

ROYAL UNITED SERVICES INSTITUTE CONFERENCE: 1-2 MARCH 2007

UK RESILIENCE – PREPARING SCOTLAND

OUR DYNAMIC EARTH, EDINBURGH

Grateful for invitation, and to RUSI for organising a very useful conference.

The title of the conference is 'UK Resilience: Preparing Scotland'. But before looking ahead, let me first reflect on what we have already achieved in terms of preparing Scotland.

The Executive collectively has recognised over the last 2 or 3 years that emergency planning needs serious strategic attention. This has translated in to sustained high level engagement with the responder agencies in Scotland, and also with Whitehall, and a much higher profile for civil contingencies within the Executive.

I am very grateful for the strategic leads which have been given by the Minister for Justice, Cathy Jamieson, as Chair of the Ministerial Group on Civil Contingencies, and by Robert Gordon, in his capacities as Head of Justice Department and chair of the Scottish Emergencies Co-ordinating Committee.

I think it is safe to say that civil contingencies is now being given its proper place in the grand scheme of things. There seemed to be a long period of almost complacency after the

end of the Cold War in which emergency planning was pushed well down the priority list. There was certainly plenty of good work going on across Scotland in those years. But I am not sure that it was given the serious high level attention it deserved.

Then, within a couple of years, the experience of foot and mouth disease and the fuel protests, and the threat of the millennium bug, illustrated both how inter-dependent and how vulnerable our society has become. These events brought emergency planning out of the shadows. And then the tragic events of 9/11 put it firmly centre stage.

The Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) was in a sense a very tangible product of the shock which reverberated around the world after 9/11. It is a highly significant and far reaching piece of legislation. For the first time there is a clear statutory framework for emergency planning and response across the UK.

I appreciate that the regulations do impose some fairly heavy responsibilities on responders, particularly on Category 1 responders. I am very grateful for all the work that is taking

place across Scotland to understand and put these into practice.

I'm also grateful to those organisations in the Armed Forces and voluntary sector – not legislated for by the Act – but which have been forward thinking in moving the agenda on.

We are supporting responders in this work as best we can. Comprehensive guidance in the form of [“Preparing Scotland”](#) has been issued. It benefited from extensive input from local practitioners. The guidance has been and will continue to be followed up by my team through visits, seminars and workshops.

Much of this work is being undertaken by secondees to the Executive who have front line emergency planning experience. We are also funding outward secondments – currently to COSLA and to Lothian and Borders Police. I am personally very keen to develop this interchange which I hope brings benefits to the individuals concerned and to the whole emergency planning community in Scotland.

Obviously most of our focus is on events and stakeholders here in Scotland. But I am very conscious that we occupy ground right on the interface between reserved and devolved powers.

For example, although civil contingencies is devolved, emergency powers are reserved; policing is devolved but national security is reserved; most aspects of energy are reserved, but managing the consequences of an accident at say an oil refinery in Scotland would be a devolved matter.

That is why maintaining links with opposite numbers in Whitehall right across the spectrum of emergency planning is crucial for us. It is something which Ministers strongly encourage. My own team are developing closer and closer ties with colleagues in CCS and in the Home Office through membership of various committees, involvement in exercises and liaison on policy development in areas such as CONTEST. It is particularly helpful that Bruce Mann now attends our Ministerial Group on Civil Contingencies.

Others across the Executive have close working relationships with parts of Whitehall, too: for example, our Environment and Rural Affairs Department work closely with DEFRA on planning for animal health emergencies, and colleagues dealing with energy policy work with DTI.

So, given all of this activity, how well is Scotland prepared now to react to emergencies?

Before giving a view let me refer to some research which was carried out for us in 2005-06 to map Scotland's capability. It was published in November and also fed in to the Whitehall National Capabilities Survey.

There were many positive comments in the report. The researchers were impressed by the high level of trust and good will and the effective networks that had been formed over a number of years across agency boundaries. To quote from the report:

“Our overall impression of emergency management in Scotland was one of professionalism and concern to do the job well. Arrangements for dealing with major emergencies are advanced and well organised”.

The researchers also noted the huge amount of work which has gone in to implementing the CCA.

However the researchers did identify room for improvement. To quote again:

“One of the most serious gaps was the apparent perception regarding the lack of arrangements to deal with a wide area event across Scotland or across more than 2-3 SCG areas – e.g. lack of formal mutual aid arrangements and vertical and horizontal co-ordination and co-operation”.

