

**Cabinet**

**13 July 2022**

**Storm Arwen review**

**Ordinary Decision**



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## **Report of Corporate Management Team**

**Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change**

**Councillor John Shuttleworth, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Rural Communities and Highways**

### **Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide.

### **Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To consider a review of the response to Storm Arwen and an improvement plan for managing future incidents.

### **Executive summary**

- 2 Storm Arwen hit the north of the United Kingdom on the afternoon of Friday 26 November 2021 and that night caused extensive damage across northern England.
- 3 More than one million homes lost power as falling trees and poles brought down power lines, with over 100,000 homes experiencing several days without power. The strong winds also caused structural damage to buildings and transport was disrupted with rail services cancelled, roads blocked by fallen trees and overturned vehicles and snow accumulations across the Pennines.
- 4 In County Durham, the electricity distribution network proved to be particularly susceptible to storm damage. Over 14,890 utility customers were affected by a loss of power. The outages affected all parts of the county and many residents were without power for several days before power was restored to all properties on Thursday 9 December 2021.
- 5 The initial impacts of the storm were felt overnight on 26 and 27 November 2021. Emergency and council services responded to calls

overnight and commenced clean-up operations as soon as it was safe to do so the following day.

- 6 County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum (LRF) implemented its multi-agency incident procedures on the morning of Saturday 27 November 2021 to coordinate response to storm damage incidents. Alongside the local emergency service response, Northern Powergrid (NPg) commenced operations to assess and repair damage to the power distribution network, in order to restore power to its customers as quickly as possible.
- 7 On Saturday 27 November, the council's response was coordinated internally via our normal emergency response procedures. However, with large numbers of communities still without power on Sunday 28 November, the council escalated its response in line with the corporate emergency plan, by standing-up a senior officer coordinating group and calling up more customer support staff.
- 8 Initially it was understood that most properties should have been reconnected by midnight on Saturday 27 November and then Sunday 28 November. However, by the beginning of the following week it was clear that it would take days to get many customers onto temporary generated power, and potentially weeks to rebuild and repair parts of the power distribution network.
- 9 Given concerns about the duration of the power outages and uncertainty about when power would be restored, on Tuesday 30 November the council requested that the LRF establish a strategic coordination group (SCG), which led to the declaration of a major incident on Wednesday 1 December. The council submitted a request for Military Assistance to Civil Authorities (MACA) which was approved by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) on Thursday 2 December.
- 10 Agencies worked together with local communities to contact and visit vulnerable people, and to provide affected residents with help and support ranging from welfare centres, hot meals, food, stoves, heaters and support supplies and where required, arranging alternative temporary accommodation. The council also assisted with welfare and hardship payments while people waited for compensation claims to be processed.
- 11 As with previous incidents and the response to Covid-19, community, voluntary and faith groups across the county were outstanding in rallying-round and providing rapid and spontaneous support, which ranged from checking on isolated people, providing food and supplies, to opening-up community centres, halls and churches to provide places

for shelter, company and warmth. Given the duration and widespread nature of the outages, community, voluntary and faith groups responses were invaluable in helping people affected by the storm.

- 12 A number of de-briefs and reviews of the response to the storm have been commissioned and undertaken including national reviews by the Department for Business, Energy, Innovation and Science (BEIS) and The Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) and by County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum (CDDLRF). These are summarised in the report.
- 13 In addition, the council undertook its own review, which consisted of seeking the views and experiences of officers who responded to the incident; elected Members; local community organisations and parish councils which responded to the incident; and the general public. The different elements of the review are summarised in the report.
- 14 To include an element of external challenge and peer review, the council engaged with Durham University and Cornwall Council in the de-brief.
- 15 The views of Safer and Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committee were also sought on the de-briefs and review with a special meeting of the Committee held on 20 May 2022 to consider the proposed improvement plan.
- 16 A number of common observations and conclusions have emerged from the review, including:
  - (a) a mixed view from the members of the public who responded to the survey with many expressing dissatisfaction with the speed of response, communication and identifying that they tended to rely on help from friends, family and neighbours and local community support as opposed to responder agencies. Others however commented favourably on the efforts of frontline staff, councillors and MPs and the support provided by responder agencies;
  - (b) a recognition that the multi-agency responses to subsequent incidents - Storms Malik/Corrie and Dudley/Eunice - had improved with immediate lessons learnt from Storm Arwen;
  - (c) while the national review of the response to Storm Arwen has identified the need to clarify the roles and responsibilities of utility companies and local responders in relation to the provision of welfare support, many members of the public, local communities and elected representatives who responded to the review expected that the council should provide support and that this should happen quickly and sooner than it did in Storm Arwen;

- (d) expectations on timescales and speed of response. For the category of storm and severity of disruption experienced during Storm Arwen, Ofgem's Quality of Service Guaranteed Standards allow network operators up to 48 hours to reconnect customers before customers are entitled to compensation for inconvenience and costs. This tends to set the timeframe for when utility companies ramp-up community welfare response. From the survey, it is clear that some members of the community expect more immediate support and action in the event of power outages;
- (e) concern about how long it took the council and partner agencies to identify the severity of the situation and declare a major incident and escalate the response;
- (f) concern about the effectiveness of command and control during the first few days of incident response. It was not clear whether NPg was leading the efforts or another agency. NPg established a control centre in St John's Chapel, which became the focal point of its response, whereas large parts of the wider county had also been affected by the storm and required support;
- (g) once it was established, the LRF response structure proved to be effective, with the council playing a significant role in coordinating and supporting the multi-agency response with partner agencies and the community and voluntary sector via the area action partnership coordinators. Many officers across the council stepped in at short notice and worked out of hours to manage the response and provide support to local residents;
- (h) the scale of the response was significant. Over 5,000 visits were made to check on vulnerable residents. Three hundred and thirty emergency support packs containing heaters, stoves, torches, batteries and other emergency items were issued. The council commissioned 41 visits by mobile catering units to 11 different localities across the county and helped place 14 households in emergency alternative accommodation;
- (i) the significant and valuable role played by community, voluntary and faith groups across the county in providing rapid and spontaneous support and the need to support the expansion of this by supporting communities to develop their own local community resilience plans and capacity. Related to this, the need to continue to provide advice to households on how they can prepare for incidents such as power outages;

- (j) following the publication of the national reviews, the need to clarify the respective roles and responsibilities between utility companies and local responders in relation to welfare support and response and when this should happen;
  - (k) the need for NPg to engage more effectively in multi-agency response, to ensure that data and information is shared to improve joint understanding of impacts and that the company contributes to shared multi-agency solutions and responses;
  - (l) the need to improve awareness and understanding of emergency planning and response and procedures amongst elected Members and the much larger cohort of officers and staff who may be required to respond to major and long-duration incidents.
- 17 Based on the de-briefs and feedback received, an improvement action plan has been developed, with improvement actions suggested against the following themes:
- (a) Review and expand the community resilience offering across the county;
  - (b) Improve incident planning and preparedness through emergency planning, training and exercising processes including the role of Members;
  - (c) Review emergency response resources and establish qualifying criteria for future incidents;
  - (d) Review of communication and information sharing during incident response following the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP);
  - (e) Develop a protocol for the activation and use of council staff during an incident;
  - (f) Review strategic, tactical and operational decision making and governance.

## **Recommendations**

- 18 Cabinet is recommended to:
- (a) note the contents of the report and the feedback from the different elements of the review outlined in Appendices 4 to 8;
  - (b) note the comments from the Stronger and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20 May 2022 outlined in paragraphs 128 to 131;

- (c) approve the improvement plan outlined in Appendix 9;
- (d) within this, agree to support the expansion of community resilience support across the county and the provision of improved training for elected Members and officers on emergency planning;
- (e) agree to share the report with NPg and the LRF to inform their own reviews and multi-agency planning.

## **Background**

- 19 Storm Arwen hit the north of the United Kingdom on the afternoon of Friday 26 November 2021 and that night caused extensive damage across northern England. The storm was followed immediately by a period of cold weather with freezing temperatures and snow in the high Pennine areas and then by a second, though less severe storm (Storm Barra) five days later.

## **Impacts**

- 20 Thousands of trees fell across the north of the UK during Arwen, causing major disruption. More than one million homes lost power as falling trees and poles brought down power lines, with over 100,000 homes experiencing several days without power. The network damage and power outages put strain on the utility companies and NPg in particular. The strong winds also caused structural damage to buildings and transport was disrupted with rail services cancelled, roads blocked by fallen trees and overturned vehicles and snow accumulations across the Pennines.
- 21 In County Durham, the electricity distribution network proved to be particularly susceptible to storm damage. Over 14,890 utility customers were affected by a loss of power. The outages affected all parts of the county and many residents were without power for several days before power was restored to all properties on Thursday 9 December.

## **Emergency planning and civil contingency arrangements**

- 22 Under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, various agencies including the emergency services, utilities and local authorities are under a duty to cooperate and are required to maintain plans to prevent emergencies and reduce, control and mitigate their effects.
- 23 Agencies are required to work together through a local resilience forum (LRF); our area is served by the County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum.
- 24 The LRF assesses risks and develops plans, policies and procedures to prevent and mitigate identified risks. When emergency incidents occur, the LRF works through its Multi-Agency Incident Procedures and if necessary, stands-up an operational structure of strategic and tactical coordinating groups and supporting sub-groups or 'cells' to manage response and recovery works.
- 25 As an organisation in its own right, the council has a corporate emergency plan which sets out our own arrangements for responding to emergency incidents, including how we engage and work with other agencies through the LRF; and how we escalate our response and

mobilise more resources beyond our normal out of hours 'on-call' arrangements, if an incident requires it.

## **Response**

- 26 Appendix 2 provides a timeline of the LRF response to the storm and Appendix 3 provides an infographic of impacts and response/recovery interventions.
- 27 The initial impacts of the storm were felt overnight on 26 and 27 November 2021.
- 28 Emergency and council services responded to calls overnight and commenced clean-up operations as soon as it was safe to do so the following day.
- 29 County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum (LRF) implemented its multi-agency incident procedures on the morning of Saturday 27 November 2021 to coordinate response to storm damage incidents and calls into the emergency services. The council, in partnership with the police and fire services, responded to fallen trees and debris affecting the highways network, damaged and dangerous structures and snow drifts on the A66. Services also responded to requests for help from residential care homes affected by power outages.
- 30 Alongside the local emergency service response, NPg immediately commenced operations to assess and repair damage to the power distribution network, in order to restore power to its customers as quickly as possible.
- 31 On Saturday 27 November, the council's response was coordinated internally via our normal out of hours emergency response procedures, with various on-call officers working together across services to coordinate the response. However, with large numbers of communities still without power on Sunday 28 November, the council escalated its response in line with the corporate emergency plan, by standing-up a senior officer coordinating group and calling up more staff to assist.
- 32 Initially we were advised by NPg that most properties should have been reconnected by midnight on Saturday 27 November and then by Sunday 28 November. However, as NPg engineers began to survey more sites, they identified that the damage to the network was far more extensive than initially thought and by the beginning of the following week it was clear that it would take days to get many customers onto temporary generated power, and potentially weeks to rebuild and repair parts of the power distribution network.



