

EMERGENCY PLANNING IN THE UK: THE PLAYERS, THE PARTNERSHIPS AND THE PRESSURES

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This paper is part of a series on “Making communities safer: challenges of creating effective disaster risk reduction partnerships”. The series arose out of a panel on this theme at the World Conference of Humanitarian Studies in Groningen, The Netherlands, 4-7 February 2009 (www.humanitarianstudies2009.org). It includes papers given at the panel and those of others who submitted papers but were unable to attend the conference.

Abstract

There is no doubt that the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) 2004 changed the face of emergency planning in the UK. The CCA gave very detailed emergency planning responsibilities to additional organisations pulling together different sectors and industries in both formal and informal relationships. Emergency planning teams have grown tremendously since its introduction demonstrating local commitment to reducing disaster risks.

Cooperation between agencies and the promotion of business continuity to businesses and community organisations are two of the requirements of the CCA that force government authorities to work more closely with the community as well as each other to plan for disasters. As a result there is now a broader spectrum of players than ever before in UK emergency planning. How are these relationships forged? Do these relationships bring added value to emergency planning?

This paper aims to discuss the interactions between some of the players in UK emergency planning, focusing specifically on local authorities, community organisations and businesses. It will consider the challenges of building effective local partnerships that reduce disaster risks and consider how relationships are working on the ground. Questions will be asked about how different sectors are influencing disaster risk reduction in the UK.

A case study will consider the role of the British Red Cross in London and how it has changed and responded to the heightened climate of emergency preparedness.

Introduction

Disaster risk reduction (DRR) is not a common phrase used in UK emergency planning. However this does not mean it does not occur. Risk reduction was at the forefront of the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) 2004 acknowledging the complexity of emergencies by putting in place a robust system aimed at identifying threats and vulnerabilities, encouraging cooperation between agencies, improving risk communication, and ensuring emergency planning and local business resilience. The CCA has been ambitious yet correct to incorporate these DRR principles into UK legislation but the real test lies in how this translates into ground level working. Partnership working lies at the heart of the CCA; it is the foundation on which nearly all the other duties are based: risk assessment, emergency planning, promotion of business continuity and warning and informing all require a joint effort by a variety of organisations if they are to be effective.

This paper provides the preliminary findings of a longer term study. A full study would consider the relationships between a wider range of authorities and third sector/community groups involved in emergency response; however this paper focuses on selected case studies in the London area.

Players in Emergency Planning

The CCA redefined the key players in emergency planning giving local authorities, various health bodies and the Environment Agency the same Category 1 classification as the emergency services. These Category 1 responders were given the following responsibilities aimed at mitigating risks and improving resilience in their local areas: risk assessment, business continuity management (BCM), emergency planning, maintaining public awareness and arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public, co-operation; and information sharing. Local authorities have an additional duty to provide advice and assistance to the commercial and voluntary sectors. Other organisations were defined as Category 2 responders, including utilities companies, transport companies, Strategic Health Authorities and the Health and Safety Executive. Their role includes to 'cooperate with and share relevant information with other Category 1 and 2 responders' (CCS, 2008). That is a lot of organisations with a duty to work together and cooperate with each other. Not only required to cooperate between themselves,

they also have a duty to consider the services offered by the voluntary sector and utilise their expertise where suitable.

Statutory guidance lists voluntary and community organisations as supporting groups defining them as ‘organisations that work not for profit and carry out work for the purpose of preventing, reducing, controlling or mitigating the effect of emergencies.’ (Cabinet Office, 2005) Within the UK there are only a handful of organisations that feature significantly under this definition including the British Red Cross, WRVS, The Salvation Army, RAYNET, Jewish Emergency Support Service and St John’s Ambulance. They have no responsibilities placed on them directly but are involved in emergency planning and response as a matter of their own organisational values and mission. In addition to these voluntary organisations there are a number of other voluntary groups who may not operate specifically in emergency planning and response, but have skills and services to contribute such as translation services, refugee services and housing .

Despite having no responsibilities under the CCA, the British Red Cross in London is an example of how a third sector organisation has prioritised emergency planning in response to it. In 2004 the Red Cross decided to make emergency response their number one corporate priority nationally in line with the CCA. They have always retained an emergency planning/emergency response capacity; however in making emergency response their corporate priority they aligned themselves more closely with the statutory organisations. As a result of this they streamlined other services and employed full-time paid staff to lead emergency planning whereas previously it was run solely by volunteers.

