

National Assembly for Wales,
Public Accounts Committee – Civil
Emergencies in Wales

18th February 2013



WLGA • CLILC

INTRODUCTION

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, and the three national park authorities, the three fire and rescue authorities, and four police authorities are associate members.
2. It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within an emerging policy framework that satisfies the key priorities of our members and delivers a broad range of services that add value to Welsh Local Government and the communities they serve.

Wales Audit Office Report - opportunities

3. The WLGA is pleased to be able to provide written and oral evidence to the Welsh Assembly Public Accounts Committee regarding the recent Wales Audit Office (WAO) report "Civil Emergencies in Wales" dated 6th December 2012
4. The WLGA and the WAO have met since the report was published and discussed its content. Although not always in complete agreement regarding some of the finer detail, the WLGA recognises the importance of the report, and its clear role in helping the local authority emergency planning function move forward in the next period.
5. The report shines the spotlight on a small but crucial local government service – inevitably raising some concerns, and providing some useful information which can inform and assist the improvement of the service.
6. The report indicates that the total spend on emergency planning services in local government in Wales is only £3.2 m. The report also confirms that the arrangements for emergency planning, does provide protection to the public, but that issues of efficiency, and best use of resources may be in question.
7. We believe that credit is therefore due to the very small number of committed professionals who underpin the emergency response of local authorities in extreme situations, examples of which have recently arisen, and are well highlighted in the WAO report.

8. However, the fact that only £3.2m is spent in Wales by local authorities, is an indication of where emergency planning services are sited within authorities, and consequently have a tough battle for finite and reducing resources alongside other services.
9. The WLGA therefore welcomes the opportunities which flow from this report to reshape and realign the service.

Simpson and the Compact for Change

10. The report makes a number of references to the Simpson report and the Welsh Government / WLGA Compact for Change. Members of the Committee may be aware that significant progress has been and continues to be made in relation to the emergency planning commitment.
11. The WLGA sees the Compact and the WAO report as complimentary, and the WAO report will continue to inform the improvement process for local government.
12. For information, the Compact commitment states "Welsh Government and Local Government to regionalise the delivery of emergency planning services within two years (September 2013) and with other partners on a multi agency basis within four years where practicable (September 2015).
13. Overseeing and approving the progress of this work is the Organisation Delivery and Simpson Implementation (ODSI) Board – comprising senior figures from Welsh Government, Wales Audit Office, WLGA, Local Authority Chief Executives, the Police Service, and others.
14. The emergency planning work stream champion is Mr Peter Vaughan, Chief Constable of the South Wales Police Force.
15. A working group exists below the ODSI Board to drive the progress of the emergency planning work – and roughly reflects, in terms of the organisations involved, the ODSI Board.
16. Since the sign off of the Compact in December 2011, work has progressed against the first stage of this challenging commitment.

17. The approach to the Compact commitment on emergency planning recognised that regional collaboration and multi-agency work is already integral to the way in which this service is delivered, but it also acknowledges that there is scope for making this collaboration more cohesive, effective and efficient.
18. The Local Resilience Forums (LRF) in South Wales, North Wales, Gwent and Dyfed-Powys established working groups to consider the options for regionalisation, using the LRF existing regional boundary as the collaboration model. The working groups examined existing practices and structures and evaluated where effective and efficient collaboration existed.
19. The LRFs made an assessment of potential areas of improvement and where change could enhance multi-agency working. They also identified efficiencies which could be realised and assessed the impact of the proposed changes on the quality of service delivery.
20. The work was undertaken on the principle that services must strive to continue to improve and there are areas where emergency planning can and must improve. Those improvements should be informed by those delivering at the front line and the key focus must be the communities they serve.
21. At its most recent meeting on 17th January 2013, Mr Peter Vaughan reported to the ODSI Board the preferred options for the regionalisation of local authority emergency planning services.
22. Whilst there was no single approach identified for local authority collaboration in Wales, across each LRF area there are a number of areas of commonality.
23. In assessing the various options available all LRF areas have taken into account the evidence of effective collaboration which is already taking place at the local level and which has evolved under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, with the LRFs providing platforms for regional joint-agency activity.
24. Each collaborative area has proposed retaining a local presence in each local authority area and to work on joint programmes. There are also similar approaches with establishing senior local government management arrangements to ensure greater co-operation and consistency on a regional basis.

25. The preferred options reflect not only the local and regional arrangements but also the challenges, priorities and the appropriate support services in the region. As presented, these options will effect improvements in operation and efficiency, remove duplication of effort, increase sharing of specialist support, increase resilience and achieve more effective communications.
26. After hearing from Mr Vaughan, the Board considered and endorsed the preferred options and were satisfied that the compact commitment to regionalising local authority emergency planning services would be met if the preferred options were duly delivered.