- 33 Given concerns about the duration of the power outages and uncertainty about when power would be restored, on Tuesday 30 November, the council requested that the LRF establish strategic and tactical coordination groups (SCG and TCG). The SCG, chaired by the council chief executive and the TCG, chaired by our Head of Community Protection commenced work on Tuesday 30 November, with the initial priorities being to develop a common understanding of the severity and likely duration of the situation and to put in place a response structure. This initial work led to the declaration of a major incident on Wednesday 1 December (County Durham was one of four major incidents declared in response to the storm – Cumbria on 26 November; North East Scotland on 29 November and Northumberland on 3 December).
- 34 The council submitted a request for Military Assistance to Civil Authorities (MACA) which was approved by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) on Thursday 2 December. From the morning of Friday 3 December, 100 plus troops from the Royal Lancers operated from two bases in the county (first St John's Chapel and then County Hall) to help with checks on isolated residents, vulnerable people and to distribute food and support packages.
- 35 The military deployment augmented the work which had been on-going throughout the week by the voluntary and community sector, local residents, the council, the area action partnerships, County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service, Durham Constabulary, NHS trusts, the North East Ambulance Service, utility companies, housing providers, local elected Members, town and parish councils and faith groups.
- 36 The agencies worked together with local communities to contact and visit vulnerable people, and to provide affected residents with help and support ranging from welfare centres, hot meals, food, stoves, heaters and support supplies and where required, arranging alternative temporary accommodation. The council also assisted with welfare and hardship payments while people waited for compensation claims to be processed.
- 37 In total, over 5,000 visits were made to check on vulnerable residents. This was in addition to checks made on people in receipt of social care packages via commissioned services and the council's in-house social care teams. Three hundred and thirty care packs containing heaters, stoves, torches, batteries and other emergency items were issued where they were required. The council commissioned 41 visits by mobile catering units to 11 different localities across the county between

1 and 8 December and helped place 14 households in emergency alternative accommodation.

- 38 While the agencies were still responding to the incident, the LRF started planning for recovery and established a recovery coordination group, chaired by our Head of Environment to coordinate short term clean-up and repair works and longer actions to improve resilience. While a great deal of clear-up work was undertaken immediately after the storm, Members may wish to note that the scale of storm damage was such that this work is still ongoing.
- 39 As with previous incidents and the response to Covid-19, community, voluntary and faith groups across the county were outstanding in rallying-round and providing rapid and spontaneous support, which ranged from checking on isolated people, providing food and supplies, to opening-up community centres, halls and churches to provide places for shelter, company and warmth. Given the duration and widespread nature of the outages, community, voluntary and faith groups responses were invaluable in helping people affected by the storm.

### **De-briefs and reviews**

- 40 A number of de-briefs and reviews have been undertaken into the response to the storm, which are outlined below.

### **Storm Arwen electricity distribution disruption reviews**

- 41 On 9 December 2021, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, launched a review by the Energy Emergencies Executive Committee (E3C) of the electricity industry response to Storm Arwen, across three pillars: system resilience; consumer protection; and additional response support.
- 42 The interim report of the review published on 17 February 2022 concluded that:

*‘The primary causes of damage were from flying debris, falling trees, and strong winds snapping poles and bringing down overhead lines which were also affected by ice build-up. The challenges presented by the prevailing conditions impeded the response by some Network operators and their ability to provide timely and accurate estimated times for restoration to customers, who struggled to communicate with their Distribution Network Operator (DNO) as customer contact systems were overwhelmed.*

*The majority of faults occurred on lower voltage overhead lines individually serving only a small number of customers, making the restoration effort resource intensive. Mobile generators proved a critical part of the solution to reducing the length of power cuts and getting*

*some customers back on supply before full repairs could be completed, although they are resource intensive to install and refuel at scale.*

*Customers found themselves not only without power but also in some cases without water and communications as other essential services lacked full resilience to power loss of this scale.*

*The Distribution Network Operators were supported in their efforts to restore power by industry-wide mutual aid agreements, resulting in engineers surging to areas most in need. Additional support for the wider storm response was co-ordinated and prioritised by local Strategic Coordinating Groups, who called on Military Aid when their own local resources were overwhelmed.'*

43 In relation to additional response support and local response, the review reported two key findings:

- *'The level and format of information required from Network Operators by Local Resilience Forums and Partnerships to aid the coordination of the welfare response proved challenging for some to provide in a timely manner, reducing the effectiveness of the local response. Agreements between each Local Resilience Forum and Partnership and relevant Network Operator on the information needed, and timescales in which these can be provided should be sought in advance and factored into system planning.*
- *Early evidence suggests that there was a lack of shared understanding in some areas between Network Operators and local partners of roles and responsibilities during severe weather events involving major electricity disruption. Regular engagement during BAU times mitigated this to some extent, but a broader discussion is required to promote a clear and common understanding of response and welfare support resources and responsibilities during major disruptive events.'*

44 The [final report](#) was published on 9 June 2022 and included a range of actions to improve the resilience of electricity networks for future extreme weather events.

45 In relation to system resilience, the report concluded that:

*'Storm Arwen resulted in electricity disruption which went well beyond the expectations of both Government and society. Current resilience standards are solely defined as measures to be implemented rather than specific consumer outcomes. A principles-based outcomes-focused resilience standard would allow operators to plan and invest accordingly while setting Government and public expectations of the service they fund.'*

46 In relation to consumer protection and specifically welfare provision the report stated:

*'Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) are responsible for local support to customers following incidents such as Storm Arwen. Under the Civil Contingencies Act (2004), DNOs are required to liaise with Local Authorities, Strategic Coordinating Groups, and third parties (such as the British Red Cross), to share information about vulnerable customers.'*

*'Following Storm Arwen, in some areas, the coordination of welfare support was challenging between local responders due to a lack of situational awareness and understanding of roles and responsibilities. Welfare provision was also hindered by obstacles in information sharing between DNOs and Strategic Coordinating Groups. ... In addition, there are no principles or agreements setting out whether the DNOs or LRFs are responsible for the cost of certain types of support for customers. The agreement and implementation of best practice documentation would provide clarity on who is responsible for the provision and payment of welfare.'*

47 In relation to additional support, the report observed:

*'There was a disconnect between the information required by local resilience partners and the information provided by the DNOs. This led to challenges for decision making within the local response, impacting on targeting additional welfare support to those most in need and on timely response escalation. While there was broad agreement on the need and responsibility to share information, the challenges and requirements need to be better understood on all sides.'*

*'Due in part to the difficulties in receiving the necessary level of information and accurate risk assessment from Northern Powergrid, Major Incidents were not declared in the North East when similar impacts in Scotland and the North West had already resulted in escalation.'*

*Local Resilience Forums and Partnerships are in broad agreement that for the future, in the face of uncertain information they should consider standing up Major Incidents early and risk having to stand down again than risk standing up too late. Nevertheless, understanding the nature of uncertainty of restoration and having clearer communication of the risks from DNOs, who frequently face unknown levels of damage, is critical to help support timely decision making by these groups. Northern Powergrid has assigned executive oversight of engagement with their Local Resilience Forums to help ensure that messaging about*

*alert levels and risk assessments ahead of anticipated disruption are communicated clearly in future events.'*

48 The report included a number of actions for improvement, which have a bearing on the council's review:

<b>Code</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Delivery Date</b>
W1	DNOs, in consultation with resilience partners, to develop principles-based industry guidance on best practice in the provision of welfare support.	DNOs	30 September 2022
W2	DNOs to work with Local Resilience partners to agree clear roles and responsibilities during severe weather events and incorporate them into DNOs' Emergency Plans.	DNOs	30 September 2022
L4	DNOs to work with Local Resilience partners to develop an agreed Joint Winter Preparedness strategy that can include an appropriate mix of exercising, workshops, scenario planning and information sharing. LRF/P chairs to provide assurance specific learning objectives have been embedded before winter 2022.	E3C – Electricity Task Group	30 September 2022
L5	DNOs to review the information they share with resilience partners and ensure that a strategy exists for communicating uncertainty in a way that supports decision making about escalation of local response coordination.	DNOs	30 September 2022
L6	Northern Powergrid to reach mutual agreement with their local resilience partners on information expectations and communication strategies to ensure timely and sufficiently detailed information is		30 September 2022

	shared regularly to support local decision making.		
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49 On 9 June 2022 Ofgem also published its [Final report on the review of the Networks' response to Storm Arwen](#).

50 The review was distinct, but complementary to the review commissioned by the Secretary of State for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and focused on matters of compliance with statutory and licence obligations; whether companies fell short of their customers' expectations and wider regulatory considerations.

51 The review concluded that:

*'Whilst front-line staff of the network companies worked hard in challenging circumstances, we found that in many cases consumers were badly let down. We heard distressing stories of customers feeling abandoned and deserted, of not knowing when their supplies would be restored, or what support was available to them. We found that these shortfalls were rooted in the DNOs' customer services and systems. We also think that some network companies were slow to compensate their customers for the disruption they endured after the event. In recognition of these issues, three DNOs have individually reached agreement to pay, via alternative action, an additional £10.28 million for consumers, over and above the £29.64 million they have already paid through mandatory and voluntary compensation payments.'*

52 The report included 20 recommendations, the following of which are of note and impact on the council's own considerations.

No.	Recommendation	Owner	Due
5	DNOs should submit winter preparedness plans for 2022/23 to Ofgem by 30 September 2022. Ofgem will confirm the scope of this report by 30 August 2022 and set out how DNO winter preparedness plans fit within the RIIO-ED2 framework in its Final Determinations publication by 31 December 2022.	DNOs	30 September 2022
8	E3C should identify options to enhance the use of mobile generators in reducing the length of power disruptions.	E3C	1 August 2022

14	DNOs, in consultation with local resilience partners, should develop principles-based industry guidance on best practice in the provision of welfare support.	DNOs	30 September 2022
15	DNOs should work with local resilience partners to agree clear roles and responsibilities during severe weather events.	DNOs	30 September 2022
16	Where DNOs are providing discretionary support (e.g. accommodation, hot meals), they should make clear to customers what support is available and how they can access it. DNOs should outline how this is being achieved in their winter preparedness reporting to BEIS and Ofgem.	DNOs	30 September 2022

### **Northern Powergrid stakeholder review**

- 53 NPg has commissioned a stakeholder review of its response to the storm and improvements it needs to make. This has included meetings with LRFs, MPs and inviting comments from elected Members.
- 54 On 9 June 2022, NPg issued a statement in response to the two national reports on the storm. It said that on top of its current 2015-23 investment programme, it has proposed increased investment in its overhead lines of around 60 percent, along with over £50 million on tree cutting over the next five years.
- 55 In addition, the company has agreed with Ofgem that it will fund charitable and not-for-profit activities that improve the resilience of communities, donating over £7.5 million in its region and working with community partners to identify the best ways to create a positive and enduring impact. When added to the compensation and direct support already provided to customers affected by the storm, NPg said that the total will exceed £20 million.
- 56 The council and the LRF are in discussion with NPg to understand how it intends to make this donation and how it can benefit our area.

### **County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum Storm Arwen Multi-agency Structured Debrief**

- 57 A multi-agency de-brief was commissioned by the chair of the County Durham and Darlington LRF. Partner agencies were asked to

undertake their own internal de-briefs in advance of a structured multi-agency de-brief which was held on 3 February 2022 and facilitated by officers from Cleveland LRF. Senior officers from each organisation on the LRF strategic coordination group (SCG) were also surveyed to inform the de-brief.