Responses to a consultation with the SCGs in 2006 in preparation for the next spending review echoed many of these themes. We were told that:

- The CCA has put enormous pressure on all Category 1 responders;
- Local authorities are particularly concerned that the pressures on each of them to ‘do more’ in relation to emergency planning, training and exercising are exceeding the capacity of the people traditionally expected to do this work;
- In addition to calls for more funding for individual category 1 responder agencies, there were a number of requests for more investment in Scotland-wide or

regional systems and solutions – something I will come back to a little later.

So what does all this tell us?

It is inevitably difficult to measure a concept like 'preparedness'. There is bound to be a degree of subjectivity in any assessment. Nevertheless the Executive's conclusion is, firstly, that Scotland is well-placed to deal with most emergencies, even pretty major ones. We have after all had a fair bit of experience over the last few years. The commitment, ingenuity, pragmatism, can do attitude and spirit of partnership of front-line people across the range of agencies is not in doubt.

But the benchmark against which we need to test our resilience is whether we could cope with a mega-emergency: for example a crisis situation

- which engulfs the whole country or several areas; or

- has catastrophic consequences in one particular area (such as the USA experienced with Hurricane Katrina); or
- simultaneous major emergencies.

Collectively we seem to be less certain that we could cope effectively in these extreme scenarios. And that is worrying given the very real prospect of pandemic flu. The recent national flu exercise concentrated many minds.

This analysis is consistent with the conclusion reached by Jeff Ord, the Chief Inspector of FRS in Scotland, in his report last year on the readiness of the service to deal with multiple simultaneous terrorist attacks. He believes that the front line would demonstrate commitment and professionalism, but that the back office organisation and infrastructure would be overwhelmed.

That is why Ministers launched the Review of Emergency Preparedness which has involved a great deal of consultation across Scotland and on which they will receive a report in the summer.

The question which the leaders of responder agencies and those of us in the Executive need to ask is: what more are we prepared to do to enable to us to be better prepared to deal with the most extreme scenarios?

In some ways this is a bit like the issue we all face when buying insurance. Do we go for the cheapest, 'value' policy? Or for a more comprehensive but more expensive version which might ultimately never be needed? We have to balance the benefits of initial savings against the risks that we might have to pay out a great deal after the car crash or burglary.

Let me spend a few minutes exploring this tension between risk and resources.

The risks we face are undoubtedly huge – and we will be hearing more about some of them during this conference. But we are also much more scientific in the way we now scan the horizon and assess risks.

Of course we can never be certain what is going to happen in the future. But by bringing to bear all the expertise of the various agencies in the public and private sectors we can have a much better idea.

For example, the Executive have set up a multi-agency group to look years if not decades ahead at the possible implications for emergency planning of the extreme weather arising from climate change. The Group includes the Executive's Chief ecologist and representatives from the Met Office, SEPA and elsewhere.

And so to the resource part of the equation. I am well aware that there are concerns about resources. But we have to recognise that, more so than in other areas, difficult judgements must be made about priorities.

Given that we all have to think the unthinkable, one could theoretically justify spending an almost infinite amount of money on contingency planning. That is not an option. Ministers have to make choices and as civil servants we have to make sure that they are made on the basis of the best possible evidence and advice about the risks.

Going back to the insurance analogy, a comprehensive policy would imply having some additional capacity which is not always used. But the standard government finance tests of efficiency, effectiveness and economy must still be applied.

Indeed it would be wrong to reduce the discussion to a simple question of how much additional public money should be invested in civil contingencies work. The Executive will of course look carefully in the forthcoming spending review at risk-based, well-argued cases for additional resources for civil contingencies. But if gaps are identified, Ministers' knee jerk reaction will **not** be that more money must be spent.

We need to continue to look hard at ways of working which ensure that current levels of resource are used to the maximum effect.

Given that the focal points for emergency planning are the 8 multi-agency SCGs, we shall in particular want to look at the scope for more pooling of resources at regional and even Scotland-wide levels.

The responsibility for responding to emergencies in the first instance must lie firmly with the individual front-line agencies. But there is plenty of preparatory work that could be done more efficiently on a multi-agency and even multi-region basis. Every single agency doesn't necessarily need to do everything – or even attend every meeting – if it would make more sense to share the load with others.

The SCG co-ordinators whom we are funding are making a good start in terms of facilitating multi-agency implementation of the CCA.

Let me give you a flavour of some of the other ways we are using programme funding in a carefully targeted way with the aim of either improving effectiveness and/or reducing duplication.

We are investing more central resources in training and exercising by developing the Scottish Resilience Development Service based in Perth. Our aim is to ensure that all the activity is risk-driven so that in overall terms we are better prepared on a multi-agency basis to face whatever emergencies crop up. We want to cut out some of the duplication that undoubtedly

exists at present and ensure that lessons are learned and applied consistently. The service will continue to work closely with the EPC in York and with a wide variety of other partners. We are also looking at investing some money in training and exercise facilities in Grampian, Central and in Ayrshire.

