

PROTOCOL FOR ESCALATION OF THE MULTI-AGENCY RESPONSE

Introduction

1. The purpose of this Protocol is to set out interface arrangements to facilitate the smooth and effective escalation of the multi-agency response to an anticipated or actual emergency from the local to the strategic level.
2. This Protocol relates only to emergencies as defined in the NI Civil Contingencies Framework 2011 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.
3. “Serious damage” in this context is where a number of organisations are required to act to prevent, reduce, control or mitigate the emergency’s effects, or otherwise take action, and are unable to do this without changing the deployment of their resources or acquiring additional resources. This protocol does not therefore address minor, day to day type incidents that organisations deal with within their normal operational procedures and resources.
4. Emergencies cover a broad spectrum of events with varying impacts and consequences. An emergency can range from a purely local incident to one having an impact across NI and beyond. These events require different co-ordination arrangements which are capable of being applied flexibly as an emergency develops or changes in character. While the majority of emergencies are local level and dealt with entirely by emergency responders acting on a sub-regional basis, some due to the nature and scale of their impacts require strategic co-ordination by central government.
5. In Northern Ireland emergencies are classified as:
 - Local Level – emergencies where the outcomes are such that the response can be delivered entirely by organisations operating sub-regionally, or
 - Strategic level (Government) – 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 this level are split into Level 1 – Significant, Level 2 – Serious, and Level 3 – Catastrophic, depending on how the strategic co-ordination is delivered.
6. This document sets out:
 - the mechanisms for sub-regional, regional and strategic inter-agency communication and co-ordination;
 - the triggers for sub-regional, regional and strategic co-ordination; and
 - the assessment arrangements and triggers to determine the need for escalation.

7. The document does not set out the detail for the operation of the various co-ordination mechanisms as this is covered in the plans and protocols for those arrangements. It will be important however that all such plans and protocols are reviewed to ensure that they remain consistent with the terms of this protocol.

Step 1: Local Level Emergency – Multi-Agency Teleconference Calls / Meetings

Activation and Triggers

Sub-Regional Communication and Co-ordination

8. Where an emergency responder or an essential service provider anticipates or detects an issue with multi-agency impacts, the PSNI can convene and chair a sub-regional multi-agency conference call / meeting to co-ordinate the response where there is a threat to life. In all other circumstances the relevant District Council can convene (via the relevant Emergency Planning Co-ordination Officer) and chair a sub-regional multi-agency conference call / meeting to co-ordinate the response. Another emergency responder organisation eg PHA can, by agreement, chair these meetings where it would be more appropriate for them to do so – this would be determined by the circumstances at the time.
9. The likely triggers for sub-regional co-ordination and information sharing would include:
- People / environment affected confined to sub-regional area;
 - Disruption to services / public confined to sub-regional area;
 - Incident capable of being dealt with by organisations acting on a sub-regional basis;
 - Short-term impact on delivery of sub-regional supply chains and services;
 - Small number of District Council areas impacted;
 - Some impact on economy in sub-regional area;
 - An unusual event which may have multi-agency implications.

Regional Communication and Co-ordination

10. Where there is a need for a regional conference call/ meeting dealing with local level type issues, then depending on the activation arrangements (see paragraph 8 above) local government or PSNI will act as default chairs of the teleconference or meeting. Alternatively, it may be more appropriate for another organisation eg PHA to chair – this would be determined based on the circumstances at the time. Sub-regional teleconference calls / meetings may, depending on identified need, continue to be held once the regional teleconferences / meetings have been established.

11. The likely triggers for regional co-ordination and information sharing would include:

- People / environment affected across a wide geographical area;
- Disruption to local area services over a wide geographical area;
- Impact covering wide geographical area / large number of District Council areas;
- Incident can be dealt with by organisations acting at sub-regional level;
- Short- term impact on delivery of supply chains and services;
- Impact on economy in local areas.

Purpose

12. The purpose of the multi-agency teleconference call / meeting is to:

- facilitate information sharing and co-ordination;
- offer support between organisations; and
- consider the need for escalation.

Step 2: Escalation Assessment

Activation and Triggers

13. Where a potential need for escalation has been identified by two or more relevant responding organisations because:

- the impact is likely to be severe and /or prolonged and affect a widespread geographical area; and / or
- there is potential for progression / expansion from a Local Level emergency to a Strategic Level (Government) emergency

then CCPB, or if more appropriate the Lead Government Department¹, will convene an assessment group of key responders to the incident to make a joint multi-agency risk assessment of the potential or actual impact for the wider community. CCPB will act as default for this function.

Purpose

14. The purpose of the multi-agency Assessment Group is to:

- collate and assess information from relevant sectors;

¹ See The Guide to Emergency Planning Arrangements in Northern Ireland –2011

- carry out joint risk assessment of the situation;
- determine whether the event requires escalation to Strategic Level (Government) co-ordination; and
- determine timescales for action.

15. In assessing whether the incident or anticipated incident needs to be escalated to Strategic Level (Government) the triggers which the assessment group can consider would include:

- Very large numbers of people affected;
- Serious and prolonged damage to the environment;
- Serious and prolonged damage to key infrastructure;
- Prolonged impact on delivery of key supply chains and services;
- Serious impact on economy;
- Extensive clean up and recovery costs;
- High degree of public anxiety;
- Need for strategic co-ordination of the media response;
- Implications beyond Northern Ireland.

