

North Tyneside Council

Report to Cabinet

Date: 23 January 2023

Title: Cabinet Response to Storm Arwen Task & Finish Study Group Report from Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Portfolio:	Community Safety & Public Protection	Cabinet Member:	Cllr Carole Burdis
Report from Service Area:	Public Health		
Responsible Officer:	Wendy Burke, Director of Public Health		Tel: (0191) 643 2104
Wards affected:	All		

PART 1

1.1 Executive Summary:

The Authority has a responsibility to respond and recover from emergency events that occur in the borough. The majority of these are minor but significant incidents can, and do, occur that test the arrangements in place and the resources available.

Emergency preparedness is a key priority for the Authority. Plans are in place, key people are trained, and regular exercising takes place, most often on a multi-agency basis locally, regionally and nationally. This has enabled the Authority to respond strongly to what the borough has faced. In addition to the series of storms last winter, significant events in recent times requiring an emergency response have included 'Thunder Thursday' in 2012 and the global coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

Last winter the borough experienced the impact of six named storms over a period of eleven weeks. Storm Arwen was the most significant. A rare 'Red' weather warning was issued and the impact for the borough and the wider Northumbria area was the worst since 1953.

The handling of the emergency response was debated by full Council in January 2022 leading to the Storm Arwen Task & Finish Study Group being established by Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee ('the Committee') to undertake a review.

The Committee reported its finding to Cabinet in November 2022 and this report provides Cabinet's proposed response to the recommendations made.

1.2 Recommendations:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (1) Agrees the proposed responses to the recommendations from the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee in relation to its study into Storm Arwen, as set out in the Appendix to this report; and
- (2) Delegates authority to the Director of Public Health to deliver the proposed actions set out in the Appendix through the Emergency Planning Leadership Group, as set out in paragraph 1.5.6 of this report.

1.3 Forward Plan:

Twenty-eight days' notice of this report has been given and it first appeared on the Forward Plan that was published on 9 December 2022.

1.4 Council Plan and Policy Framework

This report relates to all themes within the 2021-2025 Our North Tyneside Plan.

1.5 Information:

1.5.1 Background

Last winter the Met Office named seven storms over a period of eleven weeks. Six of those affected the borough. Starting with Storm Arwen, which impacted on 26 November 2021, this was followed by Storms Barra, Malik, Corrie, Dudley and ended with Storm Franklin which impacted on 20 February 2022.

The forecast impacts of Storm Arwen led the Met Office to issue a rare 'Red' weather warning relating to the likely impact of strong winds. That prediction turned out to be highly accurate and the storm was one of the most damaging ever recorded, evidenced by the data, including:

- Wind gusts of 85 Knots (97.8mph) plus with the highest wind gust recorded in the Northumbria area, 89 Knots (102mph) at Lynemouth, since January 1984 which is exceptional for the north-east of England
- In terms of impact, the last storm of comparable magnitude and similarity occurred nearly 70 years ago, in January 1953.

At its meeting on 20 January 2022 full Council debated a Motion in relation to the handling of Storm Arwen by the Authority. As a result, at the request of the Elected Mayor, the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee established a Storm Arwen Task & Finish Study Group ("the Group") to undertake a review.

1.5.2 National Context

Local authorities have a statutory duty under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 ('the Act') to respond to emergency events relating to human welfare, the environment or threats to security. The Act specifies that local authorities are 'Category 1' responders. This places them on the same footing as the emergency services and the NHS and all work in partnership to prepare for events and have the capability to respond.

To plan and prepare for localised incidents and emergencies, a network of Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) has been established across the United Kingdom. LRFs are multi-agency partnerships made up of representatives from local public services, including the emergency services, local authorities, the NHS, the Environment Agency and others. LRFs also link with government to enable national co-ordination.

1.5.3 Local Context

The Authority has well practised plans in place to meet its statutory responsibilities under the Act, where it is required to:

- Assess the risk of emergencies occurring and use this to inform contingency planning,
- Have in place emergency plans,
- Have in place Business Continuity Management arrangements,
- Have in place arrangements to make information available to the public about civil protection matters and maintain arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public in the event of an emergency,
- Share information with other local responders to enhance co-ordination,
- Co-operate with other local responders to enhance co-ordination and efficiency, and
- Provide advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about business continuity management.

This work is shaped by the Authority's work regionally in collaboration with partners forming the Northumbria LRF, which mirrors the Northumbria Police footprint. The work also reflects the local identified needs of the borough and its communities.

The Authority has worked with the Northumbria LRF which has produced the Northumbria Community Risk Register 2021-2023. This identifies and gives priority to likely event scenarios, including responding to adverse weather.

1.5.4 Responding to events

The Authority has considerable experience in responding to emergency events. Although the majority of these are minor, there have been several significant incidents that have tested the arrangements in place.

As a direct result of the priority given to emergency preparedness, including regular training and exercising, the Authority has been able to respond strongly to what the

borough has faced. In addition to the recent series of winter storms, examples of significant events include:

- In June 2012 the borough experienced ‘Thunder Thursday’, a pluvial flooding incident,
- In March 2020 it began to experience the global coronavirus pandemic and the start of government restrictions, and
- Although not an emergency, in September 2022 it responded to the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II by implementing the local element of the national response plan, known as ‘Operation London Bridge’.

