

## **Protocol for the Collaborative Communications Process**

1. The term emergency within this Protocol is defined as:  
An event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare, the environment or the security of Northern Ireland or the UK as a whole. (NI Civil Contingencies Framework - refreshed 2011)
2. In Northern Ireland emergencies are classified as follows:
  - Local Level – emergencies where the outcomes are such that the response can be delivered entirely by organisations operating locally/sub-regionally, or
  - Strategic Level – emergencies where the extent or severity of their impact is such that strategic level intervention and co-ordination by central government is required. Emergencies at the strategic level are split into different levels; Level 1 Significant, Level 2 Serious and Level 3 Catastrophic. Multi-agency co-ordination for Level 1 emergencies is delivered by the appropriate Lead Government Department and by the NI Central Crisis Management arrangements for Levels 2 and 3.

### *Local Level*

3. In the case of a local level emergency the lead agency will co-ordinate the arrangements for communicating with the public, except in circumstances where there is a threat to life when the PSNI will deliver this function. Where there is no threat to life, and no clear lead agency can be identified, the district council that is co-ordinating the emergency response will also co-ordinate the public communications arrangements. The organisation co-ordinating the public communications arrangements at this level should alert the Head of the

Executive Information Service (EIS) to the emergency.

4. In all circumstances the identification of the lead agency (or in the absence of a clear lead agency the organisation co-ordinating the public communications arrangements) in an emergency is the key trigger for the collaborative communication process. The lead agency Head of Communications will define the initial communications issues and set out the initial communications strategy.
5. Following the identification of the lead agency the Head of the EIS will contact the lead agency Head of Communications to establish whether any assistance is required. As set out at paragraph 3, where the emergency is at the local level the organisation co-ordinating the public communications arrangements will contact the Head of EIS. EIS is now operating a rolling list of staff at all grades who will be available on a “drop everything” basis to assist in an emergency, particularly during holiday periods.
6. It is important to stress that EIS will be offering assistance and will not be seeking to direct the lead agency’s communications effort – that is the responsibility of the lead agency’s Head of Communications. It may well be that, particularly in the early hours of the emergency, that the lead agency does not require formal assistance in terms of resources or expertise.
7. Beyond the lead agency there will be other responders and in the early stages of the emergency EIS will be in contact with relevant Heads of Communications to become the communications link with the lead agency. The intention is to take as much of the liaison burden off the lead agency’s communications team as possible and to allow them to get on with the core job of delivering their communications strategy.
8. The key role for EIS at this point will be to co-ordinate the key messages across all responders and develop a core script that all

responders can draw on and to consider and facilitate as necessary the provision of joint media messaging spanning key responders to the emergency. This will necessitate EIS being supplied with all news releases and all lines to take from all responders, including FAQs. This information will then be published on the NI Direct website and will be significantly augmented through the use of social media. In the event of power outages communication with the public will be via radio bulletins, nirect through smart phones and direct contact with emergency centres where applicable.

9. Throughout this period the Head of EIS will continue to liaise with the lead agency Head of Communications to keep the level of assistance required under review. This will be particularly important if or when the lead agency changes as the emergency moves into the recovery phase.
10. EIS will participate in multi-agency co-ordination meetings to provide briefing for Ministers and senior officials on the developing situation and lines to take. A circulation list, which also includes key officials, has been created within EIS and is shared with all duty press officers.

### *Strategic Level*

11. In the case of strategic level emergencies where a Lead Government Department is co-ordinating the response EIS staff out-posted in that department will co-ordinate the media response and provide input to the briefing to Ministers and senior officials.
12. In the case of a strategic level emergency where the NI Central Crisis Management Arrangements (NICCMA) have been activated, EIS will co-ordinate the media response and will lead on development of the media strategy to support the strategic priorities identified by NICCMA. This will be done in close liaison with the Head of Communications

from the Lead Department / Agency, as well as their counterparts in other responding organisations. The Head of EIS will keep all responders up to date on communications issues at NICCMA meetings and will be available to brief Ministers and key officials in conjunction with TEO officials co-ordinating the response.

# Emergency Planning

## Collaborative Communication Process