58 Appendix 4 sets out the key areas of learning and recommendations for improvement from the de-brief, which are as follows:

- (a) Review and refining of the LRF's major incident procedures and severe weather protocol.
- (b) Ensuring awareness of plans and protocols extends beyond agencies' immediate LRF representatives.
- (c) Effective obtaining, maintaining and confirmation of multi-agency shared situational awareness.
- (d) Effective data sharing between Category 2 (utility companies) and Category 1 (emergency services and local authority) agencies.
- (e) Effectiveness of the LRF multi-agency response once the severity of the incident was realised.
- (f) Ensuring that NPg continues to be effectively engaged to improve shared situational awareness, understanding of risk and shared solutions/responses.
- (g) Recognition of the work of NPg engineers to restore power supply as quickly as possible.
- (h) Recognition of the role played by local community and voluntary organisations in opening up welfare centres and supporting vulnerable people and the incorporation of Area Action Partnerships into the multi-agency response.
- (i) Ensuring that there are clearly understood channels for briefing politicians/media.
- (j) Review of likely resource needs, including the means to increase resource where needs cannot be met locally.
- (k) Following publication of the national reviews, consideration and clarification of the respective roles and responsibilities between utility companies and local responders in relation to the provision of welfare support and emergency equipment and supplies (e.g. support for welfare hubs, generators, supplies, food etc.).



59 The Tactical Business Group of the LRF and wider partners have been asked to consider the recommendations.

### **Durham County Council de-briefs and review**

60 In line with our corporate emergency plan procedures, the council undertook its own internal officer de-brief into the storm and its response. Responding officers and local area action partnership coordinators were surveyed to identify what went well, what did not go well and recommendations for improvement.

61 In addition, Cabinet Members asked that the de-brief be extended to include elected Members, local community groups and the general public so that the wider community had an opportunity to share their experiences and inform responses to future incidents.

62 Cabinet Members also asked that an element of independent challenge and peer review was built into the review to increase objectivity, robustness and critical self-reflection.

63 Officers consequently engaged with The Institute for Hazards, Risk and Resilience at Durham University and the emergency management team at Cornwall Council for external challenge on the proposed review methodology and independent peer review of the action plan and this report.

64 We want to put on record our appreciation to Durham University and Cornwall Council for their willingness to support the council's review and the constructive and informed challenge they provided.

### ***Officers' de-briefs***

65 Officers were surveyed in December and January after the storm and in advance of the LRF de-brief.

66 On-call officers involved in the initial response were consulted, alongside those called-up when the council escalated its response and then expanded its operations as part of the wider LRF multi-agency effort.

67 In addition, the local area action partnership coordinators were also surveyed given the role they played in providing local on-the-ground intelligence and helping to support local community efforts.

68 Officers were asked to identify what went well; what did not go well and to recommend future improvements.

69 In total, 29 officers contributed to the de-brief, the conclusions of which are summarised in Appendix 5.

### ***Elected Members' de-brief***

- 70 Elected Members were sent an online de-brief form on 23 February 2022, which was open until 18 March 2022.
- 71 As with the officer debrief, Members were asked to identify what went well; what did not go well and to suggest future improvements.
- 72 In total, 11 elected Members contributed to the de-brief including two elected Members who chose to contact the Civil Contingencies Unit to discuss their experiences. The conclusions of the debrief are summarised in Appendix 6.

### ***Local community groups***

- 73 Local community groups and organisations which stepped-up to support local residents were contacted by their local Area Action Partnership coordinator and invited to take part in a telephone survey.
- 74 In total, 31 groups and organisations responded to the survey, the conclusions of which are summarised in Appendix 7.

### ***General public survey***

- 75 Members of the general public were surveyed via an on-line consultation available on the council's website between 21 February and 18 March 2022. The survey was publicised on the website consultation page, via a press release and social media postings.
- 76 The public were asked about their experience of the storm in terms of nature and duration of impact; their experiences of communication with and contact by the responding agencies; what help and support they accessed and their views on any positive aspects of the response and what could be improved upon in relation to future incidents.
- 77 Two hundred and thirty-four responses were received, with the feedback summarised in Appendix 8.

### **Main conclusions and observations**

- 78 A number of common observation and conclusions were made across the various de-briefs and surveys, which are summarised below against the themes of decision-making and guidance; planning, policy and procedures; resources; information and communications; staffing; and partnership working.
- 79 A key contextual point to note is in relation to expectations around responsibilities and response.

- 80 The interim and final reports from the national reviews of utility companies' response to Arwen identified the need to clarify the roles and responsibilities of utility companies and local responders in relation to the provision and costs of welfare support and emergency supplies and equipment. However, it is apparent that many members of the public, local communities and elected representatives who responded to our surveys, expected that when the power outages occurred, the council should have stepped in to provide visible support and that this should have happened much sooner than it did following Storm Arwen.
- 81 The council and the LRF have been promoting the concept of local community preparedness and response for a number of years. This is based on households and local communities being encouraged to plan and prepare for incidents and to organise their own local responses. However, it is clear from some responses to the review that some members of the community including elected Members expected the council 'to be there' as opposed to communities organising their own local responses, which is at the very heart of the concept of local community preparedness and response.
- 82 In addition, responses to the review pointed towards different expectations around timescales and speed of response. For the category of storm and severity of disruption experienced during Storm Arwen, Ofgem's Quality of Service Guaranteed Standards allow network operators up to 48 hours to reconnect customers before customers are entitled to compensation for inconvenience and costs. In consequence, NPg tend to work to this 48-hour timescale before ramping up welfare response. From the survey, it is clear that some members of the community expect more immediate support and action in the event of power outages, particularly so in relation to vulnerable and older people.

## **Key areas that worked well**

### ***Decision making and guidance***

- 83 There were many comments from those providing feedback that once the LRF response structure was established, the strategic direction and leadership of LRF partners and Strategic Coordination Group (SCG) were clear and concise and provided focus for the Tactical Coordination Group (TCG) and the Recovery Coordination Group that followed it. Working groups and cells reporting to the TCG were well run by the chairs and deputy chairs, allowing a clear chain of reporting and information for decision making.
- 84 Within DCC, the leadership and commitment of the chief executive, the Leader of the council and other elected Members and senior managers across the council was noted, with many prioritising the incident

response over other work. Local councillors were seen as a valuable resource in linking with their local communities, providing useful information and intelligence that informed the decision-making process.

- 85 Although many people were critical of how long it took to declare a major incident, it was generally agreed that when the major incident was declared, it improved the effectiveness of efforts of partner organisations to respond to the incident.
- 86 A number of respondents also noted that multi-agency decision-making and response had improved by the time of the subsequent severe weather incidents experienced during Storms Malik, Corrie, Dudley and Eunice. Immediate lessons had been learnt although it needs to be acknowledged that the subsequent storms were not as severe as Storm Arwen.

### ***Planning, policy and procedures***

- 87 Although there was little appetite from multi-agency partners for a teleconference prior to the incident, an internal teleconference within the council was held on Friday 25 November, to discuss potential response. This was well received and seen as valuable preparation by all services that took part in the call.
- 88 Prior to and after the internal teleconference on the Friday, council services ensured that severe weather pre-planning was in place, with a number of response staff from various services being placed on standby to respond. Several responses mentioned the speed of the council's emergency operational response.
- 89 It was widely stated that once the LRF structure was in place, it worked well and required very little adjustment. The allocation of staff to participate in the group was planned, although had not been widely tested. The Operations Cell and the Logistics Cell were highlighted in particular for completing a large number and wide range of tasks quickly.

### ***Resources***

- 90 Response resources were quickly sourced and put in place by the council and partners, with speedy procurement and delivery of items to support the community and staff responding to the incident in various locations. The first items of equipment and supplies were sourced and distributed on Monday 28 November and the procurement of supplies and equipment ramped up rapidly as the scale of the incident was appreciated. The community emergency packs supplied to residents by the council were deployed rapidly to the people who needed them. The

packs were considered to be beneficial and effective and were well received by the recipients.

- 91 The deployment of food trucks and mobile catering units by the council to provide hot meals to residents was praised. They worked well and were well-received in those areas where they were located.
- 92 The use of community facilities to provide support to residents was identified as a positive aspect of the response. The public were able to access those centres that were open for numerous needs, including hot drinks, information and a place to charge mobile devices. This has been commented on as a model of good practice and should be bolstered so that this type of support can be provided to wider areas should it be required in future instances. The community centre in Tow Law was highlighted as a model, as previous investment in photo-voltaic panels and sustainable energy meant that the building was able to remain open and operational during the incident.
- 93 A number of respondents commented that with its financial and management capacity and breadth of resources, the council was able to respond effectively, flexing resources to do so. It was able to resource the response required by council services and also to provide support to community groups.

### ***Information and communication***

- 94 Although there were difficulties and quality issues with the raw data received from NPg, the time, skill and effort of council officers producing the daily data analysis and mapping was well received. This helped to ensure that all agencies had the same picture and could see the impact of the storm and power outages on the whole county.
- 95 Once staff were deployed as 'feet on the ground', they were seen as a valuable asset not only for relaying information, but also helping to gather information which helped to develop a more accurate picture of the situation on the ground. Councillors also played an important role in this, identifying and flagging residences where there were key concerns.
- 96 One of the key links during the incident response was between AAPs and local voluntary and community sector (VCS) contacts who shared important and relevant information which enabled greater support to residents.
- 97 It was recognised that the public access to the frequently asked questions (FAQs) via websites worked well and helped those affected by the incident, as did partnership working managing the media.

## ***Staffing***

- 98 It was noted that some services have a large number of specialised and trained staff to deal with incidents like this, compared with other neighbouring areas/authorities. This helped the council to respond to and initiate recovery planning to the incident.
- 99 Council services scaled-up staffing in response to the incident and worked long hours over a prolonged period. The efforts of staff from within Neighbourhoods and Climate Change, notably Highways and Clean and Green, to clear storm damage from trees and to keep the county highway network open resulted in little other significant physical disruption beyond the weekend of 26-27 November.
- 100 To assist in the response, staff were redeployed at appropriate times to areas that needed assistance. The good will and dedication of all the staff was noted - many of those responding staff were not on-call and stepped up to the task at very short notice.
- 101 The use of a lead co-ordinator directing the operational response on the ground was noted as good practice, as was the establishment of a single base for operations. This should be considered for future incidents, where required. It allowed a coordinated effort by LRF partners, with council services highly visible in some areas, reassuring the community and assisting in recovery.
- 102 The AAPs, along with links formed by their work with councillors, were crucial in the response, liaising with local communities and providing information. There was also clear direction from Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU), who some stated went above and beyond with their work.

## ***Partnership working***

- 103 The AAPs have been praised for their co-ordination efforts in providing and offering support. Their work allowed existing relationships between AAPs, councillors and the local communities to be utilised quickly and with confidence, working effectively to support residents who required support. The use of these local contacts in the areas affected by the storm to assist responding agencies in providing the support was noted as positively impacting the response.
- 104 The inter-agency working, and support provided by LRF partners especially the Fire and Rescue Service, voluntary services and the military was seen as a positive point. This was shown by the work at the multi-agency command centre with LRF partners, military and NPg personnel working together, enabling the teams involved to respond rapidly to changing demands and emerging issues.

- 105 Several respondents commended the NPg engineers who worked to rebuild large sections of network in very challenging circumstances as quickly as possible.
- 106 Many respondents commented upon the community and partner response in the incident. The spontaneous community response was very encouraging with many community halls, church halls, schools etc staffed by volunteers, opening their doors to help. In total 60 voluntary groups and town and parish councils aided the response across the county. The majority of respondents to the debrief stated that the willingness of the community groups to provide support, such as providing hot water, meals, places to charge electronic devices etc. as well as opening their doors beyond normal operating hours was a useful resource and this should be maintained and included within local emergency plans.
- 107 It was noted that the overall resilience of some local communities within the county was very good. This helped to improve the overall effectiveness of the response. In some instances, this was due to long-standing residents and established groups, but in some areas, it was a more recent development - several community mutual aid groups established during the Covid-19 pandemic stood up to support local response to the storm.

