

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

**7 September 2023**

**Storm Arwen improvement plan update**



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

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To provide the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on progress with the Storm Arwen improvement plan.

**Executive summary**

- 2 On 20 May 2022, the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report and presentation on civil contingency and emergency planning arrangements and a review of the response to Storm Arwen. The Committee was consulted on the draft Storm Arwen improvement plan and its comments were provided to Cabinet when it considered the plan at its meeting of 13 July 2022.
- 3 As part of its feedback, the Committee asked that a progress report be brought back to the Committee so that it could have oversight of progress with implementation.
- 4 Since the improvement plan was approved by Cabinet on 13 July 2022, significant progress has been made implementing the 27 improvements highlighted in the plan, many of which have required multi-agency working via the County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum (LRF).
- 5 Appendix 2 to the report provides a progress report on implementation. Twenty improvement actions have been completed; six have commenced and are still in progress; and one has yet to start, in the main because it is contingent on other work.

- 6 Local communities and town and parish councils are also playing their part with over 40 communities responding to the council's offer to work with them to develop their own local community resilience plans.

### **Recommendation**

- 7 Members of the Committee are asked to note the contents of the report.

## **Background**

- 8 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.
- 9 Nationally, 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.
- 10 In County Durham, 14,891 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.
- 11 The storm was one of the most disruptive weather events County Durham 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.

## **De-briefs and improvement plan**

- 12 A number of de-briefs and reviews of the response to the storm were commissioned including a national review by the Department for Business, Energy, Innovation and Science (BEIS).
- 13 The council undertook its own review, which was considered by Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 22 May 2022 as part of the consultation on a draft improvement plan, which was subsequently considered and approved by Cabinet on 13 July 2022.
- 14 The plan set out 27 improvement actions against six 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.
  - (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.
- 15 Appendix 2 to the report provides a progress report on implementation. Twenty improvement actions have been completed; six have commenced and are still in progress; and one has yet to start, in the main because it is contingent on other work.

### **Community resilience**

- 16 One of the six improvement themes is community resilience. Members will be pleased to note that local communities and town and parish councils are playing their part with over 40 communities responding to the council's offer to work with them to develop their own local community resilience plans. As of now, 25 communities/groups are at the initial stages of planning; 13 are in the process of developing plans; five have draft plans; and eight have completed plans, five of which have been fully tested and exercised.
- 17 To support local communities, the council has introduced a community resilience and response support fund to operate alongside other funding sources. So far four applications have been received, with three approved.
- 18 We are also working with Durham Community Action to support the management committees of community buildings to plan to act as local community hubs during incidents. We will be delivering a workshop with DCA in November where we will provide management committees with advice and stocks of basic emergency equipment.
- 19 The council has also supported the development of a new funding scheme introduced by Northern Powergrid and managed by the Northern Powergrid Foundation. The council worked with Northern Powergrid to generate applications during the 'soft launch' testing of the scheme at the end of last year. Eighteen groups were supported during the soft launch, being awarded a total of £193,000.

### **Related planning**

- 20 While the county did not experience severe storms and power outages in winter 2022/23, Members may wish to note that some of the reviewed procedures and actions were implemented when the county contended with extreme temperature 'heatwave' events last summer and also when we dealt with minor storms and power outages last winter.

- 21 Members may also wish to note that during the course of 2022 and 2023, there has been national emergency planning around the possibility of widescale power outages and utilities failure. A national emergency planning exercise, called Exercise Mighty Oak was held earlier this year and the council and its partners in the LRF participated.
- 22 National, regional and local planning is ongoing following the exercise and some of the improvement actions identified in our Storm Arwen improvement plan have been included in these wider work programmes.

## **Conclusion**

- 23 Storm Arwen was one of the most disruptive weather events the county has experienced in recent times, with communities and residents affected significantly and many experiencing prolonged and unprecedented power outages.
- 24 Following reviews, the council and its partners identified areas for improvement and significant progress has been made over the course of 2022 to implement the improvements, with some work still ongoing.
- 25 Local communities and town and parish councils are participating in the planning with over 40 communities responding to the council's offer to work with them to develop their own local community resilience plans.

## **Background papers**

- [Cabinet, 13 July 2022, Storm Arwen review – report of Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change](#)

## **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**

None.

### **Consultation**

Stronger and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee was consulted on the draft improvement plan on 20 May 2022.