Another high priority is emergency communications. The Executive is investing a great deal in national communication systems such as airwave and firelink. Subject to resources being made available during the coming spending review we also plan to invest in a new Resilient Telecommunications Network. This should – to summarise a highly technical proposal - ensure that strategic level communications remain live even during the most severe emergencies.

We are also funding pilot work in Lothian and Borders on an inter-agency alert system and rest centre management software. Subject to the success of these pilots and availability of resources we are prepared to roll these out across the country.

It makes sense in efficiency and effectiveness terms to develop national, inter-operable systems which make it easier for Scotland plc to respond in a united way, rather than for each

area to develop its own. We are happy to look at other business cases for similar systems.

We are also looking closely at other ways in which we can secure more effective national planning and response arrangements at minimum cost.

- Mutual aid is an issue which keeps cropping up. The emergency services have well-trying mutual aid arrangements. And other organisations are used to co-operating informally across boundaries. But there is a clear demand for more formal mutual aid and co-ordination arrangements in the local authority and health sectors. Ideally these would synchronise with the blue light arrangements. We are happy to work with COSLA and SOLACE and other agencies on this;
- We also want to explore the scope for more national call off contracts with private sector firms that would only be triggered in an emergency. The temporary mortuaries contract is a good example: we pay a relatively small annual retainer but the facility can be invoked in any area of the country very quickly in the event of a mass fatalities

incident. Could the same principle be applied for example to transport assets, call centres or media liaison officers?

- We have employed for the last few months an emergency communications strategist to help us to think about all aspects of the duty to warn and inform the public. He has talked to many civil contingencies specialists and communications managers in Category 1 and 2 organisations as well as to people in the media world. We shall be consulting on a number of possible Scotland-wide initiatives over the next few months.

The common theme in all of this is, I believe, the need for a consistent Scotland-wide approach.

Civil contingencies specialists need to be locally based: readily available to advise senior managers in responder organisations and to work with the local private sector.

But we now have a Scotland-wide framework, Scotland-wide guidance, and a Scotland-wide capabilities programme. We are developing Scotland-wide exercising and training arrangements and a common approach to warning and informing and caring for the public. We are also talking to the business community and voluntary sector on a national basis.

The challenge we face in addressing the weaknesses identified by the research I quoted earlier is to forge an even more effective interface between Scotland-wide and local planning and response arrangements. The whole needs to add up to more than the sum of its parts.

This is an ambitious but not an impossible agenda. If Scotland is to become better prepared for the most serious emergencies, then resilience must be given an appropriate place on the corporate agenda in each of the individual organisations, including the Executive.

It would clearly be wrong for every organisation to be spending all of its time worrying about what might happen next. But it is important that emergency planning is not left to a handful of emergency planners, however committed they are.

In fact I wonder whether the nomenclature here is bit of a barrier to progress. Perhaps emergency planners should in future be called civil contingencies advisers? The rationale would be that functional managers need to do the planning for their areas with the advice of a specialist unit, not the other way round.

Likewise, top teams and those immediately below them need to think laterally about their personal roles and responsibilities for emergency planning and response, scan the horizon, both domestic and overseas, and be involved in exercising and training. They need the advice of the specialists; but they need to make the decisions.

There is of course already plenty of senior commitment to emergency planning. For example, around 100 senior managers came together at the National Resilience Seminar last June – an event we shall be repeating next month.

We have also been involved in the last few weeks in facilitating tabletop sessions with members of the Lothian and Borders and Fife SCGs.

And next month I shall be speaking at an awayday for the Highlands & Islands SCG.

Conclusion

As I conclude, let me quote a vision statement which our Ministers have agreed:

They want “Scotland to be prepared to deal with the consequences of any emergency because responder

agencies are planning and exercising together effectively on the basis of a clear, shared view of the risks, have a good understanding of what capability is available locally and nationally, and are using resources flexibly and pragmatically”.

I think we are well on our way to achieving that vision. Our experience of G8 in 2005 showed that all the various agencies in Scotland can work together effectively and with colleagues elsewhere in the UK in precisely the way envisaged by the Civil Contingencies Act. It was the biggest test our emergency planning community has probably ever faced and we passed it with flying colours.

But we need to build on that experience as we look to develop our capacity to withstand major national emergencies which might come at us with far less warning than we had for G8.

I have described work which is already in hand and offered some other ideas. Jeff Ord’s consultative review on emergency preparedness will also help us to see where any gaps lie. I look forward with interest to see what Ministers decide next summer in the light of the team’s findings.

In the meantime I look forward to continuing to work with a range of agencies within Scotland and in Whitehall to make Scotland a safer place.