## **Areas for improvement**

### ***Decision making and guidance***

- 108 Several respondents expressed concern about how long it took to identify the severity of the situation and possible reluctance to declare a major incident and escalate the response.
- 109 It was reported that NPg had declared an 'internal major incident' on Friday 26 November, but that it was not until Tuesday 30 November that this information was shared with LRF partners. Once shared, a call was made on the Tuesday for a full LRF Strategic Coordination Group (SCG) to be established supported by a Tactical Coordination Group (TCG). The SCG and TCG then spent 24 hours trying to develop an accurate picture of the scale and likely duration of the incident ('situational awareness'), before declaring a major incident on Wednesday 1 December.
- 110 The information responding agencies had been presented with in the first 48 hours of the incident, did not suggest that the impact of the storm was a great as it would turn out to be.
- 111 Key decisions including whether the incident warranted declaration as a major incident were based on information provided by NPg. The

information was found not to be entirely reliable, and some respondents commented that at times it felt as if NPg did not wish to share critical information with the LRF and that NPg representatives attending SCG and TCG meetings were often unable or unwilling to make decisions that might have financial or liability impacts on NPg as an organisation.

- 112 Many respondents also stated that as well as not being entirely transparent and open in the early days of the incident, NPg were also too slow to respond and that this affected the speed of the multi-agency response. Although many respondents focused on NPg, many also commented that the overall multi-agency response to incidents such as Storm Arwen, needs to be quicker overall and that all organisations were too slow to respond to the storm.
- 113 The slow response was in part due to the preparation stages for the incident. There was little interest in a multi-agency teleconference between LRF partners prior to the storm, with the only discussion regarding preparations and preparedness taking place between the council and the Fire and Rescue Service, both of which had asked other partners whether there should be a multi-agency precautionary call on Thursday 25 and Friday 26 November.
- 114 It was felt by some that there was a lack of effective command and control during the first few days of incident response, manifest in confusion over who was overseeing the overall response. It was not clear whether NPg was leading the efforts or another agency.
- 115 NPg established a control centre in St John's Chapel, as the focal point of the response. However, large parts of the wider county had also been affected by the storm and required support. The effectiveness of the countywide response was hampered by the decision to establish the control centre in the far west of the county. The situation improved when the control centre was moved to County Hall on Sunday 5 December to provide a more centrally located control centre and operational base.

### ***Planning, policy and procedures***

- 116 Some respondents said they felt that the incident was outside of rehearsed preparedness and that this showed a lack of planning by LRF partners for supporting vulnerable residents over an extended period.
- 117 The LRF Severe Weather Protocol was singled out by some as not being clear enough on what was required to prompt action (activation triggers). Some respondents commented that a 'one size fits all' approach caused local issues and that LRF planning should be informed by a more detailed appreciation of geographical and community issues.



- 118 Some respondents felt that there was a lack of awareness and understanding of some emergency response processes and documentation. Some suggested that emergency response training should become part of mandated training for the Extended Management Team (EMT) on an annual basis.
- 119 It was also felt that training should be extended to all councillors, ensuring that they understand their role within incident response and how they can help to improve the overall response to an incident.

### ***Resources***

- 120 A number of respondents felt that the existing resources for emergency response were not suitable for an incident duration such as Storm Arwen. Resources available were geared towards much shorter duration incidents which are more common in the county. This meant that a number of resources - some quite specialised for this type of incident - had to be sourced from local suppliers for distribution to the public. This presented challenges for the Supplies and Logistics Cell which found that a number of the desired resources, were in short supply and could not be sourced quickly.
- 121 The welfare packs provided by the council were in part a response to the sheer numbers experiencing extended periods without power, but also in part a response to a view that the welfare packs provided by NPg were considered to be inadequate for households deprived of power over an extended period of time.
- 122 A number of community groups noted that early in the response when welfare packs were first distributed, that some NPg packs were short of some items. The AAPs and community groups resorted to checking packs before they were distributed.
- 123 A number of community groups and town and parish councils called for the supply of resources to support and assist community response to be improved, including making community buildings more resilient so that they can support local communities with items such as hot water and/or hot food.

### ***Information and communications***

- 124 Several responses stated that the data received from NPg was poor and caused delays in the response. When the data was received by the council, it required extensive and time-consuming analysis to produce useable data which could assist the response and identify those areas in greatest need of support. Issues reported were: a lack timely and frequent updates impacting the ability to respond; poor quality and inaccurate data including inaccurate power restoration times; data

provided for the region overall which required extensive analysis to produce local data; and not all properties experiencing outages being included in the data. Some respondents also felt NPg was not very transparent with information, holding some back saying it could not be shared. It took some days for lists of property addresses affected by outages to be shared

- 125 NPg provided mixed messages on the initial estimates of both the scale and severity of the outages, which affected situational awareness and appreciation of the severity of the incident.
- 126 Initially, agencies found it difficult to understand the actual needs of communities on the ground, although the picture became clearer as more information was provided on the severity of the incident. In part, this could be due to the nature of the incident itself, with some communities experiencing compromised access to telecommunications such as internet, mobile or landline telephones due to the power cuts. This was a particular issue as an early indicator of concern for agencies is the number of calls for assistance they receive - the low number of calls into agencies on the Sunday was taken as an indicator that there were no exceptional issues or demand.
- 127 Telecommunications issues not only hampered the public reporting concerns and requesting assistance, but they also affected the command post established at St John's Chapel, which experienced problems with broadband speeds and mobile phone reception.
- 128 Various respondents commented on the sharing of information between agencies and a lack of communication between the council, NPg and other organisations, which led to a duplication of effort. This was evident in those areas where door-knocking took place, with some properties being visited more than once by different agencies.
- 129 Information was shared between agencies via the Resilience Direct (RD) emergency planning portal, as is the general practice. It was found that with many more officers involved in the response to the storm compared with other incidents, many officers were not familiar with the system and required support from the CCU and LRF.

### ***Staffing***

- 130 It was identified by several respondents that there were potential capacity issues for Care Connect operating the council's 'out-of-hours' (OOH) service and the Emergency Duty Team (EDT), particularly as the incident became prolonged.
- 131 There were reports that Care Connect was inundated with requests for assistance from those experiencing failures in electrical and telephone

connections. The same was said of the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) taking calls regarding vulnerable persons also being stretched. It was felt that for the volume of calls being received for an extended OOH period, there were too few staff working to cover volume of issues. This has also been stated for other services responding, including the Civil Contingencies Unit.

- 132 Some respondents commented that it felt as if there were limited numbers of council officers visibly on the ground during the first few days of the incident. Organising 'boots on the ground' out of hours presented challenges for council departments, compared with LRF first responder agencies who provide 24-hour response services and have 'recall to duty' contractual arrangements with their staff.

### ***Partnership working***

- 133 At LRF SCG meetings, those officers attending noted that some updates from NPg seemed to be solely focussed on providing information on their own progress and position, as opposed to working with partners to develop solutions, leading to duplication of effort. However, the situation improved over time with NPg changing its representation at meetings during the course of the incident.
- 134 Some officers drew attention to the amount of time taken responding to enquiries and requests from MPs and elected Members which came to them direct rather than through the established communications channels and routes, because at times, this diverted senior officer time away from managing the response. However, at the same time it has to be acknowledged that a number of elected Members who responded to the de-brief flagged the need for a better understanding of emergency planning procedures and expected roles and that this could have been mitigated through better training and/or awareness in advance.
- 135 Although there were some community emergency plans active prior to Storm Arwen and engagement events had taken place to increase these numbers, there is a need for more community emergency planning through community groups and at local parish level. This development should be supported by the council and other LRF partners, alongside improvements in arrangements for resilience resources and facilities.
- 136 Cabinet may wish to note that since the incident, the Civil Contingencies Unit has responded to 31 requests to develop local community resilience plans and has met with 17 groups to progress local planning. Two large briefing sessions with town and parish councils have also been held in conjunction with the County Durham Association of Local Councils.

## **Improvement action plan**

137 Based on the de-briefs and feedback received, an improvement action plan has been developed, with improvement actions suggested against the following themes:

- (a) Review and expand the community resilience offering across the county;
- (b) Improve incident planning and preparedness through emergency planning, training and exercising processes including the role of Members;
- (c) Review emergency response resources and establish qualifying criteria for future incidents;
- (d) Review of communication and information sharing during incident response following the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP);
- (e) Develop a protocol for the activation and use of council staff during an incident;
- (f) Review strategic, tactical and operational decision making and governance.

138 The draft improvement plan is attached at Appendix 9.

## **Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee comments**

139 A special meeting of the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee was held on 20 May 2022 at which Members received a presentation on emergency planning arrangements, the de-brief and review and the draft improvement plan.

140 The Committee agreed to support the proposed improvement plan and associated actions and noted the identified timelines for the improvement plan actions to be delivered.

141 The Committee also recommended to Cabinet that the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives regular monitoring updates on progress against the improvement plan actions.

142 Members provided a number of detailed comments on the proposed action plan, set out in Appendix 10, which have been taken into account in the final improvement plan presented in this report.

## **Conclusion**

- 143 Storm Arwen was one of the most disruptive weather events the county has experienced in recent times. The county, its communities and residents were impacted significantly and for many, the prolonged duration of power outages was unprecedented.
- 144 The spontaneous community response to the storm was outstanding with families, friends and neighbours, local organisations, faith groups and community and voluntary groups stepping forward to help those in need.
- 145 The multi-agency emergency response was also significant, with the council playing a full and active role, using its best endeavours and flexing its resources to support local residents in challenging circumstances, as best it could.
- 146 Alongside other agencies, the council has reviewed its responses to the storm to learn lessons and improve how it can respond to future emergency events. Members of the public, local community organisations, elected Members and council staff have contributed to the review and we are grateful to those people who took part.
- 147 Many respondents to the review noted that the multi-agency response to the four storms which followed Arwen was much improved, indicating that immediate lessons had been learnt from the first brace of storms.
- 148 The council and its partners are keen to further improve how we respond and the review has identified a number of areas that worked well and also a number of areas which need to be improved, which provide the basis for the improvement plan outlined in the report

## **Background papers**

- None

## **Other useful documents**

- None

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 places a duty on local authorities to cooperate with other agencies including the emergency services and utility companies, to assess risk and maintain plans to prevent emergencies and reduce, control and mitigate their effects. Agencies are required to work together through a local resilience forum (LRF).

The Act also requires electricity distribution network operators to liaise with local authorities, Strategic Coordinating Groups (SCGs), and third parties to share information about vulnerable customers and work together to provide welfare support.

The Electricity (Standards of Performance) Regulations 2015 made by the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority under the Electricity Act 1989(b) set out the Quality of Service Guaranteed Standards which electricity distribution network operators are required to provide to customers.

### **Finance**

The proposed council community resilience and response support fund can be funded from civil contingency earmarked reserves in 2022/23 and considered as a potential growth item in future budget rounds and the medium term financial plan.

### **Consultation**

Members of the public, local community organisations and town and parish councils and elected Members and officers were consulted in the various debriefs and review as outlined in the report. A session was held with Stronger and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 May 2022 and the Committee's comments were

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

None.

### **Climate Change**

It is predicted that we can expect more severe and volatile weather patterns due to long term climate change which may mean that severe storms become a more frequent occurrence.