Cooperation between Organisations

To complement the duty to work together there is a statutory process in place, the Local Resilience Form (LRF), to ensure that Category 1 organisations engage with each other in joint working. Category 1 responders within a LRF area attend the forum along with Category 2 responders and voluntary agency representatives where invited. The idea of a statutory forum perhaps gives the impression of forced joint working which may serve to bring people together as a matter of course rather than to achieve a desired outcome. Whether this is so or not, it cannot be argued that it doesn’t at least encourage joint working.

LRFs have been successful in getting people together, sharing information and ensuring that various organisations who may not otherwise meet interact with each other. A number of local Emergency Planning Officers (EPO) were asked to give feedback on how the LRFs facilitated cooperation. They commented that the structure in place makes cooperation more organised and effective for multi-agency working. On the other hand, they also highlighted that LRFs do not get attendance at the right level of seniority to make them conducive to decision making, therefore limiting what can be achieved there. One EPO remarked that ‘the forums and emergency planning itself does not have as high a profile as some other forums which easily attract more senior representatives.’ It also appears that there can be a reluctance to share information and encourage joint learning, showing that in this type of environment there may be an element of competition between organisations. Due to the infrequency of the meetings (generally quarterly) it can take a long time to achieve decisions and consensus.

The experiences of these officers show that while there are clear benefits to these forums there are issues that limit their effectiveness. It appears that while they get organisations in the same room, unless there is the right level of seniority in attendance, there can be little achieved other than information sharing and networking. This isn’t necessarily a bad thing, but it needs to be recognised and accepted for what it is. Attendance at the LRF is only one aspect of fulfilling cooperation duties. The guidance expects Category 1 responders to work outside the LRF framework (Cabinet Office, 2005 p13) and engage with other organisations in bilateral or multilateral relationships outside of this arena which is essential if they are to engage with local businesses and community groups.

UK Guidance states: ‘Category 1 and 2 responders are obliged to co-operate with other category 1 and 2 responders and other organisations engaged in response in the same local resilience area.’ (Cabinet Office, 2005). Provision is also made for these organisations that do not have duties under the CCA: ‘they can – and should – still be as fully involved as possible.’ (Cabinet Office, 2005). Although there are no responsibilities set for voluntary organisations under the CCA, they are heavily relied upon across the sector where greater recognition is being given to the skills, experience and services they have to offer the statutory groups. In recognition of their role, the Civil Contingencies Secretariat is considering the inclusion of voluntary groups in the

Civil Contingencies Act Enhancement Programme (Civil Contingencies Secretariat, 2008). However, before this occurs do voluntary groups need to adapt to a new way of working?

Most, if not all local authority emergency plans mention that voluntary organisations have a role to play in responding to emergencies within their area. These references vary from a list of contact details to detailed Memoranda of Understanding (MoU). In the past voluntary organisations tended to respond when called upon with no previous arrangement required. They simply responded to a need with whatever capacity they had, resulting in varied response times, capacities and services. While this may have worked in the past when perhaps they were not listed in nearly all emergency plans, one can now question whether this can be an effective way of working. For example, a particular local authority simply had the organisation's name and contact details listed in their emergency plan. There had been no contact with them and no agreed understanding of the response they would provide, simply an expectation that they would be able to provide a service when called upon. This type of arrangement or lack of arrangement must be replaced by effective partnership working otherwise there is misplaced security resulting in an increased risk if expectations are not met.

The British Red Cross (London)

Most of the local authorities in London had these types of informal arrangements in place with the British Red Cross London. They had them referenced in their plans but had little understanding of the services they could provide, their capacities and their response time. When the British Red Cross London decided to align itself further with the emergency planning and response fields it redefined its services and took on a more professional approach.

One of the key parts of these new services was a recently launched campaign to enter into formal agreements with London local authorities replacing the assumed agreements with Memoranda of Understanding. Having these formal agreements in place meant that both parties would have an understanding of the services that would be provided as well as likely response times and capacities, ensuring that the local authority can plan their response and include them appropriately. These relationships validate the role of the Red Cross in emergency planning, enabling it to increase its capacity and emergency response services, and ensures that they have

greater participation in local emergency planning arrangements and exercising. In entering into agreements both parties are outlining the vulnerabilities that their partnership is addressing. In this case it is the temporary displacement of people from their homes, ensuring that they have all their basic needs met during the particular incident.