1.5.5 Scrutiny of the emergency response to Storm Arwen

The Committee presented the findings of the Group in its report to Cabinet on 28 November 2022.

It is noted that the Group:

- Recognised the comprehensive information on the Authority’s emergency planning obligations in relation to weather events that exists,
- Recognised the extent of the storms and how the Authority prepared, communicated, co-ordinated response activity for each storm, which included identified good practice and what lessons had been learned,
- Understood the primary priority in any emergency event should, and will always be, to ensure the safety of life,
- Established there was a clear understanding that the Authority would carry out its statutory duty to carry out all recovery works.

In addition, the Group concluded that:

- The Authority was able to rapidly mobilise staff with the necessary specialist technical skillset to support the range of requirements needed to keep residents and property safe,
- This activation and effective mobilisation reduced possible further impacts to residents and business within the borough, and
- By its very nature, resilience and emergency planning practice constantly evolves through experience.

The Storm Arwen Task & Finish Group identified four recommendations. These are outlined in the Appendix to this report along with officer commentary and responses for Cabinet to consider.

1.5.6 Next steps

Every service area within the Authority has their own business continuity plan and, where appropriate, emergency response plan(s) in preparedness for providing a resilient response to disruption events.

The Director of Public Health has corporate responsibility for the coordination of this and the Authority's overall approach to emergency planning and resilience. An Emergency Planning Leadership Group (EPLG) has been established to provide appropriate governance arrangements and assurance that the statutory responsibilities contained within the Act are being met and supports the themes of the Our North Tyneside Plan.

It is proposed that Cabinet delegate authority to the Director of Public Health to address the recommendations made by the Storm Arwen Task & Finish Study Group via the EPLG.

1.6 **Decision options:**

The following decision options are available for consideration by Cabinet.

Option 1

Cabinet accepts the recommendation set out in paragraph 1.2 above

Option 2

Cabinet does not accept the recommendation set out in paragraph 1.2 above

Option 1 is the recommended option.

1.7 **Reasons for recommended option:**

Option 1 is recommended to support the recommendations made by the Storm Arwen Task & Finish Study Group established by the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee. This will provide confidence that the Authority continues, in a healthy way, to learn from emergency events and to ensure it complies with its statutory duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

1.8 **Appendices:**

Appendix: Cabinet Response to Storm Arwen Task & Finish Study Group Report from Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

1.9 **Contact officers:**

Colin MacDonald, Head of Technical & Regulatory Services, tel. (0191) 643 6620
John Barton, Principal Lawyer, tel. (0191) 643 5354
David Dunford, Senior Business Partner, tel. (0191) 643 7027

1.10 Background information:

The following background papers/information have been used in the compilation of this report and are available at the office of the author:

- (1) [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#)
- (2) [Northumbria Community Risk Register 2021-2023](#)
- (3) [Storm Arwen Task & Finish Group report to Cabinet, 28 November 2022](#)
- (4) [Storm Arwen Task & Finish Group report to Council, 21 July 2022](#)
- (5) [Motion to Council relating to Storm Arwen, 20 January 2022](#)

PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

2.1 Finance and other resources

It is expected that all actions contained within this report can be delivered within existing budgets. Any elements that cannot be contained within existing budgets or have further financial implications will be brought to Cabinet or Council, whatever is appropriate, for a decision prior to any expenditure being incurred or committed.

2.2 Legal

In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, Cabinet is required to provide a response to the recommendations of the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee within two months. In providing this response Cabinet is asked to state whether or not it accepts each recommendation and the reasons for this decision. Cabinet must also indicate what action, if any, it proposes to take.

The report recommends the actions Cabinet should take which addresses the statutory requirement.

2.3 Consultation/community engagement

2.3.1 Internal Consultation

The Director of Public Health, who has overall responsibility for emergency planning and resilience matters has considered the findings of the Storm Arwen Task & Finish Study Group and has consulted with the Emergency Planning Leadership Group and the responsible portfolio holder, the Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Public Protection.

2.3.2 External Consultation/Engagement

No external consultation/engagement has taken place. The responses to the recommendations will be shaped in consultation with the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum and, where appropriate, with elected members, residents and businesses.

2.4 Human rights

There are no issues relating to human rights directly arising from this report.

2.5 Equalities and diversity

There are no equality and diversity issues arising directly from this report. Equality Impact Assessments will be produced or updated, whatever is appropriate, as the responses to the recommendations contained in this report are shaped and implemented.

2.6 Risk management

There are no risk management implications directly arising from this report. Risks associated with emergency response, preparedness and business continuity are included and are monitored within the established corporate risk management arrangements.

2.7 Crime and disorder

There are no crime and disorder issues directly arising from this report. Prevention of crime and disorder forms part of emergency response considerations, and to meet with the statutory duty to warn, inform and advise the public in the event of an emergency.

2.8 Environment and sustainability

There are no environment and sustainability issues directly arising from this report. The effect of climate change impacts on the magnitude of emergency events involving adverse weather is understood. The Authority's climate emergency board has established a workstream to assess how the borough adapts its infrastructure and its services to ensure future resilience. The board is engaging with the Emergency Planning Leadership Group in that work.

PART 3 - SIGN OFF

- Chief Executive
- Director of Service
- Mayor/Cabinet Member
- Chief Finance Officer
- Monitoring Officer
- Assistant Chief Executive