## **Human Rights**

None.

## **Crime and Disorder**

None.

## **Staffing**

None.

## **Accommodation**

None.

## **Risk**

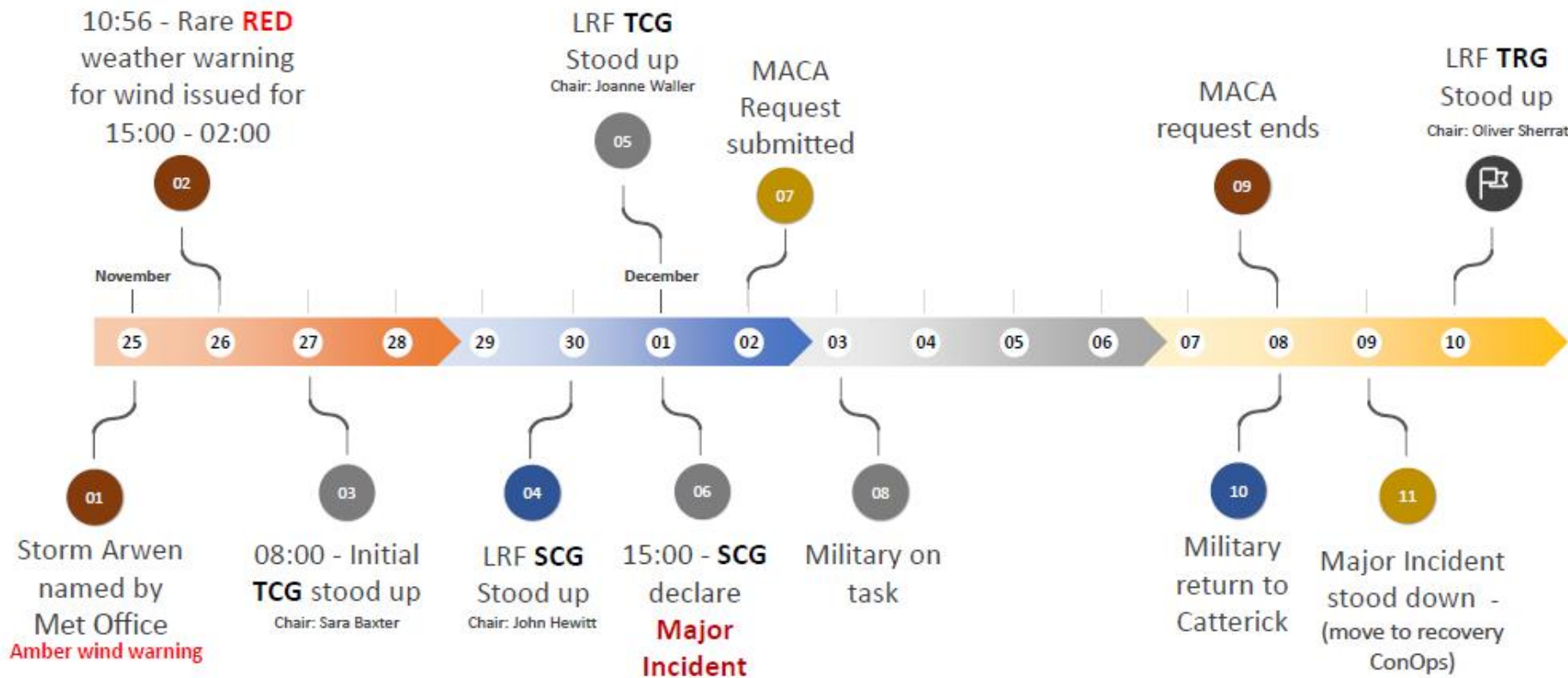
'Breach of duty under Civil Contingencies Act by failing to prepare for, respond to and recover from a major incident, leading to a civil emergency' is included as a risk within the council's corporate risk register. An update on controls and planned improvements in relation to this risk, post- Storm Arwen was provided to the meeting of Audit Committee on 28 February 2022 as part of the quarter three Strategic Risk Management Progress Report.

## **Procurement**

None.

## Appendix 2: Response timeline

### CDDLRF Storm Arwen response timeline...





## Appendix 3: Storm Arwen impacts and response/recovery interventions

 <p><b>14,891</b> Properties lost power</p>	 <p><b>51</b> Generators supplying power to 28 postcodes</p>	 <p><b>over 330</b> Care packs issued</p>
 <p><b>120</b> DCC buildings damaged</p>	 <p><b>over 5,000</b> Visits by Military, Wardens and CDDFRS</p>	 <p><b>over 2,000</b> Additional tonnes sidwaste collected</p>
 <p><b>400</b> Fallen/At risk highway trees</p>	 <p><b>385</b> Fallen/At risk non-highway trees</p>	 <p><b>22</b> Street lights non operational</p>
 <p><b>45</b> Customer contacts for Welfare received</p>	 <p><b>100</b> Gullies/drains require attention</p>	 <p><b>41</b> Mobile Catering units deployed</p>
 <p><b>14</b> Households offered temporary accommodation</p>		

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## Appendix 4: County Durham and Darlington LRF multi-agency be-brief key elements

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*The report outlines the findings from a multi-agency structured debrief held on 3 February 2022 following CDDLRF members' response to Storm Arwen. The report proposes a number of recommendations for consideration by the Tactical Business Group of the LRF and wider partners.*

*The recommendations are based on areas identified for improvement and areas that highlighted good practice and effective working that need to be incorporated for the future; the learning is applicable not just to this LRF. A number of the recommendations are taken from internal debriefs presented by partners during the process.*

*The key elements identified:*

- 1. The review and refining of the major incident procedures (MAIP) and severe weather protocol, to include the adoption of key principles, a greater focus on anticipation of events, hard triggers for activation, use of SPOCs and co-chairs and promotion of the principle of including all partners wherever appropriate/possible.*
- 2. Ensuring awareness of plans and protocols extends beyond agencies' immediate LRF representatives and includes those who may have to utilise or activate them out of normal hours.*
- 3. Consideration given to the means of effectively obtaining and maintaining multi-agency shared situational awareness, ensuring that this is confirmed by ground truth from multiple sources rather than proxy indicators/assumption.*
- 4. Ensuring that the learning and development of effective data sharing between Cat 2 and Cat 1 agencies continues, and that lessons/emerging practice is shared beyond the LRF area (with a view to aiding regional and national practice). Considerations include data provision, format, collation across agencies, impacts of GDPR on sharing and access to the priority register.*
- 5. The effectiveness of the LRF multi-agency response once the severity of the incident was realised including strategic and tactical coordination, the establishment of local tactical cells and rapid procurement and supply of equipment, support packs and food.*

6. *The importance of ensuring that Northern Powergrid continues to be effectively engaged with both strategic and tactical coordinating groups to improve shared situational awareness, understanding of risk and shared solutions/responses.*
7. *Recognition of the work of Northern Powergrid engineers to restore power supply as quickly as possible in extremely challenging circumstances.*
8. *The recognition of the role played by local community and voluntary organisations in opening up welfare centres and supporting vulnerable people and the incorporation of Area Action Partnerships into the multi-agency response as a crucial source of community intelligence, communication and engagement.*
9. *Ensuring that there are clearly understood channels, appropriate resources and clear responsibilities for briefing politicians/media at all scales (e.g. Parish council to National), providing a buffer from operations.*
10. *Review of likely resource needs (e.g. those provided to communities, cooked food, blankets, torches etc) of a reasonable worst case scenario versus the actual material readily available. Where the needs cannot be met locally ensure that the means are in place to increase resource (e.g. pre-identified suppliers/partners national stockpiles).*
11. *Following publication of the national review, consideration and clarification of the respective roles and responsibilities between utilities companies (Cat 2) and local Cat 1 responders in relation to the provision of welfare support and emergency equipment and supplies (e.g. support for welfare hubs, generators, supplies, food etc.).*

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## Appendix 5: Main conclusion from officers' de-briefs

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### DCC responding officers

- 1 Thirteen responding officers took part in the de-brief.

#### ***Positive Areas***

- 2 Services put in place well-rehearsed pre-planned business as usual (BAU) and on-call out of hours (OOH) with additional support arrangements for weather related emergencies by Highways Services and Clean and Green. The weather warnings were widely distributed internally prior to the emergency.
- 3 Speed of emergency operational response, along with governance in line with CCU plans.
- 4 Some services have a great number of specialised and trained staff to deal with incidents like this in comparison to other neighbouring authorities.
- 5 Development of operational response plan to mobilise and deploy support.
- 6 Strategic direction and leadership of LRF partners/SCG were clear and concise and provided focus for the TCG and Recovery Coordination Group.
- 7 LRF TCG with sub cells was established quickly and regular comms and flow quickly established.
- 8 The leadership of the Chief Executive, the Leader and other senior managers/politicians across the council who dropped everything, focussed solely on this incident.
- 9 Support from Leader/MPs/local councillors.
- 10 The financial support and investment by the Council to address the emergency and ensure food and heating or alternative accommodation was sourced for those in need.
- 11 Early standing up of multi-agency meetings supporting shared situation awareness and joint understanding of risk.

- 12 DCC was able to react to issues with care homes, supported living services and vulnerable people on the day as they were flagged.
- 13 Quick and reactive response from services.
- 14 The data pack produced each day with updates was well received and helped to ensure everyone had the same picture and could see the impact on the whole county.
- 15 There was a good flow of communications to Elected Members, MPs, public and media.
- 16 Public access to frequently asked questions (FAQs) via websites worked well and helped as did Partnership working managing the media.
- 17 Resources were quickly put in place by DCC and partners, with speedy procurement and delivery of items to support the community and staff responding to the incident in various locations.
- 18 The engineering side of NPg work in the face of extreme challenges.
- 19 The community and partner response were immense.
- 20 The inter-agency working and support provided by LRF partners especially Fire and Rescue, voluntary services and Military to support the community.
- 21 The LRF multi-agency structures for SCG/TCG worked well.
- 22 The Military liaison arrangements and MACA support was invaluable and worked extremely well in delivering our response.
- 23 The multi-agency command centre with LRF partners, Military and NPg personnel working together enabled the teams involved to respond readily to changing demands and emerging issues.
- 24 The good will and dedication of staff was again superb, many of these members of staff were not on call however, stepped up to the task at very short notice.
- 25 Clear direction from CCU who really went above and beyond and were a credit to the organisation.

26 As a result of efforts by Neighbourhoods and Climate Change to keep the highway network open, transport across the county was not significantly disrupted.

***Area for Improvement***

27 The incident was outside of rehearsed preparedness and has shown a lack of planning and exercising by LRF partners for supporting vulnerable residents over an extended period.

28 It was difficult to understand the actual needs of the community, this became clearer as information/picture developed.

29 There were numerous reports of enquiries, requests and issues from MPs and elected Members being raised directly with officers rather than through established routes. This may have been mitigated through better training and/or awareness in advance. Responding to direct queries took up a lot of senior officer time which detracted from managing the response.

30 There were limited sitreps available that provided situational awareness and details of response actions to share with partners at TCG.

31 The command post at St John's Chapel experienced issues with telecommunications and broadband reception and could have been avoided with a more central location.

32 NPg representatives attending the Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) were often unable (or unwilling) to make decisions that might have financial or liability impacts on them as an organisation.

33 There was a lack of clarity over what constituted a major incident. NPg declared a major incident several days before communicating this to the LRF/SCG.

