



## Appendix 10

## Community Engagement

## **Community Aspects**

As in all aspects of recovery, co-ordination and facilitation will be a key element of the response to community aspects of the Belfast Resilience recovery plan. Therefore Belfast City Council will hope to work in partnership with other relevant agencies to ensure delivery of the recovery aspects of the Resilience Plan. This section of the plan will consider issues relating to community engagement in the recovery process.

The plan will aim to ensure that the recovery response at community level – takes account of and builds on the support that communities and individuals normally prefer to rely on in a crisis

is as simple as possible to understand and access

is piloted and consulted on with the community

## **Public reassurance and confidence**

It is vital to involve the community affected in the recovery process (without causing alarm) from the outset of any emergency to enable a return to normality that is as quick as possible. The public is likely to accept and make allowances normal services needs to be managed effectively and transparently with due consideration given to the wishes of the community.

Much work can be undertaken before an event. The aim is to ensure that the public, in the broadest sense of the word, is informed not only about the emergency planning and recovery arrangements in place in their area, but also about the specific issues that may affect them.

## **Public Meetings/ Workshops**

A public meeting or meetings should be considered at an early stage. Having separate meetings for affected residents and businesses may be useful especially when there are different information requirements. A public meeting should be as structured as possible including up-to-date information on the situation and including senior representatives (i.e. those in a position to make authoritative statements) from all the agencies involved. These representatives should also be clear on the multi-agency strategy, actions and messages.

Workshops or facilitating self-help or interest groups to meet to consider individual or collective issues, ideally held in community facilities, may also be helpful. These meetings and events might also involve specialist agencies. Consideration should be given to establishing neighbourhood forums/drop in points to allow members of the public access to information and assistance on the whole range of problems that they may be experiencing. Focal points for assistance may be based in the communities that have been affected and/or in relocated sites (if appropriate). In some cases consideration should be given to the use of mobile units if other facilities are rendered unusable. In a wide area incident a central location easily accessible by public transport might be established as a one-stop-shop. Staff from a range of different agencies should be available (either by being present or by being contactable and involved) to provide advice and answer questions. The purpose of these arrangements is to provide relevant and timely information about the nature of the unfolding event. This may include –

- Actions being taken by responders to assist the recovery phase;
- Actions the public themselves can take to facilitate the recovery period;
- How further information can be obtained; and
- End of recovery and return to normal arrangements. for a period of disruption whilst the response is on-going. However, expectations will rise as time progresses, and there will be pressure to restore services and demonstrate an adequate and appropriate response.

The benefits of a perceived “good” response can be undermined by poor recovery management. The reconstruction and restoration of amenities and

In this context the following points may arise:

- Information specific to the emergency
- Housing
- Financial
- Health
- Transport
- Employment
- Spiritual
- Insurance
- welfare

Pre-prepared statements may be used to put across information and facts to the media and the public. It is important that spokespersons have the trust of the target audience. Using trusted members of the community and respected individuals will assist in communicating in an effective and helpful manner. If communities have been relocated, action plans will need to be drawn up for the period that they have to be relocated and also as reoccupation takes place. Those affected should be involved in the process of drawing up these actions plans. Children and older people are particularly affected by relocation. Older people lose their support mechanisms such as their neighbours and this may have an impact on their care arrangements. Young people lose access to their local friendship groups.

### **Separate out audiences, e.g. residents, businesses, etc**

In the community aspects of recovery it will be important to ensure that the full range of potential audiences is considered. In some cases the support arrangements will need to be tailored to take account of the varying needs of different aspects of community.

In addition the elected members of the affected community will be undertaking their duty as community representatives to act as a conduit for information between their communities and local responders. As civic leaders, they are involved with many aspects of community life and can provide a focus for gathering community concerns, as well as providing a mechanism for responders to get information out to the public. Therefore, their inclusion in any community discussion is essential.

It is also vital, for economic and social reasons, to establish a pro-active and integrated framework of support to businesses in the affected area.

### **Self-help groups**

It may be helpful to establish a temporary advisory (non-executive) Community Recovery Committee that will bring community concerns and feelings to the attention of the Recovery Co-ordinating Group. Terms of reference of the group should be established (guidance templates available) to avoid confusion about roles and responsibilities. It will be important to provide opportunities for people to talk about their experiences. There will be many organisations able to assist with this and other practical aspects of recovery including Citizens Advice and Community Law Centres, Youth and community workers, primary care trusts, counselling services, Age Concern and so on, many of which will be acting on a voluntary basis.

### **Help-Lines/Information on websites (including overseas incidents affecting local people)**

If a help-line/web-site arrangement is to be put in place, this should be arranged as soon as possible. Planning in advance for this, at the general level, may be very helpful. Much work can be undertaken before an event. This must ensure that the public, in the broadest sense of the word, are informed not only about the emergency planning and recovery arrangements

in place in their area, but also about specific sites or risks that may affect them. Information about help-lines needs to be clear and simple and widely disseminated by a variety of means.

These considerations should also be taken into account when there are overseas incidents affecting local communities.

## **Media**

The media can be very helpful in putting out public information (as is the case during the emergency phase). Close contact needs to be established and maintained with the media. Much of the preparation for this can be discussed and agreed in advance of any incident. The use of smaller local stations should also be considered.

## **VIP visits**

VIP visits are a very likely part of any recovery process. They can present an opportunity for raising awareness, reinforcing messages of thanks, and speeding up some aspects of recovery. They also provide an opportunity to broadcast general messages related to the recovery to the public.

## **Commemoration/Anniversaries/Memorial services/Permanent memorials**

Depending on the nature and severity of the incident, there may be considerable community reaction in the community and the idea of a commemoration in the form of an event or memorial service or longer term permanent memorial may be suggested. The community should be engaged in this process. In addition some of the following points may be appropriate for consideration:-

1. Introducing books of record of condolence
2. Establishing a condolence website
3. Public consultation on memorial design

4. The impact of anniversaries and related support arrangements
5. Support arrangements to deal with reminders and media attention associated with public enquiries or litigation.