

22 November 2017

Civil resilience

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

The terrorist attacks earlier in the year, and the local government response to the Grenfell Tower fire have prompted consideration of how councils plan for and respond to civil emergencies. At its meeting in September the Board agreed to a new workstream in this area. This paper outlines and seeks members' views on work to support councils in emergency planning and civil resilience.

Recommendation

That the Safer and Stronger Communities Board members note the contents of the report and provide feedback and direction.

Action

Officers to take forward as outlined.

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Civil resilience

Background

1. 2017 has seen a number of high profile tests of local government's preparedness for civil emergencies. The terrorist incidents in Westminster, Manchester, London Bridge and Finsbury and the Grenfell Tower fire have seen councils and fire and rescue services at the forefront in responding to these tragedies.
2. Following the Grenfell Tower fire, and criticism of the initial handling of the disaster by both Kensington and Chelsea council and the Government itself, a number of different organisations have been reviewing how councils plan and respond to civil contingencies. This paper summarises the findings so far and emerging next steps.

Cabinet Office Civil Contingencies Secretariat review

3. As the Board will recall from its meeting in June, the Queen's Speech included a commitment by the Government to develop a new strategy for resilience in major disasters including the establishment of a Civil Disaster Reaction Taskforce to help at times of emergency.
4. In light of this commitment, the Cabinet Office's Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) undertook a short review over the summer and early autumn around some of the challenges associated with national resilience and what solutions there might be to them, with a view to feeding back proposals to the National Security Council. The three key areas that the review has been considering are:
 - 4.1. **Assurance** – what can be done to assure the public that resilience standards and planning requirements are being met at a local level? In order to answer this question the review considered questions such as:
 - 4.1.1. Are there agreed standards on civil resilience and emergency planning that councils can measure themselves against?
 - 4.1.2. What formal involvement should councils have in local resilience forums (LRFs)?
 - 4.1.3. What sort of peer review or alternative processes can provide assurance to Ministers that areas are prepared?
 - 4.2. **Local capability and mutual aid** – what arrangements are in place at local level to share support and capacity? How are these invoked?
 - 4.3. **Mobilising central capacity** – how can Government swiftly mobilise central government capacity to provide additional support to local places following a disaster?
5. The LGA has held a number of discussions with CCS during the review to feed in our view about the need for bottom up, locally led arrangements that work in local areas, and for additional funding to support training on emergency planning across the sector.

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6. The original intention for the review was to report in November, so we are expecting feedback on Government's proposals at any time.

LGA/SOLACE discussions and proposals

7. Sessions at the LGA's annual conference where councils' response to the terrorist incidents in the first half of the year were discussed made it clear there was a desire for experiences and good practice to be shared, especially among chief executives. As a result the LGA has been having discussions with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) about what the sector can do to enhance preparedness and civil resilience capability, with the LGA looking to increase support for councillors and SOLACE exploring training requirements for senior officers.

Leadership Essentials Course

8. Officers in the team are currently working with the LGA's leadership team to develop a pilot leadership essentials course on emergency planning and civil resilience as part of our Highlighting Political Leadership programme. The one day course, which is expected to take place in early 2018, will focus on issues including: how can councillors assure themselves that their councils are prepared to deal with an emergency and are following best practice; what is the role of councillors during an emergency; how can local mutual aid arrangements support councils during a crisis; and how should you respond when an emergency or crisis occurs?
9. The session will also focus on media presence and the significance of councillors' community role, building on a need that has been identified since the Grenfell tragedy where a shift in the roles of councillors and officers in civil emergencies has been noted.

The LGA's councillor's guide to civil emergencies

10. Alongside the new training, we will also be updating our existing [councillor guide](#) on emergency planning to cover these issues in more depth. Although it was only developed in 2015, the guide was developed with flooding and weather emergencies in mind, and it is clear that there is a lot of experience to build on since then, with expectations of councils and how they will respond changing in the intervening period.

Additional guidance and support

11. With a range of materials and courses already available around emergency planning and civil resilience officers have been scoping out with SOLACE how the two organisations could best support local authorities around this agenda. Consideration has also been given to how the sector responds to the recommendations from the CCS review.
12. A common theme in the LGA's discussions with CCS and SOLACE have been around the provision of training to senior officer teams in local authorities. We are in the process of seeking views on how the training offer to councils and their partners could be improved. It could be that more regional training, involving a range of local partners and a mix of training methods from personal study, through open discussion forums to playing out scenarios may make training more accessible for councils.

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13. We anticipate that one of the conclusions from the CCS review will be the need to improve mutual aid arrangements between councils. There are well established frameworks for the police and fire and rescue services, but as the floods in 2014/15 demonstrated arrangements are less developed among councils. There are some strong and well-practised regional arrangements in London and Greater Manchester, and while there are some examples of good practice in two-tier areas such as Suffolk, there is not a consistent map when it comes to mutual aid arrangement.
14. Following the 2014/15 floods the Department of Communities and Local Government has been in discussion with the LGA about developing local government's mutual aid arrangements and some options about how this could be strengthened were worked up in the first part of this year, though they have not been progressed as a result of the local and general elections and then other work, such as that around the Grenfell fire. Discussions with SOLACE are at a very early stage on how the sector might take the lead in developing mutual aid arrangements. As proposals and options are worked up we will be seeking members' views on the way forward.
15. Although there is already a joint [SOLACE/CLG guide](#) to emergency planning, our work with SOLACE suggests that guidance that takes the reader through the life cycle of an emergency itself may be useful and assist chief executives and their senior management teams in building their preparedness for an emergency.
16. Separately, the LGA's communications team have been exploring what additional support could be provided to councils to enhance the sector's capability for crisis communications. Government has also been looking at this issue, with the result that the LGA has now signed up to help develop a cross-government communications resource on this.
17. Finally, we aim shortly to publish a write up of an LGA annual conference session led by the chief executives of Manchester and Westminster councils when they shared their experiences of responding to the terrorist attacks in their areas.

Implications for Wales

18. The LGA's work in this area could be of benefit to Welsh councils and councillors and we will liaise with the WLGA as the work programme is developed to ensure they are aware of the work, and can inform its development.

Financial Implications

19. Due to capacity constraints within the team, we are anticipating that much of this work will need to be delivered using external support: there is some budget available to do so, and the pilot leadership essentials course will be delivered from within existing budgets.
20. However, we have emphasised to Government that this is an area where additional resources would support the delivery of more widespread training across local government.

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Next steps

21. Subject to the Board's comments, officers will continue work to:

21.1. Develop the leadership essentials training offer.

21.2. Update the existing councillor guide – this is likely to be in 2018 and may build in feedback from the pilot training session, depending on timing.

21.3. Engage with and respond to the CCS review once it is completed.

22. The Board's views on what support councils are looking for on this agenda, both corporately and at individual councillor and officer level, would be most helpful.