STEP 3: Strategic Level (Government) Emergency - Determination and Activation of the Appropriate Level of Response

16. The outcome of the Assessment Group will be used to determine whether strategic co-ordination through central crisis arrangements either by the Lead Government Department (Level 1 – Significant emergencies) or by the NI Central Crisis Management Arrangements (Level 2- Serious / Level 3 – Catastrophic emergencies) should be invoked. These arrangements are detailed in the CCG(NI) Protocol for the NI Central Crisis Management Arrangements. Where for Level 1 emergencies there is no identifiable Lead Government Department, or where responsibility is not clear, TEO will agree the lead role with relevant departments.

17. Separate, and in addition to the above assessment process, the CCG(NI) Protocol for the NICCMA provides for the establishment of the NICCMA in response to a request from a Lead Government Department to do so.

18. Where it has been agreed that there is no requirement for strategic co-ordination by Government the existing sub-regional and/or regional co-ordination arrangements will continue to apply in order to deliver the local level response to the emergency. The same applies where strategic co-ordination is required by Government, in which case the Chair or agreed representative of the group delivering the local level co-ordination function will

attend Lead Government Department (Level 1) or CCG(NI) (Levels 2/3) strategic co-ordination meetings to inform the strategic decision-making process and to provide a liaison point between the local level and strategic level groups.

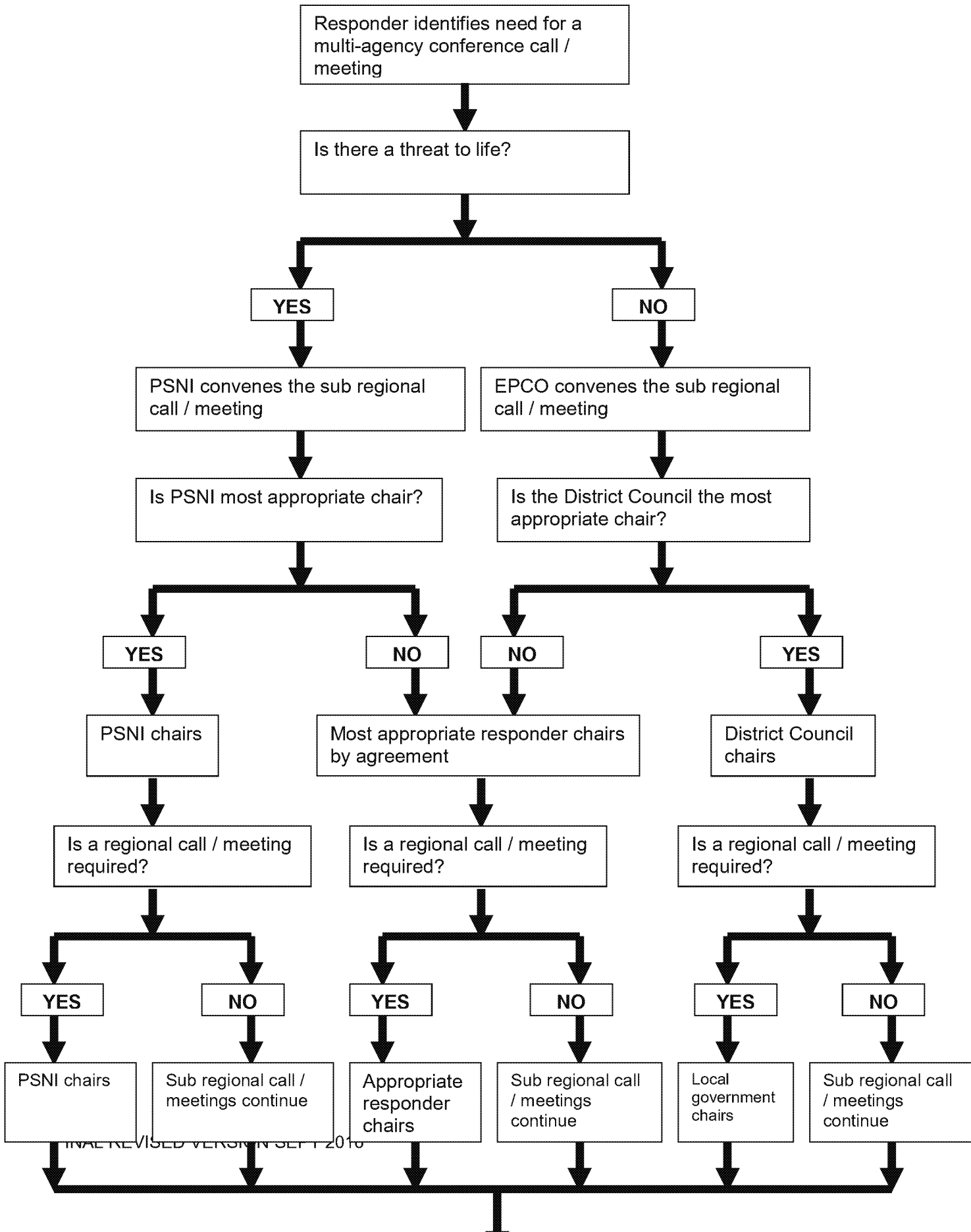
19. In the event of a Level 2 or Level 3 emergency CCG(NI) will co-ordinate the strategic level response/recovery. Depending on the nature of the emergency there may be one or more Lead Government Departments whose role at CCG(NI) meetings will be to provide information and expertise to inform the management of the response. Representatives of the Lead Government Department should also be available to inform the local level co-ordination group as necessary.

20. A flow chart summarising the arrangements described in this Protocol is at Annex 1.

**Civil Contingencies Policy Branch
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ESCALATION PROTOCOL FLOW DIAGRAM

STEP 1: LOCAL LEVEL EMERGENCY



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STEP 2: ESCALATION ASSESSMENT