34 Some communities without power had no access to internet or telephones.

35 Poor data from NPg caused delays in the response. Issues reported were: a lack of frequent updates impacting the ability to respond; poor quality and inaccuracy of data; data provided was for the region and required extensive analysis to produce local data; and not all properties experiencing outages were recorded in the data.

36 NPg provided mixed messages and initial estimates of both the scale and severity of the outage. It did not accurately reflect the scale of the

incident and potential impacts on communities across the county. Situational awareness was poor.

- 37 It seemed like NPg had a reluctance to call a major incident through the LRF and it should have escalated this much sooner.
- 38 Resilience Direct (RD) was used for the incident response and officers were not familiar with the system and required support from the CCU and LRF.
- 39 The welfare pack provided by NPg was considered inadequate to meet the needs of households without power. Food and support packs were not readily available in DCC stocks; this presented challenges to the Supplies and Logistics Cell.
- 40 Some updates from NPg at SCG were solely focussed on providing information on their own progress and position, as opposed to working with partners to develop solutions leading to duplication of effort. However, this improved through the incident. The NPg approach at the initial meetings appeared to improve when representation changed at subsequent meetings.
- 41 There were multiple reports that Care Connect were inundated with requests for assistance from those experiencing failures in electrical and telephone connections.
- 42 There were limited numbers of Council officers visibly on the ground during the first few days. Organising 'boots on the ground' OOH presented challenges, whilst LRF partners were able to mobilise some staff very quickly.
- 43 The Emergency Duty Team (EDT) was stretched, there were too few staff working to cover the volume of issues. This was the same with many other services including Civil Contingencies.

### ***Recommendations***

- 44 To establish a multi-agency command centre, if appropriate, at an early stage in incident response.
- 45 Elected Member training should be undertaken to raise awareness and advise on our approach to response and recovery arrangements for Major Incidents.
- 46 Emergency Assistance Centre provision should consider providing additional support in emergencies. This should consider strategically

placed equipment across the county and establish supplies of essential equipment to protect health and wellbeing and support response.

- 47 Official LRF TCG and SCG with required cells to be established sooner.
- 48 Additional guidance around declaring a major incident is required.
- 49 The LRF should conduct some more detailed planning and exercises to consider the potential for future incidents around power outages as well as other major incidents.
- 50 DCC should consider additional contingency planning for the loss of utilities and the impact on the community.
- 51 Additional work is required for stronger community resilience preparations, working with communities to establish local arrangements including community plans and resilient community facilities.
- 52 A review of multi-agency protocols and planning is required, including that of communications systems failure.
- 53 An elected Member protocol for communication and the role of local authority Members in an incident is required – to ensure there is consistency and a full awareness of Members/officer's roles.
- 54 Resilience Direct training is required by DCC staff and by multi-agency partner agencies.
- 55 Planning for similar scenarios in future should be considered. Roles and responsibilities should be planned out alongside the activation of staff to fulfil these roles, including out of hours arrangements. A pool of volunteer staff should be recruited to assist in emergency response activities.
- 56 Annual training and exercising should be held within DCC to ensure operational readiness.
- 57 Mandatory training for EMT/on call duty officers on emergency planning procedures, linked to PDRs at strategic leadership levels.

### **Civil Contingencies Unit**

- 58 Five civil contingency officers took part in the de-brief.



### ***Positive areas***

- 59 An internal teleconference was held on the Friday in lieu of an LRF teleconference to discuss potential response. This was well received and seen as a valuable preparation.
- 60 DCC departments put severe weather pre-planning in place with a number of response staff from various response services on standby.
- 61 The Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) and councillors were crucial in the response, liaising with local communities and providing information.
- 62 The community and voluntary groups and organisations were superb. They worked well with the AAPs.
- 63 Spontaneous community response was very encouraging with a number of community halls, church halls, schools etc opened their doors to help out. They were a great asset, with plenty of volunteers to help out.
- 64 DCC information processing (mapping and data analysis) was invaluable.
- 65 DCC departments scaled up in response to the incident and worked long hours during a prolonged response. Notable were Highways and Clean and Green.
- 66 The deployment of mobile catering units worked well and was well received in those areas where they were located.
- 67 The response structure put in place worked well. The Logistics Cell etc were great and covered a lot of ground completing a huge number of wide-ranging tasks quickly.

### ***Areas for improvement***

- 68 Issues with the LRF Severe Weather Protocol and it not being definitive on activation.
- 69 There was little interest in a multi-agency teleconference prior to Storm Arwen, this void was filled with a discussion regarding preparedness between DCC and CDDFRS.
- 70 There were potential capacity issues for Care Connect operating the Out of Hours service and EDT.

- 71 There is a need for increased training and exercising, internally and externally to prepare for incident response. This should include voluntary and community groups, as well as elected Members.
- 72 Communities should be supported further in developing their resilience plans and arrangements.
- 73 Existing resources for emergency response were not suitable for a prolonged incident duration such as Storm Arwen. Resources available were for much shorter incidents.
- 74 NPg were not very transparent with information, holding some back saying it couldn't be shared. Communications from NPg was limited and they did not provide a clear picture of the situation causing delays in the response.
- 75 Data provided by NPg required extensive and time-consuming analysis to obtain valuable data to assist the response and identify those areas in greatest need of support.
- 76 During the response and recovery phases, there was a lack of awareness and understanding of corporate plans including Corporate Emergency Plan and Recovery and Restoration Plan.
- 77 There was a lack understanding and an expectation from politicians that DCC was responsible for supporting individuals and communities, whereas many individuals and communities supported themselves.
- 78 It took until Tuesday for the call to be made that a full SCG should be established. The SCG and TCG stated that lack of situational awareness delayed the declaration of a Major Incident for around 24 hours while information was sourced.
- 79 A DCC internal TCG on the Sunday reported back no exceptional issues being conveyed to DCC. This is potentially due to those areas not having power to make contact.

### ***Recommendations***

- 80 An annual DCC training and exercising schedule for CMT/EMT is required to ensure regular exposure and awareness in relation to emergency response.
- 81 Training and awareness are required with DCC of corporate plans including Corporate Emergency Plan and Recovery and Restoration Plan.

- 82 DCC elected Members should undertake emergency planning awareness training.
- 83 DCC should review the availability of resources to support multiple emergency assistance centres (EACs) for an extended period. This should include managing staff, support staff and communications etc.
- 84 Expansion of the community resilience offer from the CCU and the development of community emergency response plans. These should include the capability of community buildings and local community volunteers acting as community resilience hubs.
- 85 The declaration of a Major Incident should be more forthcoming from all LRF partner organisations for significant and widespread incidents based on the impact on the area.
- 86 Detailed planning is required for the response to widespread power outages from individual LRF partner organisations and from the LRF.
- 87 A DCC wide agreement is required for activating staff for emergency response, especially out of hours with the appropriate compensation for their time.

#### **Area Action Partnership coordinators**

- 88 Eight Area Action Partnership coordinators took part in the de-brief.

#### ***Positive areas***

- 89 The council's robust budget with effective and efficient management, meant that the local authority was able to respond effectively without significant concerns.
- 90 Assisting the resilience of 60 voluntary and community sector (VCS) groups aided the response across the county.
- 91 Councillors played an important role in identifying and flagging residences where there would be key concerns around their resilience.
- 92 The declaration of a Major Incident is considered to have improved the effectiveness of efforts of partner organisations to respond to the incident.
- 93 The overall resilience of some local communities within the authority area is very good, which helped to improve the overall effectiveness of the response.

- 94 Having staff members as “feet on the ground” helped to provide accurate information of the situation.
- 95 Important and relevant information was shared between AAPs and local VCS contacts which enabled greater support to residents.
- 96 Several community mutual aid groups have been established for the Covid pandemic and worked well, providing a clear and accurate picture of the ongoing situation and helped to foster a community spirit.
- 97 Existing relationships between AAPs, Councillors and the local communities were utilised quickly and with confidence, working effectively to support residents.
- 98 The willingness of the community groups to provide support, such as providing hot water, meals, places to charge electronic devices etc. as well as opening their doors beyond normal operating hours was a useful resource to the local authority and this should be maintained.
- 99 A range of different council services came together to form working groups/cells at speed and brought the correct people together to share their skills and knowledge to focus on immediate solutions to issues that had arisen.
- 100 The emergency packs that were delivered to communities by the council were considered to be excellent and were rapidly deployed to the people who needed them.
- 101 The existing partnership with the food van providers has been praised for providing hot food to the areas that needed this support.

### ***Areas for improvement***

- 102 A lack of clarity over specific roles and responsibilities of staff has been identified, relevant AAPs and local networks should be included in briefings on severe weather warnings.
- 103 Lack of effective command and control has been noted, mostly in the form of confusion on who oversaw the overall response, whether this was NPg or another agency.
- 104 The control centre in St John’s Chapel needed improvement, it hampered efforts to effectively co-ordinate action across the rest of the county by focusing on one locality.

- 105 Decisions were being made based on information being provided by NPg, which was not entirely reliable and, in some instances, they did not wish to share critical information. It did not accurately reflect the severity of the situation.
- 106 Issues identifying vulnerable residents as all agencies have separate records. There was a reliance on local partner organisations to provide this information.
- 107 A lack of communication and information sharing between the local authority, NPg and other organisations led to a duplication of effort.
- 108 There were communication issues around mobile phones and, in some locations, connectivity to the internet meaning it was difficult to communicate with some residents.
- 109 Some AAPs had no previous involvement in emergency planning for their areas. Going forward, it would be useful to understand responsibilities but also what is expected in localities.
- 110 Community packs were not delivered to the communities that were expecting to receive them in time and were short of some items.
- 111 There was a lack of understanding of geographical and resilience issues faced by communities, which differs by community, by responding agencies. A one fit approach caused issues in response.

### ***Recommendations***

- 112 Greater resilience is required in community facilities to support residents during an incident, including basic resources, power and communications.
- 113 All relevant partners should hold Major Incident and scenario planning exercises focused on supporting the public.
- 114 Further development of local resilience planning with a long-term aim of a community resilience plan for every community in County Durham.
- 115 A mechanism to access emergency funding quickly to support community response to incidents.
- 116 A review of planning and emergency arrangements by the local authority and other agencies.

- 117 A countywide, centralised vulnerable persons register so that vulnerable residents can be quickly identified and contacted in future incidents.
- 118 Ensure that stocks of emergency packs for residents are available and can be rapidly distributed.

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## Appendix 6: Main conclusions from elected Members' de-brief

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1 Eleven elected Members responded to the de-brief survey.

### ***Positive areas***

2 The redeployment of staff at appropriate times to areas that needed assistance has been noted as a positive aspect of the overall response.

3 The use of a lead co-ordinator directing the response to Storm Arwen is considered good practice, as is the establishment of a HQ as a base.

4 Once aware that it was a major incident, council services were highly visible in some areas, reassuring the community and assisting in recovery.

5 The use of community facilities to provide support to residents is considered to have played a positive role in the response.

6 The deployment of food trucks to provide hot meals to residents during the response is considered to have been of great benefit to residents.

7 The community emergency packs that were supplied to residents by DCC are considered to have benefitted residents greatly and were well received.

8 The AAP have been praised for their co-ordination efforts in providing and offering support.

9 The use of local contacts in the areas affected by the storm to assist in providing the support has been praised as positively impacting the response.

10 Communities came together to help provide each other with support.

### ***Areas for improvement***

11 There is a need for local contingency plans for local Parish Councils.

12 Council emergency response plans should be updated including policies and documents.

13 Suggestions have been made for creating a priority request plan for countywide emergencies, where councillors can report where they have

power outages and other issues, so that an intelligence picture can be built.