Regional Collaboration – preferred options

27. The first part of the Compact commitment to regionalise the delivery of local authority emergency planning services by September 2013 is on target with the preferred options proposed by the LRFs all being achievable by this time.
28. An area by area summary of the new regional delivery teams is below.
29. **Dyfed Powys** - Dyfed-Powys is geographically the largest LRF in England and Wales covering 50% of the land mass of Wales. The assessment of options for regionalisation therefore needed to take geography into consideration in determining what option most appropriately meets the Compact commitment.
30. The existence of the small dedicated multi-agency Partnership Team at the core of the LRF means that Dyfed-Powys finds itself in an already advanced position in meeting the regionalisation commitment of the Compact. The preferred option to take this position further forward is to develop and enhance current arrangements through the Partnership Team.
31. The team will provide coordination and oversight for over arching regional planning, training & exercising. They will also develop greater coordination and collaboration of emergency planning functions, training, exercising and work streams within/between agencies at the local level.
32. In addition to this, the Partnership Team will be joined by representatives from all other agencies once a week to drive forward the regional work on a multi-agency basis. The concept of bringing together all the agencies on a 'Working on Wednesdays' basis has been trialled in Dyfed-Powys during 2012, but will be formally instigated as part of the preferred option going forward.

33. **Gwent** - The Gwent local authorities will establish Board of Director level officers to oversee and co-ordinate joint working on emergency planning projects in a more formal way.
34. A single Local Authority will lead on emergency planning on behalf of the other 4. This responsibility will rotate every 2 years across the 5 local authorities.
35. The role of the Lead Local Authority will be to act:
- as the LRF secretariat, supported by the other local authorities as necessary;
 - via the Chief Executive, as chair of the joint Local Authority Board and provide its secretarial services; and
 - as the focal point for the co-ordination and monitoring of joint local authority activities and the management of ongoing work programmes, if necessary via the Chief Executive and respective board directors.
36. Gwent also suggests a role for the WLGA in providing greater co-ordination of local government emergency planning at an all-Wales level. This role would involve the creation of a post to co-ordinate project work across all 22 local authorities.
37. **South Wales** – A team has been created by each council linking their service delivery structures; through a shared Terms of Reference, a joint business plan and a branded team identity. The work of the virtual team is being delivered within defined collaborative working arrangements.
38. These arrangements are brought together through the South Wales Emergency Planners Group which develops and delivers a unified work programme. The team across the South Wales LRF area, and the strategic direction over the unified work programme, is managed by the Local Authority Resilience Board (LARB). This unified work programme and joint business plan could also assist in the development of a multi-agency approach through engagement over time.
39. Whilst the region as a whole will not take on the unique challenges of the capital there will be the opportunity for enhanced learning and an opportunity for the virtual team to work together to provide support.
40. **North Wales** - The agreed model for regionalisation will create a single emergency planning support function for local authorities in North Wales formed around two hubs – one in the East and one in the West. A Civil Contingency Officer will be located at each authority who will be responsible for:

- general liaison in all aspect of emergency planning and recovery planning;
 - support local authorities in risk identification;
 - ensuring that strategies, plans, and exercises developed by the hubs are converted into local action at local authority level; and
 - ensuring that local authorities developed their business continuity plans.
41. These individuals will be supported by officers/assistants located at the two hubs who will be charged with developing plans in particular areas and ensuring that best practice is identified, disseminated and promoted.
42. The service will be managed by a manager located at one hub area and he/she will have a deputy who, in order to ease administration and facilitate the distribution of workload, would be located at the other hub area.
43. Commissioning of the required service will remain with individual authorities. The purpose of the new Unit will be to ensure that each authority is in the optimum state of readiness to cope with an emergency and thus each authority will need to be able to discuss their requirements at an appropriately senior level.

Conclusion

44. The WLGA has played a key role in helping local authorities on their way to achieving significant change. We are confident that the momentum, and opportunities for improvement, which have been created via the Compact for Change will be maintained over the next period.
45. The WLGA will continue to work closely with the emergency planning managers to ensure that the service they provide takes account of the issues raised within the WAO report.
46. The next phase of work will be equally as challenging, if not more so, as the multi agency partners become engaged in the collaboration conversation.

For further information please contact:

Simon Wilkinson, Regulatory and Frontline Services Policy Officer
simon.wilkinson@wlga.gov.uk

Welsh Local Government Association
Local Government House
Drake walk
Cardiff
CF10 4LG
Tel: 029 2046 8600