Partnership working in emergency planning is largely due to the need for it in emergency response. A poor response to an emergency will endanger the lives of both those affected and the responding agencies, it will take longer and there will be little coordination or control. There is little resilience in relying on agencies of any kind to just turn up in a response to a major incident without any previous relationship or understanding of roles, requirements and services to be provided. Partnership working is key to preparedness and no responding organisation should be excluded from this process.

Partnerships with Community and Faith Groups

Faith groups are also being drawn into emergency planning by local authorities and the police as they work to engage with particular faith and ethnic communities. Some local authorities engage with community groups in order to gain advice about how to ensure emergency plans take into account their needs and beliefs. For others it is about understanding what the groups can offer in terms of assisting the local authority to respond to the needs of a diverse community (EPO, 2009). Both Hillingdon and Haringey Councils are looking to set in place a community alert scheme to directly inform local community leaders of incidents and gain information and advice of any issues that may affect particular groups. This is an essential part of Community Cohesion Planning which will be discussed later in this paper.

Working with faith groups in an emergency is also key to addressing particular human aspects of a disaster as faith has a vital role to play in many people's lives and this can be most apparent during these times. Whether at the scene of an incident ministering to those affected and their friends and families, or following an incident at survivor reception centres, faith leaders have a significant part to play in providing emotional support to people when requested. In acknowledgment of this the Major Incident Multi-faith Plan for London was developed by the

London Churches, Metropolitan Police and local authorities to ‘enable faith communities to provide an effective response to any major incident.’ (London Churches et al, 2006)

Following the publication of the London Major Incident Multi-faith Plan, one particular local authority and the local police sought to set up a local multi-faith plan for their borough. The leaders of major faith groups in the borough were invited to be part of this plan which consisted of them joining the response register, undertaking training and participating in the local Multi-faith Forum. The plan was focused around an arrangement to call out faith leaders if they were requested at the scene of an incident, a rest centre or humanitarian assistance centre. It took over 6 months to set up the arrangement due to difficulties in making contact with leaders, arranging meetings and confirming agreements. The responses were varied but in the end the major faith groups were represented and attended training. Once something like this is set up there is an ongoing cycle of training and exercising to be carried out. As the system was dependent on the clergy having police-issued cordon passes, every police officer had to be aware of the scheme in case they were ever presented with one; this posed a significant additional training requirement for all their personnel. While the scheme is successful in achieving improved links with faith groups and getting their services in emergencies, it has not been used live in the two and a half years since it was set up which may raise questions as to whether it was actually addressing a need in the first place or simply fulfilling an obligation for joint working.

With regard to the engagement of community groups, volunteers and voluntary groups, an emergency planning officer comments ‘In theory I would welcome additional participation from the voluntary and community sector. There would be a supply of willing people, with a broad range of expertise and experience. However this could create as many problems as it solves. The vetting and training of volunteers, mobilisation protocols, health and safety, the list of issues is endless.’ (EPO, 2009)

As with all schemes, the benefits have to be weighed up alongside the effort taken to run the scheme to ensure that it is practical and worthwhile to all involved. Partnership working will not be effective in reducing risks if there are no risks or vulnerabilities identified in the first place. It

will not be effective to copy arrangements in different areas unless there is a need for them, otherwise this results in wasted time and little benefit.

Community Cohesion Planning

Risk reduction in a UK urban setting poses many challenges including the high concentration of people in a small area, a diversity of cultures and faiths and a high concentration of businesses. In places where community relations are delicate if not problematic there is a greater risk that incidents that threaten community cohesion such as demonstrations, retaliation and hate crimes on a large scale could be triggered. Though these events are not new in themselves they are relatively new on the emergency planning agenda as they were traditionally dealt with by the police. In the UK we have seen racial and religious tensions spark large incidents that escalate such as Birmingham riots in 2005 (Guardian, 2005) the religious and racial hate crimes that followed the London Bombings in 2005 (IRR, 2005) and the Bradford riots in 2001 (BBC, 2001). These events, though not emergencies in the traditional sense, still ‘threaten serious damage to human welfare or the environment of a place in the UK’ and can still fall under the UK definition of an emergency (Cabinet Office, 2005) and therefore fall under the responsibility of those involved in emergency planning. These incidents are often triggered by other events and it is possible their occurrence can be anticipated by monitoring particular risk indicators such as tensions within the community, events and interactions between rival groups and local, national and international events.