### **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.

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## **Appendix 2: Storm Arwen improvement plan progress as at 3 August 2023**

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Improvement areas agreed by Cabinet:

1. Review and expand the community resilience offering across the county.
2. Improve incident planning and preparedness through emergency planning, training and exercising processes.
3. Review emergency response resources and establish qualifying criteria for future incidents,
4. Review of communication and information sharing during incident response following the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP).
5. Develop a protocol for the activation and use of council staff during an incident.
6. Review strategic, tactical and operational decision making and governance.



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

<b>No.</b>	<b>Suggested actions/considerations</b>	<b>Service Responsible</b>	<b>Date to be completed</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Notes</b>
1	(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	Completed	Commenced Dec 2021. As at 23/05/23 undertaken meetings with 25 groups and two sessions with CDALC. Five plans have been completed, trained and exercised. Three have been completed and are waiting for training/exercising. 13 areas have draft plans awaiting to be finalised. See below.
	(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	Completed	Two sessions with CDALC attended by 32 town and parish councils.

No.	Suggested actions/considerations	Service Responsible	Date to be completed	Status	Notes
	(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	Completed	The offer of energy efficiency audits has commenced. Northern Powergrid Foundation has funded solar panels and battery installations based on DCC advice; DCA also funding energy efficiency work.
	(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	Completed	Cabinet approval 13/07/22. Grant criteria, eligibility and application forms developed alongside Northern Powergrid Foundation grant scheme. Scheme introduced October 2022. As of 23/05/2023 four applications received; three approved.
	(e) Review public advice and guidance on ways to improve personal and property resilience.	CCU, N&CC	30/09/2022	Completed	Review undertaken and updated advice and guidance published on DCC and LRF websites; public information on preparing for emergencies published in Winter 2022 issue of Durham County News.

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

No.	Suggested actions/considerations	Service Responsible	Date to be Completed	Status	Notes
2	(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	Completed	Corporate Emergency Plan (CEP) reviewed. Revised CEP signed-off by Corporate Management Team 28/09/22.
	(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	Completed	Local planning commenced as part of national emergency planning for national power outages and utilities failure . CDDLRF National Power Outage plan produced March 2023. Electricity industry guidance on working with LRFs received January 2023. NPg published its Local Resilience Partner Guidance August 2023. Clarification sought from Northern Powergrid on reaching local agreement on roles and responsibilities and activation procedures.

No.	Suggested actions/considerations	Service Responsible	Date to be Completed	Status	Notes
	(c) Develop a surge resourcing plan and identify, recruit and train pools of staff who can be deployed to various support roles in emergency incidents.	CCU, N&CC with Public Health, AHS and HR, RES	31/10/2022	Commenced	Surge resourcing plan developed and agreed by Corporate Management Team 08/03/23. Role descriptions in development.
	(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	Commenced	Training prospectus drafted. Dates TBC with HR and uploaded to DLD. Exercising programme to be developed. Multi-agency incident training places on regional training courses requested and booked. Senior council managers involved in training exercises as they arise (Ferris, Lynx, Mighty Oak, Peninsula).
	(e) Develop a training programme on the use of Resilience Direct (RD).	CCU, N&CC	31/03/2023 Revised to 31/12/2023	Not started	Currently, staff are briefed and supported on use of RD as required by CCU prior to exercises or during incidents. A training package to be rolled out from September 2023 to a core group of RD users (main responders and support staff who need to use RD). RD training to be included in training programme for senior managers (see 2d).

No.	Suggested actions/considerations	Service Responsible	Date to be Completed	Status	Notes
	(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	Completed	Exercises Ferris (October 2022), Lynx (March 2023) and Mighty Oak (March 2023).
	(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	Completed	Two training sessions delivered (9 Members attended 3 November and 16 attended on 23 November 2023).
	(h) Review guidance for elected Members on Incident Response and distribute.	CCU, N&CC	31/10/2022	Completed	Guidance included in training sessions slides used on 3 and 23 November 2023.

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

No.	Suggested actions/considerations	Service Responsible	Date to be Completed	Status	Notes
3	(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 packs are readily available and can be distributed rapidly to those in need.	CCU, N&CC with Adults, AHS and Procurement, RES	30/09/2022	Completed	Central store established in council depot. Stocks replenished for winter 2022/23. Procedures for stock management, activation and distribution agreed.
	(b) Consider a centralised, county-wide 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	Commenced	Corporate Strategy service has developed a 'multiple social vulnerabilities' (MSV) dataset linked to Unique Property Reference Numbers (UPRNs) to support targeted help for vulnerable people. Government has funded a pilot in Cumbria on joining-up vulnerable people data across organisations (Project Viper). CDDLRF and DCC discussing how Viper could be extended to CDDLRF area.

