

RESPONDING TO EMERGENCIES

THE UK CENTRAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

SECTION 1: EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT IN THE UK

- 1.1 An emergency (or disruptive challenge) as defined in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 is a situation or series of events that threatens or causes serious damage to human welfare, the environment or security in the United Kingdom. This definition covers a wide range of scenarios including adverse weather, severe flooding, animal diseases, terrorist incidents and the impact of a disruption on essential services and critical infrastructure. More information on the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 can be found in Annex A.
- 1.2 History has taught us to expect the unexpected. Events can, and do, take place that by their nature can not be anticipated exactly. Response arrangements therefore need to be flexible in order to adapt to the circumstances at the time while applying good practice, including lessons from previous emergencies, and safeguarding the UK's constitutional settlement.
- 1.3 The following guiding principles have been developed to capture the core characteristics of effective emergency response. They should be applied to the management of any emergency. These are:
 - i. **Preparedness:** All individuals and organisations that might have to respond to emergencies should be properly prepared, including having clarity of roles and responsibilities, specific and generic plans, and rehearsing response arrangements periodically.
 - ii. **Continuity:** The response to emergencies should be grounded within organisations' existing functions and their familiar ways of working – although inevitably, actions will need to be carried out at greater speed, on a larger scale and in more testing circumstances during the response to an incident.
 - iii. **Subsidiarity:** Decisions should be taken at the lowest appropriate level, with co-ordination at the highest necessary level. Local responders should be the building block of response for an emergency of any scale.
 - iv. **Direction:** Clarity of purpose should be delivered through an awareness of the strategic aims and supporting objectives for the response. These should be agreed and understood by all involved in managing the response to an incident in order to effectively prioritise and focus the response.

- viii. Account to Parliament and lead in the submission of evidence to any subsequent Government-appointed or independent inquiry; and
- ix. Identify, learn and share the lessons from the planning and response to the emergency.

2.17 The LGD for the response phase would need to work closely with the LGD for the recovery phase (where different) from the outset to ensure a smooth transition of responsibilities at the appropriate time and to ensure that response and recovery activities are undertaken in concert.

Role of the Lead Government Department for Recovery

2.18 In England, the role of the LGD for Recovery, in consultation with other government departments, and if appropriate the devolved administrations will be to:

- i. Act as the focal point for communication between central government and the multi-agency Recovery Co-ordinating Group(s) at local level involving relevant government offices in the English regions or the devolved administrations as appropriate;
- ii. Agree, across government, clear aims and objectives for the recovery process, including criteria for standing down recovery mechanisms and structures;
- iii. Produce brief, accurate situation reports feeding, as appropriate, into the Common Recognised Information Picture (CRIP) on the nature and scale of the recovery issues; using the agreed recovery reporting framework and principles (published on the UK Resilience pages of the Cabinet Office website at:
<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ukresilience.aspx>)
- iv. Ensure that strategic recovery issues are identified and acted on during the response phase of an emergency and that there is a smooth and effective handover from response to recovery;
- v. Produce a handling plan as soon as possible. This should offer a clear assessment of whether the recovery issues are

Lead Government Department where appropriate. The purpose of the Situation Cell is to ensure that there is a single, immediate, authoritative overview of the current situation available to decision makers.

- 3.10 As part of its role the Situation Cell develops and maintains a ***Common Recognised Information Picture (CRIP)***, which will be summarised on display boards in COBR and briefed at the outset of key meetings and shared as far as possible with responders at the regional and local level. The CRIP will consist of information relating both to the scene and significant wider impacts, including facts and figures, the main developments and decisions, trends, and upcoming decision points. The Situation Cell will also enable Ministers and senior officials to be briefed on the latest developments, including significant wider impacts, likely developments, and the effectiveness of the response.
- 3.11 In order to ensure accurate and timely information is available in the CRIP, the Cabinet Office will request situation reports (Sit Reps) from other Government Departments and agencies as appropriate providing a national summary of nationally managed or co-ordinated services. Government Offices in the English regions will be expected to provide a Common Regional Recognised Information Picture summarising the position of locally delivered services in their area. Where appropriate, the devolved administrations will be asked to summarise the position in their countries.
- 3.12 All departments and agencies will be responsible for ensuring that they are able to access either directly or indirectly relevant, timely, information on their areas of responsibility and are able to provide a prompt read-out of the impact including the views of key stakeholders. Any requests for information from local responders/agencies in England should normally be routed via COBR to the Government Offices to avoid duplication and minimise the burden on local responders.
- 3.13 The CRIP may often have a security classification – however it should not, as a matter of course, contain material classified higher than Secret, to ensure it can be effectively distributed to departments and relevant responders. Wherever possible, the classification should be limited to Restricted or below.

- iii) **Cabinet Office will convene a meeting** (if appropriate in COBR) **if there is uncertainty over the direction of the UK central government response to any emergency or the effectiveness of the local response in England and Wales**, to assess the situation and advise ministers as necessary;
- iv) In the event of any catastrophic or serious emergency in England or on reserved issues in Great Britain, **the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary or other senior Ministers nominated by the Prime Minister, will direct the central government response from COBR.** In cases of doubt, **the Home Secretary would at least initially, assume the chair in COBR.**
 - a. The Cabinet Office or the Lead Government Department would chair meetings of officials in COBR. A Government Liaison Officer will be deployed to provide a two-way channel for information between COBR and the Strategic Co-ordinating Group (where established);
- v) **Convening Regional Co-ordinating Groups or Regional Civil Contingencies Committees** in England, will be considered by COBR and/or the Lead Government Department to support communication with the centre in response to a catastrophic, serious or significant emergency, local multi-agency co-ordination, and the identification and tasking of resources. The Government Offices in the English regions will provide the default Government Liaison Officer (GLO) in a non-terrorist emergency unless alternative arrangements are in place;
- vi) where **multi-site and wide area emergencies** occur, COBR will prioritise the allocation of scarce resources between nations and regions. Where an emergency is confined to one nation or region, prioritisation may be done at the national or regional level;

Business in COBR.

- viii) Once activated, relevant departments and agencies will immediately send representatives to COBR. COBR will remain engaged until the emergency has passed. The COBR Secretariat in consultation with the LGD and No.10 will decide on the scheduling of meetings (the 'battle rhythm') and whether and which departments need to be represented in COBR 24/7;