According to the Government Offices for London (GOL, 2007) the police, local authorities, faith groups and minority support groups all need to be part of a planning process that understands how to avoid and respond to these problems that can escalate very quickly and have far reaching impacts. In saying this, these types of events are extremely complex and can have roots and issues based on community relationships with state organisations (Guardian, 2005). Therefore any action taken by the government and state organisations in planning for and monitoring such tensions must be done with the support of community groups and with an understanding of the issues in hand. Community Cohesion Plans are in their early stages but they are closely aligned with general plans of fostering relationships with community groups. In the case of Waltham Forest Council, they took immediate action following the terrorism-related

raids in 2006 where 24 men were arrested, They were quick to react to the incident to manage this risk of civil disturbance, and then took on a proactive approach to strengthen partnerships and tackle extremism. All efforts were coordinated through community engagement and communication. They reported that these actions prevented a difficult situation from escalating into something worse but there are many challenges ahead to deal with the underlying issues. (GOL, 2007)

The Promotion of Business Continuity

‘We want to engage with voluntary organisations, particularly those with a direct role in supporting vulnerable people. We want to encourage them to improve their own resilience and emergency arrangements to improve how vulnerable people are supported during and after an emergency’ (Emergency Planning Officer, January 2009)

Most emergency planning teams in the UK interact with businesses and some voluntary organisations during their activities to promote business continuity. The uptake of Business Continuity by both voluntary organisations and businesses is an important part of improving local resilience. Protecting these organisations means protecting livelihoods, jobs, the local economy, community spirit and critical services. So why is it such a struggle? The experiences of several emergency planning teams show that despite excellent programmes and advertising there is still a reluctance for businesses to respond well to these business continuity promotional activities. Perhaps the question that needs to be asked is whether local authorities are the best placed to get this message out and to encourage businesses to take it seriously.

While statutory responsibility has been put on local authorities to promote Business Continuity significant pressure has not been put on businesses to implement it (apart from particular industries such as FSA (Financial Services Authority) regulated businesses (FSA, 2008)). Because of this lack of responsibility on the side of the businesses and voluntary organisations there is no partnership working as the responsibility is one sided therefore the attempts to promote business continuity can be futile and yield few results.

Businesses and Emergency Planning

Due to the diversity of businesses and their services there is the opportunity for them to become involved in many aspects of emergency planning and response where they have something to contribute. An Emergency Planning Officer (2009) explained how in the event of an incident requiring a 'Rest Centre' in a local town centre, for which the Civic Centre would be used, the council asks local restaurants to participate in a food voucher scheme for people staying at the rest centre. Businesses who agree to take part will accept vouchers given and can then submit them to the council for reimbursement once the rest centre is closed. This allows the council to provide people with a meal, but also takes away the need and trouble of catering facilities, addressing different dietary needs and giving people a greater choice of meal options. The scheme also supports the community by providing trade and revenue for local businesses. Unfortunately the scheme is only affective if the rest centre is set up in the town centre. If the emergency occurs out of the area and another site is chosen for the rest centre that is away from food outlets then this scheme can't be used.

Supermarkets are another example of businesses becoming involved in emergency planning. Tesco and Sainsbury's, both large supermarket chains, are involved in emergency arrangements with some local authorities and voluntary organisations. They have agreements in place to provide emergency access to their stores out of hours to enable local authorities or voluntary agencies to procure food and essential provisions for assistance in an emergency. Even where there is no advanced agreement in place, many businesses will assist in the response to an emergency as was seen at the Potter's Bar Train Crash in 2002 (Guardian, 2002) and the London Bombings in 2005 (Greater London Authority, 2006).

