

Improving civil contingencies planning

Summary impact report (12 month)

The report findings and recommendations

1. This paper outlines the impact of Improving civil contingencies planning, a joint Accounts Commission and Auditor General for Scotland performance audit report published on 6 August 2009.
2. The report's main findings were that overall, key organisations were working well together to plan for dealing with major disruptions and events such as severe weather and pandemic flu, particularly through the regional Strategic Coordinating Groups (SCGs). While most organisations had a generic emergency plan in place, planning for business continuity management and recovery were not as well developed. In addition, there was potential for more collaboration between organisations to increase capacity and make more effective use of resources.
3. The report made 16 recommendations for the Scottish Government and public sector organisations. Details of specific progress against these recommendations are listed at Appendix 1, although these developments may not always be directly or solely attributable to our report.
4. The report also included a self-assessment checklist for all public sector organisations involved in planning for civil contingencies in Scotland (NHS boards, councils, police forces, fire and rescue services, SEPA and the Scottish Ambulance Service). The checklist was designed to enable these organisations to assess both their own performance and the performance of partnership groups, for example, regional Strategic Coordinating Groups (SCGs).

Media, political and sector interest

5. Around 50 press articles were generated by publication of the report. This exceeds the internal benchmark of high profile press coverage (30 press articles). Coverage included television, national press and radio, local press and radio, and specialist publication articles.

6. The main themes of the media coverage were around:

- The need for Scottish and UK governments to work more closely together.
- The finding that organisations were working well together but there is room for improvement.
- More needs to be done to be best prepared for emergencies.

7. The numbers of report, key message and podcast downloads from Audit Scotland's website were similar to average figures. Download activity over the year following publication is summarised below.

Downloads	Improving civil contingencies planning	Average for Audit Scotland publications
Main report (pdf and rtf versions)	2,943	2,641
Key messages	537	451
Podcast	346	436

8. The Scottish Labour, Liberal Democrats and Conservative parties each commented on the report and welcomed its findings. SOLACE and ACPOS issued a joint statement welcoming the report and made a commitment to 'ensure that all recommendations and learning points are responded to quickly and effectively.'

9. Ronnie Nicol spoke at the 5th MacKay Hannah Emergency Planning Conference on 18th September 2009. Copies of the report and key messages were distributed to delegates.

Parliamentary scrutiny

10. The Auditor General briefed the Scottish Parliament's Public Audit Committee (PAC) on 23 September 2009. The Committee noted the report and decided to take no further action.

Impact on Scottish Government policy

11. The Scottish Government's official response to the report outlined progress and proposed actions against each recommendation. Immediate Scottish Government actions included:

- the Resilience Advisory Board for Scotland (RABS) met to discuss the embargoed report the day before publication
- key stakeholders met in the month following publication to discuss key findings and a way forward
- a project manager was appointed within Scottish Resilience with responsibility for progressing the recommendations

- a RABS subgroup was established to provide leadership and accountability for progressing the recommendations
- memoranda of understanding between the Scottish Government and each SCG were agreed.

Local impact

12. SCGs have been active in taking forward the recommendations in the report. Examples of their activity are summarised in Appendix 1. Local Category 1 responders are mainly implementing the recommendations through their local SCGs, however our auditors have also identified actions taken by individual local authorities and NHS boards. For example around two-thirds of NHS boards or their committees either considered or noted the report, and a third are planning to report back on progress.
13. Local authorities have taken the lead on developing SCG training for local authority councillors (including those councillors that serve on fire and rescue authorities and police boards) on their role in an emergency. New training materials have been developed and shared among SCGs and the majority of councils have run awareness raising sessions with elected members. In some areas, these materials are being adapted for use with health board members.
14. In April 2010, the COSLA Community Safety Executive Group considered progress on civil contingencies planning in the light of our report. The discussion focussed on our recommendations around the need for improved business continuity planning, governance and accountability and cross-boundary issues. The Group agreed to a number of actions in relation to these areas.
15. The swine flu pandemic in late 2009 provided a further impetus for Category 1 responders to ensure their business continuity plans were up to date and fit for purpose; and these were further tested during the severe winter weather in early 2010.