- 14 There is a feeling that the overall response to incidents, such as Storm Arwen, needs to be quicker overall and that the response to Arwen was too slow.
- 15 A need for greater involvement of parish and county councillors in the response to incidents to improve the effectiveness of emergency response in future.
- 16 Improvements are required on contact and communication internally and externally with other organisations and with the public.
- 17 Improve the supply of resources to support and assist community response, including the resilience of community buildings so that they can support the local community with items such as hot water and/or hot food.
- 18 Staff reactivity during Storm Arwen has been highlighted as needing improvement in addition to the need to improve the on-call system to ensure staff are available where and when they are needed.
- 19 All councillors should have had proper emergency planning training to help improve the overall response to an incident.
- 20 Better and more timely communication is needed from NPg, both with residents and partner organisations, for example its food trucks and when power will be restored.
- 21 NPg response was too slow and affected other agencies' ability to respond and act quickly. It has also been suggested that there needs to be improvements to NPg's capacity to respond to incidents in future.

### ***Recommendations***

- 22 The time and process to decide on a major incident should be improved.
- 23 Establish local emergency plans for Parish Councils along with an emergency response team at parish council level, with DCC to provide support.
- 24 The support offering being provided by the council needs to improve in future incidents.



- 25 Emergency plans to be updated with lessons learned from Storm Arwen.
- 26 A daily briefing should be provided to councillors on the latest developments during an incident.
- 27 Consider the resilience of community buildings, providing suitable basic equipment and a form of resilience in power supply.
- 28 The emergency packs, including food packs, should be considered for future incidents.
- 29 Emergency planning training should be provided to all councillors.

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## **Appendix 7: Main conclusions from telephone survey of town and parish councils and local community groups/organisations**

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1 Thirty-one local groups and organisations responded to the survey.

### **Specific issues raised**

- 2 Numerous community facilities opened to support their local communities with a range of services such as hot water, hot food, electrical item charging, laundrette facilities and information.
- 3 Assisted Durham County Council (DCC) and Northern Powergrid (NPg) in arranging venues and publicising the availability of the food trucks.
- 4 Community groups provided information updates and lists of support services available to residents through social media, local shops and leaflets for every house.
- 5 Assisted the community to engage with the responding authorities, DCC, NPg, councillors etc. as well as identifying those in need and requiring support. When required, assisted in delivery of support items such as welfare packs.
- 6 The number of volunteers varied greatly depending on the size of the group and area covered. In some areas up to 59 volunteers helped their local community.
- 7 Community support was provided by several local businesses, this was often in the form of workforce but in some instances, it came with the provision of resources and consumables for the local community.
- 8 MPs, parish councillors and county councillors provided support to their local community groups.
- 9 Local support also came from AAP coordinators who volunteered to provide assistance, council employees in their local community, a locally owned charity, staff from local schools and one responding group received support from four youth ambassadors.
- 10 Some community groups provided support to upwards of 293 homes, with numbers varying greatly from area to area. Communications and information were provided to a much larger number of homes.

- 11 The majority of community groups provided support for around three to seven days, the longest was 21 days.
- 12 Information was a challenge for community groups, with many stating that there was a lack of information and clarity being provided by NPg as to when power would be restored.
- 13 There was a lack of understanding of the “big-picture”. This is something that if addressed could assist in future incidents.
- 14 Electronic communication was an issue in some areas where they had no access to landlines, mobiles, or internet.
- 15 Some experienced issues with resources required to support communities. Welfare packs were made available, in some cases requests were never fulfilled and passed on to community groups and generators promised by NPg in some cases never arrived or had mechanical issues.
- 16 Perception of the co-ordination of the response to the storm was poor. This includes dealing with people’s unhappiness about the situation which was taken out on volunteers and councillors. Some said that greater co-ordination is needed locally to support those who need it, and this should be quicker.
- 17 Suitability of facilities used for support was a concern. Some had no power to provide hot meals or drinks, while a concern was raised around safeguarding where a school was used.
- 18 Several community groups had draft community emergency plans, but sections and details were missing that could have been used. Others did not have an emergency plan in place.
- 19 Appropriate PPE and ID to show volunteers supporting the response was not in place. Some residents became suspicious of the motives of those volunteering, with some residents being afraid to open doors.
- 20 Some areas experienced issues with volunteer fatigue due to the length of time they supported the response.
- 21 Information provided by NPg could be improved, with advice on when homes would be reconnected and more timely information around the availability of food trucks in the local area.
- 22 Some communities have suggested that the provision of a generator for their facilities would be of benefit.

- 23 A clear and usable system/database of everyone needing assistance and if they had received help, therefore informing door knocking activities.
- 24 Eventual good support provided by the AAP staff and partnership although this needs to be sooner.
- 25 A provision for funding and resources to be made available, with a clear and quick way to access funds to assist in communities during an emergency. Where not available, a defined process for reimbursement should be in place.
- 26 Greater mental health support to be made available in the aftermath of incidents such as Storm Arwen, especially in areas already experiencing high suicide rates and mental health issues.
- 27 The growth and development of community groups in response to COVID have helped to achieve a greater level of preparedness and assisted with the response to Storm Arwen.
- 28 The local AAP, wardens and elected Members have been praised for their support.
- 29 Some community groups have commented that they felt that the response to Storm Arwen was very good under unusual and difficult circumstances.
- 30 DCC should have made the decision to declare a major incident earlier.

### **Recommendations**

- 31 NPg to be more proactive and timelier in its community support and more accurate information on the location and duration of power outages.
- 32 Improved communication and co-ordination from DCC and partner agencies, including a single point of contact (SPOC) to quickly utilise and mobilise local community intelligence.
- 33 A greater visible presence on the ground from responding agencies.
- 34 Support and guidance for using community facilities who wish to offer assistance in future incidents.
- 35 Pre-deployment of resources such as welfare packs to those area that require them, for more rapid deployment.

- 36 Review of community facilities to ensure they are resilient and able to provide the maximum amount of support possible to the community. Consideration for the use of generators or other resilient power sources.
- 37 To start or continue with the development of community emergency plans in conjunction with DCC.
- 38 Community group training to improve knowledge and skills for incident response; information on the LRF, emergency planning and responders (Category 1 and Category 2).
- 39 Greater access to emergency packs being provided, stored locally to speed up distribution.
- 40 A Community Crisis Financial Fund should be considered to assist with the response to future incidents, as well as greater financial support upfront for more staffing and resources.

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## Appendix 8: Storm Arwen general public survey

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- 1 Two hundred and thirty-four people responded to an online survey available on the council's website between 21 February and 18 March 2022.

### Effects

- 2 Of the 234 respondents, 184 respondents advised they were directly affected by Storm Arwen, while 150 respondents were indirectly affected. One hundred and fifty-seven respondents experienced a power outage, 125 experienced loss of telecommunications, 50 experienced property damage from the storm or falling trees and 21 experienced loss of water supply.
- 3 Respondents were affected by power outages for a range of days from up to one day to over six days, with the two largest groups of respondents experiencing outages for more than six days (46) and five to six days (31), the lowest was up to a day (three responses).

### Attempts to use contact channels

Channel	Didn't try	Tried but didn't get a response	Tried and got through
Northern Powergrid by telephone	36 (28%)	71 (55%)	22 (17%)
Northern Powergrid by email	69 (62%)	31 (28%)	12 (11%)
Northern Powergrid website	36 (31%)	44 (37%)	38 (32%)
Northern Powergrid social media (such as Twitter or Facebook)	66 (64%)	21 (20%)	16 (16%)
Durham County Council by telephone	90 (88%)	9 (9%)	3 (3%)
Durham County Council by email	94 (97%)	3 (3%)	0 (0%)

<b>Channel</b>	<b>Didn't try</b>	<b>Tried but didn't get a response</b>	<b>Tried and got through</b>
Durham County Council website	90 (94%)	3 (3%)	3 (3%)
Durham County Council social media (such as Twitter or Facebook)	93 (93%)	6 (6%)	1 (1%)
Local councillor	90 (87%)	3 (3%)	10 (10%)
Local MP	85 (83%)	4 (4%)	14 (14%)
Ringling 101	90 (87%)	7 (7%)	7 (7%)

### **Satisfaction with contact channels**

<b>Channel</b>	<b>Satisfactory outcome?</b>	
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Northern Powergrid by telephone	4 (18%)	18 (82%)
Northern Powergrid by email	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Northern Powergrid website	3 (100%)	0 (0%)
Northern Powergrid social media (such as Twitter or Facebook)	3 (19%)	13 (81%)
Durham County Council by telephone	2 (67%)	1 (33%)
Durham County Council by email	94 (97%)	3 (3%)
Durham County Council website	90 (94%)	3 (3%)
Durham County Council social media (such as Twitter or Facebook)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
Local councillor	6 (60%)	4 (40%)
Local MP	12 (86%)	2 (14%)

Channel	Satisfactory outcome?	
	Yes	No
Ringling 101	1 (17%)	5 (83%)

### Help and assistance

- 4 Most respondents remained at home (122). Respondents mostly either received contact from NPg (77) or received no contact from any responder agency (68). Of those respondents that did receive contact, the two highest groups received contact from one to three days after outage (41) and three to five days (25).

Assistance	No. (%)
Support from friends, family or neighbours	92 (81%)
Mobile food truck	32 (28%)
Locally organised community support, such as a community centre, church, school, community volunteers or local businesses	21 (18%)
Local drop-in centre for information, advice, food or warmth	8 (7%)
Northern Powergrid customer support hub or vehicle	8 (7%)
Emergency care pack provided by Northern Powergrid	5 (4%)
Emergency boxes provided by the army or the local council, directly or through community centres	5 (4%)

### Specific issues raised

- 5 Decision-making process of DCC and partners needs to be sped up, especially in declaring a major incident, with support needing to be provided more quickly, with praise for decision to request support from the Army, although considered too slow to make that decision.
- 6 Need for improved understanding of geographical differences and challenges by DCC and partners, including isolated properties, issues with damaged/fallen trees and information and support residents may need with this.



- 7 The accuracy, efficiency and effectiveness of communication and co-ordination between DCC and partners needs to be improved.
- 8 Review of staff availability and whether staff required to be more visible during response (door knocking, providing information etc.) as responders criticised for not being visible and too slow to send staff out to assist/repair problems.
- 9 DCC and partners must review communications strategies and telecommunication infrastructure as many residents received no or late communication and inaccurate information, including the support available to them, and were left with no communication facility to contact responders.
- 10 Some residents praised the communication of information they received during Storm Arwen.
- 11 DCC and partners need to review strategies around identification and registration of affected households, including identification and registration of vulnerable households, welfare checks on those impacted as well as ways of providing support to those unable to travel to centralised support hubs and unable to leave home.
- 12 Need to review existing and potential community buildings that can be/are used as centres to provide support to communities and increased desire to create community response plans.
- 13 Resilience of support centres and vulnerable community buildings (care homes etc.) needs to be improved with provision of equipment (generators etc.) and resources to be able to provide support to community.
- 14 Frontline staff and engineers, especially those from NPg, have generally been praised for their efforts during the response, alongside local councillors and MPs.
- 15 The provision of food van support has been praised. Although some respondents requested greater food variety and some complained about inaccessible locations and the use of community venues to provide centralised support; and the provision of care packs and equipment to help with heating, cooking etc., including provision of generators. However, many residents advised they had no access to or received no support.