Businesses are often keen to raise their profile or to demonstrate goodwill by contributing funds or equipment to emergency planning efforts. The Marriott Hotel chain approached the British Red Cross requesting to fundraise for them as the chain had been affected by disasters in the past and they wanted to contribute to emergency response in the UK. In response to this the Red Cross was able to work with them to form an agreement where they can use the Marriott Hotel as a rest centre in an emergency and they train key staff in incident response and rest centre management; in return they agreed to raise funds for a new vehicle for the Red Cross.

British Red Cross London and EDF

The Red Cross recently entered into an agreement with EDF, the electricity provider, to assist them in their duty of care to their customers by checking on and supporting vulnerable individuals in the event of a prolonged electricity outage. This involves conducting door to door assessments on affected streets to identify the vulnerable individuals and specific needs including food, water, heating and medical conditions.

The Red Cross are on call 24 hours a day to provide a swift response to these calls from EDF. They tend to receive several per week; however during severe weather this call rate can rise to several per day. On many occasions during the period of heavy snow in January they arrived just in time to help vulnerable people requiring immediate hospitalisation. By providing this service, they are addressing a critical need that would not otherwise be addressed in a simple power outage.

Working with the Voluntary Sector

While partnership working is mostly driven by the CCA, local authorities recognise that working with voluntary organisations and community groups enhances their ability to respond effectively to emergencies.

The British Red Cross London is an example of an organisation without statutory duties influencing emergency planning locally. They have commented that where local authorities had previously perceived them as unreliable, with only a small response capacity, they have now made their name in emergency planning and emerged as a professional organisation with arrangements in place with local authorities, businesses, and health and transport agencies. They state, 'We are aiming to be the humanitarian provider of choice in London with 6000 trained emergency response volunteers across London.' (British Red Cross, 2008). They are now key to improving emergency response arrangements across London.

One of the biggest issues with working with voluntary organisations in the UK is the perceived lack of professionalism, and unreliability. Where this may be true for some, they are under increasing pressure to improve their approach due to guidance being issued to Category 1

responders by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat advising them how to engage effectively with the voluntary sector and hold them accountable for agreements and services provided. (Civil Contingencies Secretariat, 2007).

It is essential to acknowledge that while there is the need to engage with voluntary organisations and improve emergency planning arrangements with them there remains the problem of partnership working between statutory organisations, specifically Category 1 responders as identified in the report of the London Bombings in 2005 (GLA, 2006). Multi-agency working between Category 1 responders should not be taken for granted due to their long standing relationships and shouldn't be neglected in the desire to improve relations and partnership working with voluntary organisations. As mentioned earlier, there needs to be a clear understanding of the roles and services of all organisations with due regard and planning given to each.

Summary

This short study has considered some of the different ways that organisations in different sectors are interacting with each other and creating partnerships. Partnerships bring value where they grow in response to an identified need. However the various sectors that have been mentioned all approach emergency planning from a different angle and all have a different perspective. It is essential that these diverse views are brought to the table even if it can appear as forced joint working. There is lots of room for creativity when it comes to partnership working as long as you know the services another can offer.

Real events are often the best way to prove that these partnerships address risks successfully such as in the case of the Red Cross and EDF call outs; however in most cases throughout the UK emergencies are not prevalent so many partnerships have to rely on proving the effectiveness of relationships through simulations and testing. In order to gain a better understanding of this, further study is needed to assess the effectiveness of risk reduction through partnership working.

From the examples mentioned it is clear that organisations need to recognise where their and others' expertise lies, they should practice putting formal MoUs in places when services are

expected, they should exercise and rehearse together, share information and monitor the outcome of their partnership. Partnership working should be practiced to achieve a specific outcome such as reduce a particular risk, address an identified vulnerability or improve an existing relationship. The key is to seek partnerships that add value and do not force organisations to stray from their goals or implement unnecessary arrangements.

It can be seen that even amongst the few local authorities that were studied there are innovative ideas about partnership working. There is action and there is dialogue in place as well as a genuine will to improve relationships and reduce risks where they are identified. DRR principles are being practised on the ground. There will always be challenges when different organisations come together and even more so when different sectors are brought together. The UK experience shows that progress is being made and learning is taking place.

Please regard this paper as work in progress. The ongoing study will look in greater detail at the effectiveness of partnerships to community resilience and the problems that arise and will include the experiences of a greater number of organisations in the public and voluntary sectors. If you wish to provide comments or take part in this study please contact Kaylene Williams by emailing k.williams@procontinua.co.uk.

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