Longer-term impact

16. The Scottish Government has worked collaboratively with its partners across the resilience community to address the recommendations in the report. Together they have identified five cross-cutting, strategic themes and have considered these as well as the recommendations. The strategic themes are:
- governance and accountability arrangements
 - funding
 - partnership working
 - measuring preparedness
 - information provision.

17. The Scottish Government is developing a forward planning paper on the future of resilience in Scotland. This is intended to set the direction of travel for addressing some of the remaining strategic issues from *Improving civil contingencies planning*.

Conclusion

18. The report had a significant impact among those involved directly in civil contingencies planning and was welcomed by both practitioners and senior personnel as providing an independent assessment of the current arrangements. In particular, it focussed attention on some of the more difficult areas, such as governance and accountability and value for money, and the Scottish Government recognises these still need to be addressed.

19. In December 2009, the Scottish Government published the findings and recommendations of an independent review of water rescue capability in Scotland.¹ This review made a number of positive references to *Improving civil contingencies planning*, including the following:

It would be redundant to repeat or comment at length on the conclusions of a very helpful document in this deliberately succinct report but I found the audit report had been widely read and positively received.

¹ *Independent Review of Open Water and Flood Rescue in Scotland: a report for the Minister for Community Safety*, Scottish Government, 2009

Appendix 1. Summary of report impact against Audit Scotland’s framework for measuring impact

HOLDING TO ACCOUNT AND HELPING TO IMPROVE	Assurance and accountability	Planning and management	Economy and efficiency	Quality and effectiveness
Impact of report recommendations				
The Scottish Government and Strategic Coordinating Groups partners should agree a standard approach to the sharing of civil contingencies planning information across Scotland.		●	●	●
Strategic Coordinating Groups should review their membership to ensure key organisations are represented appropriately, and work to maximise the benefits of effective joint working, including across SCG boundaries.		●		●
The Scottish Government should review how it engages with those individuals who have day to day responsibility for civil contingencies planning, and ensure that it provides consistent information.		●		●
In consultation with SCG members, the Scottish Government should clarify the governance and accountability arrangements for decisions made by the Strategic Coordinating Groups and for their own role during an emergency.	●	●		
Councils, police forces and fire and rescue services should ensure elected members are aware of their role in an emergency and of developments in civil contingencies planning.	●	●		●
Strategic Coordinating Groups partners and the Scottish Government should work together to ensure that the full potential of Community Risk Registers in informing risk assessment and planning at local and national levels is realised.		●		●
The UK and Scottish governments, Strategic Coordinating Groups and individual organisations , should work together to improve cross-border and cross-boundary planning.		●		●
Local responders should ensure that they have up-to-date emergency and business continuity plans and recovery arrangements, and that staff are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities.	●	●		●

HOLDING TO ACCOUNT AND HELPING TO IMPROVE	Assurance and accountability	Planning and management	Economy and efficiency	Quality and effectiveness
Impact of report recommendations				
Local authorities must ensure they are providing business continuity management advice and assistance to local businesses and voluntary organisations. Strategic Coordinating Group partners should consider how they could add value to this process.		●	●	●
Scottish Government and local responders should work together to improve public awareness of the risks we face and to ensure effective communication procedures are in place during and after an incident.		●		●
Strategic Coordinating Group partners and the Scottish Government should work together to ensure the effective targeting and coordination of exercises and training.		●	●	●
Category 1 responders must ensure they are meeting the statutory requirement to exercise all emergency and business continuity plans.		●		●
Strategic Coordinating Group partners and the Scottish and UK governments should ensure that lessons learned from training and exercising activities are systematically shared and that monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure their effective implementation.		●	●	●
Strategic Coordinating Group partners and the Scottish Government should work together to develop and apply a consistent framework for managing and reporting expenditure to demonstrate value for money, and seek to deliver increased efficiencies and improved resilience through further partnership working.	●	●	●	●
Category 1 and 2 responders should develop formal mutual aid agreements. These agreements should take account of cross-border and cross-boundary arrangements, and the voluntary and private sectors.		●	●	●
Local responders, Strategic Coordinating Groups and the Scottish Government should develop arrangements for managing, monitoring and reporting their performance.	●	●	●	●