local Planning and Security Working Group on CNI.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>The Wales Evacuation Framework and Warning and Informing Framework need to be revised and updated to take into account response structures and roles and responsibilities around wide-area evacuation and communications.</td>
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<td>PO6 The Wales Resilience Partnership Team to establish task and finish groups, involving the LRFs, to update and revise wide-area evacuation and warning and informing plans.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>The involvement of the Third Sector in emergency response and recovery to provide added value and support needs to be explored further and how this support can be co-ordinated and delivered across wide-area or multiple-area incidents. This work should include the management of convergent volunteers.</td>
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<td>PO7 The Wales Resilience Partnership Team to establish a task and finish group, involving the LRFs and in liaison with Cabinet Office, to develop effective arrangements for the managed use of Third Sector support.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Further work is required in drawing together all existing initiatives of dealing with vulnerable people into a single, national planning group to take this work forward in a co-ordinated way.</td>
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<td>PO3 This should link in to the action from Exercise Cygnus for the Welsh Government Health and Social Services Department to establish a task and finish group, involving the LRFs, co-ordinate work on identifying and supporting vulnerable people during emergencies.</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>How national assets are deployed during wide-area coastal flooding events needs to be examined and the agreed response structure communicated to all LRFs.</td>
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<td>PO3 Welsh Government to work with Cabinet Office and DCLG on the development of these arrangements. This will feed into work currently being undertaken to establish a COBR Logistics Cell.</td>
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<td>Update the Wales Flood Response Framework in light of the outcomes of Exercise Megacyma and publicise this document with Welsh partners.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>All LRF generic response plans should contain the Joint Decision-Making Model and consideration of the agreed standard agenda for initial meeting of the SCG’s.</td>
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Timescales for completion of these recommendations to be agreed following discussions with identified leads.