No.	Suggested actions/considerations	Service Responsible	Date to be Completed	Status	Notes
	(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	Commenced	Emergency Assistance Centre Management Plan reviewed and updated. Resourcing of rest centres in prolonged incident being addressed through Surge resourcing plan. See action 2c.
	(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	TBC depending on national review	Completed	Drafted principles paper for Northern Powergrid (NPg) to consider August 2022. NPg not prepared to consider until electricity industry guidance published. NPg published its winter preparedness strategy October 2022 which included its approach to welfare provision. Electricity industry guidance issued January 2023. NPg published Local Resilience Partner Guidance August 2023 which sets out its role and responsibilities and approach to welfare response and cooperation with local resilience partners (see Action 2b).

**Theme 4: Review of communication and information sharing during incident response following the JESIP principles.**

No.	Suggested actions/considerations	Service Responsible	Date to be Completed	Status	Notes
4	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	Commenced	Raised with LRF Warning & Informing Group via LRF Storm Arwen Task & Finish Group. Approach to communications in power outage scenario also being addressed through planning following Exercise Mighty Oak.
	(b) Review the SITREP process for those responding to an incident.	CCU, N&CC	31/08/2022	Completed	Situation report (SITREP) processes and templates updated as part of Corporate Emergency Plan (CEP ) review.



No.	Suggested actions/considerations	Service Responsible	Date to be Completed	Status	Notes
	(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	Completed	Agreement reached with NPg on data it will provide in future power outages. Approach worked during minor storms/outages in winter 2022/23.
	(d) Review LRF and organisational telecommunications resilience, including the LRF Telecommunications Plan.	Digital Services, RES with LRF	31/03/2023	Completed	LRF resilient telecommunications guidance reviewed and updated March 2022. Guidance to be reviewed again as part of planning following Exercise Oak.
	(e) Review documentation and training to ensure that the Joint Emergency Services Inter-operability Principles (JESIP) are considered and included in incident actions.	CCU, N&CC	30/09/2022	Commenced	Proposing EMT session based on JESIP LRF training.

**Theme 5: Develop a protocol for the activation and use of Council staff in during an incident**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Suggested actions/considerations</b>	<b>Service Responsible</b>	<b>Date to be Completed</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>5</b>	(a) Develop a surge out of hours activation protocol.	CCU, N&CC	31/10/2022	Completed	Included in surge resourcing plan signed off by CMT 08/03/2023.
	(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	Completed	Addressed in surge resourcing plan signed off by CMT 08/03/2023.

## Theme 6: Review Strategic, Tactical and Operational decision making and governance

No.	Suggested actions/considerations	Service Responsible	Date to be Completed	Status	Notes
6	(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	Completed	Completed July 2022 and tested in subsequent exercises.
	(b) Consider a Strategic and Tactical Officers rota for chairing incident response groups.	CCU, N&CC	31/10/2022	Completed	Considered during review of Corporate Emergency Plan. Current approach is that the Strategic/tactical officer on call would initially chair incident response groups if out of hours. If during office hours, most appropriate Head of Service would chair. Approach retained in most recent review of CEP.
	(c) Consider the establishment, the criteria and staffing requirement for a multi-agency command centre.	CCU, N&CC with LRF	TBC	Completed	Considered during review of Corporate Emergency Plan and Multi-Agency Incident procedures.

## Progress with community resilience plans

Initial meeting(s) held with 25 communities/groups:

- Durham City
- DERIC/Bearpark
- Pelton
- Urpeth
- Ouston
- Pelton Fell
- Bullion Hall, Chester-le-Street
- Cornsay Colliery, Cornsay Village
- Coxhoe and Quarrington Hill
- Newton Aycliffe
- Easington
- Shotton
- Peterlee
- Haswell
- Medomsley
- Healeyfield, Castleside, Moorside
- Stanhope Parish Council (overarching plan for Weardale once local plans are completed)
- Eastgate
- Ireshopeburn
- Wearhead
- Witton-le-Wear
- St John's Chapel

- Bowes
- Middleton/Newbiggin
- Eggleston

Active groups being supported to develop plans:

- West Rainton and Leamside
- Shincliffe
- East Hedleyhope
- Frosterley
- Cowshill
- Startforth
- Lartington
- Trimdon and Thornley Division
- Stanhope
- Wolsingham
- Romaldkirk

- Woodland
- Chester-le-Street

Completed plans ready for training date:

- Ingleton
- Dipton
- Gilesgate

Completed plans, trained and exercised:

- Westgate
- Evenwood and Barony
- Lands Village Hall
- Belmont
- Lanchester