- 16 Some individuals praised DCC and partners for their response, including closing and clearing of roads, especially from fallen trees and checks on some residents noting the scale and complexity of the incident response.
- 17 Some residents noted that DCC and partners response had improved during the most recent storms, including communications, although they noted the impacts in many areas were less severe. Other residents noted no improvement.
- 18 Some residents noted ongoing power connectivity issues they are still experiencing with sporadic power cuts, citing the need for increased investment in power infrastructure.
- 19 Some residents praised the compensation offered by NPg, while others noted problems with information around compensation, the compensation process, timescale and amount while others have received no compensation.
- 20 Some individuals praised specialist medical equipment suppliers for their efforts to provide urgent medical equipment/supplies to residents during the storms.
- 21 Some residents noted they have already taken their own measures to make themselves more resilient to future incidents. Some feel their concerns were not being taken seriously by DCC and partners with some individuals stating the council area should be divided into smaller units.

## Appendix 9: Improvement action plan

No.	Theme	Suggested actions/considerations	Service Responsible	Date to be Completed
1	<b>Review and expand the community resilience offering across County Durham</b>	(a) Promote the development of new and review existing community resilience plans, as necessary, through town and parish councils and community groups.	CCU, N&CC	31/03/2024
		(b) Provide training and exercising opportunities for town and parish councils and community groups to improve knowledge and skills for emergency response, including information on the LRF, emergency planning and Category 1 and 2 responders.	CCU, N&CC	31/03/2024
		(c) Work with local communities to identify through energy efficiency audits, where community resilience hubs could benefit from being sustainably powered in order to provide emergency support to residents impacted by future incidents.	Partnerships, N&CC	31/03/2025

		(d) Consider the creation of a council community resilience and response support fund to operate alongside other partner/external sources of funding, to support community preparedness and to support those assisting community responses to future incidents.	CCU, N&CC	30/09/2022
		(e) Review public advice and guidance on ways to improve personal and property resilience.	CCU, N&CC	30/09/2022
2	<b>Improve incident planning and preparedness through the emergency planning, training and exercising processes including the role of Members</b>	(a) Review existing emergency plans and arrangements including on-call rotas ensuring they are updated as necessary, with lessons learned from Storm Arwen.	CCU, N&CC	31/10/2022
		(b) Develop procedures and contingency plans for internal use and in partnership with the LRF for the response to similar incidents scenarios (e.g. power outages, communication failures etc.).	CCU, N&CC	31/10/2022
		(c) Develop a surge resourcing plan and identify, recruit and train pools of staff	CCU, N&CC with Public Health,	31/10/2022

		who can be deployed to various support roles in emergency incidents.	AHS and HR, RES	
		(d) Develop an annual training and exercising schedule for senior council managers linked to PDRs, to ensure regular exposure and awareness in relation to emergency response.	CCU, N&CC with HR, RES	31/03/2023
		(e) Develop a training programme on the use of Resilience Direct.	CCU, N&CC	31/03/2023
		(f) CCU to work with LRF partners to exercise the response to major incidents and scenarios, with a focus on supporting the public during a prolonged incident.	CCU, N&CC with LRF	31/10/2022
		(g) Provide emergency planning awareness training to elected Members to improve their understanding and familiarity with emergency response process.	CCU, N&CC with HR, RES	31/10/2022
		(h) Review guidance for elected Members on incident response and distribute.	CCU, N&CC	31/10/2022
3	<b>Review emergency response resources and establish qualifying criteria for future incidents</b>	(a) Review the community welfare pack stocks and develop criteria for their activation, deployment and distribution, including a review of available options for storage and distribution, to ensure	CCU, N&CC with Adults, AHS and Procurement, RES	30/09/2022

		packs are readily available and can be distributed rapidly to those in need.		
		(b) Consider a centralised, countywide vulnerable persons database/register so that vulnerable persons can be identified quickly, contacted and provided with support as necessary.	CCU, N&CC with Research & Intelligence, RES	31/12/2022
		(c) Review the availability of resources that will be required to support an Emergency Assistance Centre for a prolonged period, including managing staff, support staff, communications etc.	CCU, N&CC and HR, RES	30/10/2023
		(d) Work with utility companies and LRF to review the provision of assistance to vulnerable people, welfare support (food vans etc.), emergency equipment including support packs and generators, including the criteria for support and respective organisational responsibilities for provision (note that this needs to be informed by the outcome of the national review).	CCU, N&CC	30/09/2022 to tie in with timescale for national review actions

4	<b>Review of communication and information sharing during incident response following the Joint Emergency Service Interoperability Principles (JESIP).</b>	(a) Review communications strategies to ensure that effective communications can be maintained internally within the council and externally with partner organisations and residents, including the consideration of alternative communication methods if residents with no power and limited battery time on mobile phones are unable to access internet/digital communications.	CCU, N&CC with Communications and Marketing, REG	31/03/2023
		(b) Review the SITREP process for those responding to an incident.	CCU, N&CC	31/08/2022
		(c) Consider the future data requirements of an incident and what resources are required from the council.	CCU, N&CC with Research & Intelligence, RES	31/10/2022
		(d) Review LRF and organisational telecommunications resilience, including the LRF Telecommunications Plan.	Digital Services, RES with LRF	31/03/2023
		(e) Review documentation and training to ensure that the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) are considered and included in incident actions.	CCU, N&CC	30/09/2022

5	<b>Develop a protocol for the activation and use of Council staff in during an incident</b>	(a) Develop a surge out of hours activation protocol.	CCU, N&CC	31/10/2022
		(b) Consider staff roles in an incident and ensure that suitable training and PPE is available (example door knocking and reception centres).	CCU, N&CC with HR, RES	31/10/2022
6	<b>Review strategic, tactical and operational decision making and governance</b>	(a) Review the process for declaring a major incident and update accordingly for widespread incidents and high impact incident.	CCU, N&CC with LRF	31/08/2022
		(b) Consider a Strategic and Tactical Officers rota for chairing incident response groups.	CCU, N&CC	31/10/2022
		(c) Consider the establishment, the criteria and staffing requirement for a multi-agency command centre.	CCU, N&CC with LRF	TBC



Contact:  
Direct Tel:  
email:  
Your ref:  
Our ref:



Mr Alan Patrickson  
Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change  
Durham County Council  
County Hall  
Durham  
DH1 5UE

27 May 2022

Dear Alan

### **Response to the Storm Arwen Improvement Plan**

As Chair of the Council's Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, I would like to thank Kevin Edworthy, Gordon Elliott and yourself for attending the Committee's special meeting on 20 May 2022 to deliver a presentation on civil contingency planning and Storm Arwen review.

The report's recommendation was for the Committee to note information contained within the report and presentation and provide comments on the proposed improvement plan. In line with this recommendation, the following are comments from the Committee in relation to each improvement plan theme:

#### **Theme 1 – Review and expand the community resilience offering across County Durham**

Members acknowledged the incredible response by local residents, community groups and associations and parish and town councils within their areas following Storm Arwen. The Committee note ongoing work to develop local Community Risk Plans, citing examples where this has been undertaken and encourage all parish and town councils to develop a plan within their area. However, Members highlighted

a potential risk with capability for delivery of plans due to limited resources within some parish councils and ensure that both parish and town councils are properly equipped, and appropriate support is provided.

The development of local Community Risk Plans together with a creation of central vulnerable person data base within Theme 3 of this improvement plan may assist with targeting resources and focused deployment of staff, including military support to communities within the county.

The Committee note the national review of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and that a National Resilience Strategy with a vision to make the UK the most resilient nation is anticipated to be published in the summer. Members questioned available resources from the Government to local authorities and in response note grant funding from the Government has been provided for investment in resilience for local communities and following the review of the Civil Contingencies Act, there is planned expansion of core staff within the Local Resilience Forum. This investment is welcomed and I request that an update on this position is included within a future report to the Committee.

## **Theme 2 – Improve incident planning and preparedness through the emergency planning, training and exercising processes**

Elected members have a pivotal role within their local communities if a major incident is declared. Whilst acknowledging unprecedented demand on services over a weekend period, Members commented on the challenges they experienced attempting to contact council and partner agencies via telephone. During this period, Members also provided feedback that they experienced some uncertainty on who to contact and how to signpost residents to obtain advice or information. Within this context, Members welcome the proposal to review on-call rotas and provide elected Members with guidance on incident response and emergency planning awareness training.

Whilst not included as a suggested action within the improvement plan, Members also welcomed the wide-ranging approach to engage with young people in emergency planning awareness through schools, young firefighters association and army, air and police cadets.

## **Theme 3 – Review emergency response resources and establish qualifying criteria for future incidents**

The focus of consideration within this theme was establishment of a centralised vulnerable persons database. Members shared experiences to the potential risks and impact power failure can have to residents who are dependent on electricity for vital medical equipment within their homes. The creation of a proposed centralised county-wide vulnerable persons database is essential for the council and partner

agencies to make contact with vulnerable people and provide the support they require.

Whilst not a specific action, Members commented on the benefits of alternative sources of power and how this had been utilised and beneficial in some community buildings within the county with Tow Law Community Centre cited as an example of good practice.

#### **Theme 4 – Review of communication and information sharing during incident response following JESIP principles**

Members welcome the suggested areas within this theme and commented that clear, concise and timely communications from the council and all agencies was essential to residents, communities and elected members. In considering this theme, Members highlighted this as an important improvement area within the plan and provided feedback to their frustrations and from residents when the estimated time of power restoration was not being met and hours turned into days. In addition, members acknowledged this was an unprecedented storm and demand that would have been placed upon council services, particularly customer services were extremely high.

In considering this area, Members also commented on the need to consider alternative communication methods as residents with no power would have no internet to view websites for information and limited battery time through their mobile phone.

The Committee also noted that an anticipated outcome from the national review of Civil Contingencies Act is for removal of the Category 2 responder and all agencies will be classed as Category 1 responders that includes stronger requirements to agencies to provide information in relation to an incident.

#### **Themes 5 & 6 – ‘Develop a protocol for the activation and use of Council staff during an incident’ and ‘Review Strategic, Tactical and Operational decision making and governance’**

The committee considered these areas together and support the approach to develop a surge out of hours activation protocol and consideration to roles that could be undertaken by staff working from home to provide vital support to an incident.

Following consideration of these areas, in addition to the report’s recommendation and comments to the improvement plan’s themes, the Committee also agreed the following recommendations to:

- (i) Support the proposed improvement plan and associated actions;
- (ii) Note the identified timelines for the improvement plan actions to be delivered, and
- (iii) Recommend to Cabinet that the Safer and Stronger Communities OSC receive regular monitoring updates on progress against the improvement plan actions.

In closing the meeting, Members applauded the efforts of officers and staff from all agencies who worked tirelessly in unprecedented times to support communities within County Durham.

To conclude, I hope you find the above comments constructive and would welcome these being reflected in any future report to Cabinet. If you require any further information, please contact the Committee's Overview and Scrutiny Officer, Jonathan Slee.

Yours sincerely

*Joyce Charlton*

Cllr Joyce Charlton

Chair of the Safer and Stronger Communities

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Cc

Cllr Craig Martin, Chair Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Cllr Chris Lines, Vice Chair Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Cllr Phil Heaviside, Vice Chair Safer and Stronger Communities OSC

Cllr John Shuttleworth, Portfolio Holder for Rural Communities and Highways

Helen Lynch Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Ros Layfield Democratic Services Manager

Stephen Gwilym, Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Gordon Elliott, Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement

Kevin Edworthy, Strategic Manager- Executive Support