



Northumberland

County Council

COUNCIL

6 JULY 2022

STORM ARWEN SCRUTINY REVIEW

Jeff Reid, Chair of the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Purpose of report

To report the outcomes of the review conducted by the Storm Arwen Task and Finish Group.

Recommendations

Council is requested to agree the following recommendations arising from the evidence sessions contained in paragraph 4 of the report of the Storm Arwen Task and Finish Group:

- (1) 4.1.6 Scottish Power Energy Networks (SPEN)**
 - (a) that officers continue to liaise with colleagues at all the relevant utility companies to ensure that all partners are in a position to provide a coordinated response to future emergencies;**
 - (b) the Council's Community Resilience Project is shared with all relevant partners to ensure that resources are properly identified and allocated during an emergency incident, and**
 - (c) utility companies be encouraged to promote their priority customer schemes to ensure that as many vulnerable customers or those with "additional needs" are included on their databases.**

- (2) 4.2.12 Northern Powergrid (NPG)**

Further to the recommendations in 4.1.6:

- (a) NPG be requested to work with the Council and other partners to ensure that all relevant information in times of an emergency is**

accurate so that decision making can be improved and the appropriate actions be enacted, and

- (b) NPG be requested to review its maintenance programme so that corridors of powerlines are kept free of obstructions that might compromise the network during severe weather conditions.

(3) 4.3.10 Northumbrian Water Limited (NWL)

Further to the recommendations in 4.1.6:

- (a) NWL be requested to review its policy for the provision of emergency water supplies, recognising that in an imperfect situation and issuing the appropriate advice, communities and individuals should be able to make their own decisions on how to utilise it, and
- (b) Berwick Hospital review its contingency plan to ensure that it has an uninterruptible water supply.

(4) 4.4.8 Northumberland County Council Adult Care

- (a) all the Council's personal data sets be reviewed to ensure that assistance in emergency situations can be properly targeted;
- (b) consideration also be given to how best personal data can be shared both within the Council and with partner organisations, and
- (c) the Council's contracts with care homes and similar providers must include a condition that an approved emergency contingency plan be in place to ensure a continuing high level of care during future emergency incidents.

(5) 4.5.13 Northumberland County Council Communications

- (a) the Council's Communications Team ensure that all appropriate contact details are updated and regularly reviewed, and circulated to members and other key partners;
- (b) the Council host winter preparedness sessions to be conducted annually to include contributions from town and parish councils and other partners as appropriate, which would include the promotion of personal responsibility in readiness for emergencies;
- (c) the Council prepare an Emergency Communications Winter Plan in readiness for dealing with further emergency situations, and

- (d) the County Emergency Committee tests and reviews the Community Resilience Project annually.
- (6) 4.6.8 Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS)
- (a) the Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service take measures to improve the technological capability of the incident room, including the implementation of an integrated automated response and logging system, and
 - (b) NFRS officers be trained to operate road clearing equipment and service vehicles carry such necessary equipment as is practicable.
- (7) 4.7.8 Northumberland Communities Together (NCT)

The Community (COVID) Support Officers be retained and embedded into the Council's response structure.

- (8) 4.8.9 Openreach

Further to the recommendations in 4.1.6:

- (a) Openreach be requested to formulate and publish an Emergency Communications Plan to be implemented in the event of future emergency incidents, and
- (b) Openreach be invited to discuss its proposals to improve connectivity across all its services in Northumberland at a meeting of the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

NB: Although the sections above are divided into the evidence sessions of those participants, the discussions arising from that evidence sometimes broadened out into some wider, but still related issues and the recommendations at the end of each section were formulated as a result of those deliberations.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the "How", "Living", "Connecting" priority included in the current NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2021.

Key issues

The response to Storm Arwen was a multi-agency approach with LRF partners including the military being involved.

The attached report of the Storm Arwen Task and Finish Group examines the issues and challenges faced by the Council and its partners in that response: what went right, what went wrong, the measures already being put in place as a consequence of lessons learnt and additional recommendations to ensure greater preparedness in the event of a similar event in future.

Background

Storm Arwen was named by the Met Office on 25 November 2021. The Met Office reported that the storm brought severe winds across the UK overnight 26 to 27 November 2021, with it issuing a red warning for wind. The developing storm, tracking south to the north-east of the UK, brought northerly winds gusting widely at over 69mph. The highest gust speed was 98mph at Brizlee Wood, Northumberland. This was one of the most powerful and damaging winter storms of the latest decade. Although there were no deaths directly caused by the storm in Northumberland, three people died when they were hit by fallen trees in Cumbria, Aberdeenshire and Northern Ireland. Thousands of trees were felled across the north of the UK – including large mature trees – leading to major disruption. The unusual direction of the strongest winds - northerly as opposed to prevailing westerly – may have been an additional factor influencing the number of trees brought down. More than one million homes experienced a loss of power as falling trees brought down power lines, with over 112,000 homes (mostly in Northumberland, County Durham and Tyne and Wear) subsequently experiencing several days without power. The strong winds also brought various reports of structural damage to buildings. The storm brought large waves and dangerous conditions around the UK, particularly along the north-east coastline.

This was the first red warning issued for Northumberland since the Met Office's traffic-light impact-based warnings service began in 2011. Previous red warnings for wind were issued on 29 January 2016 for the Shetland Isles and before that 12 February 2014 for NW England and W Wales.

A range of impacts were felt across the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum (LRF) area, with the impact on communities varying by time and location. Initially the focus was the immediate damage caused by strong winds however over the coming days the position moved to ongoing and escalating severe issues due to loss of electricity and communications across a number of communities. This culminated in the declaration of a major incident, the deployment of the military and a further concurrent storm.

At its meeting on 1 December 2021, the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested that a review of the implications of the storm be conducted. On 5 January 2022, the Council passed a notice of motion endorsing the need for such a review from Councillor Bridgett and a scoping report for the establishment of a Task and Finish Group was agreed at the following meeting of the Committee on 12 January 2022. The following members were appointed to the Group:

Councillors Jeff Reid (Chair), Mark Mather (Vice-Chair), Steven Bridgett, Gordon Castle, Richard Dodd, Brian Gallacher, Colin Hardy and Nick Morphett. The Group met on six occasions to consider 87 written submissions from county residents and businesses, Parish and Town Councils, County Councillors an MP, the military and the voluntary sector. These included three evidence gathering sessions at which representatives from the following organisations attended to discuss the challenges they faced during and in the aftermath of the storm and the measures that they are putting in place in preparedness for future incidents:

Northern Powergrid
Scottish Power
Northumbrian Water
NCC Communications
NCC Adult and Social Care
NCC Communities Together
Northumberland Fire and Rescue

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