

159. Local exercising is also informed by national exercises. Ideally, local areas will have sufficient notice of plans for national exercises, enabling them to write plans and test them in advance of a wider national exercise; in practice, national exercises are often arranged at shorter notice, and may be directed by different government departments as well as the lead departments for civil contingencies, which can disrupt local exercise plans (ML/12 - INQ000080804).
160. There is an expectation that in formulating emergency plans, LRFs and individual agencies including local authorities will take into account the needs of vulnerable people. Vulnerability is not framed in government guidance in terms of protected characteristics, nor is it clearly, or narrowly, defined, but instead includes broad references to children and young people; faith, religious, cultural and minority ethnic communities; and elderly people and people with disabilities. Previous research from the British Red Cross (People Power in Emergences, British Red Cross, November 2019) (ML/5 - INQ000080819) published shortly before Covid indicates different practices on whether vulnerability is defined in local plans, and on whether this is seen as a responsibility of the LRF or of councils. However, the LGA understands that there is very limited direction and no specific requirement from Government as to the issues for which councils and LRFs should test and exercise, even where these could be identified as national level rather than local issues.
161. The LGA understands that, broadly, plans work on the basis that everybody is vulnerable, and there have been some efforts to focus on specific groups in line with the guide, such as those who may be experiencing domestic abuse and the implications of this for evacuation plans and rest centres. There can be challenges in accessing relevant information and implementing practical steps in response, but the LGA understands this is an issue that local areas are increasingly focused on.
162. Feedback from member councils indicates that most emergency plans would not have systematically taken protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 into account prior to the pandemic, but instead, in line with government guidance, focused on a broad definition of vulnerability. They would be expected to take into account the Public Sector Equality Duty generally of course.