



## **Belfast Resilience Forum/Emergency Preparedness Group Progress Report for April 2014 – March 2015**

### **Overview**

The period from April 2014 to March 2015 has been a busy one for Forum members and has been set against a background of change. Several organisations were preparing for the introduction of new organisational structures and boundaries on 1 April 2015 including Belfast City Council, PSNI, NI Housing Executive and Belfast Education & Library Board. New local and sub-regional civil contingencies arrangements were introduced in 2014 to help improve the co-ordination at a local level and in October 2014 Belfast Resilience Forum elected to rebrand itself as Belfast Emergency Preparedness Group (EPG) and adjust its structure to align with the other four Emergency Preparedness Groups outside Belfast.

Irrespective of these changes, members have continued to commit their time to deliver our priorities including reassessing our risks to ensure we are appropriately prioritising our time, updating emergency plans and protocols, delivering and participating in training and exercises and continuing to encourage the public, communities and businesses to be ready for emergencies.

Belfast's reputation as a top venue for events continues to grow and members supported the arrangements for events such as the Giro d'Italia, the Carl Frampton Titanic Boxing Showdown and Red Bull Crashed Ice in addition to the normal range of annual events. Towards the end of the year preparations also began for Tall Ships 2015 with over 500,000 people expected to attend the four day festival in Belfast.

Agencies continued to work together well in response and while the number of incidents was less than previous years, it was noted that there were a number of incidents which required long periods of multi-agency co-ordination including five weeks liaison due to a fire on a cargo ship, NI Water's lead of the multi-agency preparations for internal industrial action which lasted a month and preparations for the risk of Ebola. Emergency plans were also activated for several episodes of flooding leading to 53 homes being internally flooded in Belfast. It was acknowledged that swift action by residents and the combined efforts of a number of agencies helped to save other homes. This once again emphasised the continued importance of supporting our affected communities to develop their community emergency arrangements and the importance of everyone working together. Community resilience continues to be a core priority for Belfast EPG in 2015/16.

### **Priorities**

9 priorities were identified for this period of which 5 (56%) were completed by March 2015. Of the four outstanding priorities, three were near completion at the year end and the final priority was put on hold pending work required internally within an organisation to assess the risk prior to multi-agency work being undertaken.

A key priority for this period was the preparation for Local Government Reform. On 1 April 2015 the boundary of Belfast City Council expanded to take in an additional 53,000 residents, 21,000 households and 1,000 business premises from the North Down, Castlereagh and Lisburn areas. South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust is responsible for some of these areas and engagement was undertaken to ensure that our approaches would align if an incident occurred. Members spent time identifying and learning about the risks in the new areas, engaging with the transferring community resilience groups and updating our plans to include the new areas. We would like to thank everyone who assisted with this significant piece of work.

Other priorities included the routine updating of our multi-agency plans including the Local Risk Assessment which confirmed that our priorities remain appropriate in consideration of our risks. Following the creation of a site specific template emergency plan for Belfast, the River Lagan and Belfast Harbour Emergency/Major Incident Plans were rewritten to follow this new format. The template plan is now available online to assist any site in Belfast to produce their emergency plan.

### **Membership & Structure**

In February 2014 the NI Executive agreed a range of measures to improve local civil contingencies arrangements in Northern Ireland. Key to this was the formal formation of four Emergency Preparedness Groups (EPGs) outside Belfast and Belfast EPG is aligned to these new arrangements. An overarching group known as the Sub Regional Civil Emergency Preparedness Group (SCEP) was also formed to bring together the joint chairs from each of the five Emergency Preparedness Groups to enhance the uniformity of approach at a local level across Northern Ireland. It was recommended that each group aligned its structure and approach and that a range of template emergency plans was produced for adoption in each area. Belfast EPG has therefore restructured as shown in Appendix I and continues to work with the new structures to implement these changes.

The joint chairs of Belfast EPG are Chief Superintendent Nigel Grimshaw from PSNI and Siobhan Toland, Head of Environmental Health/Lead Operations Officer for Health & Environmental Services Departmental from Belfast City Council.

Following these changes a small number of organisations which had regional responsibilities opted to leave the Belfast EPG as they were more appropriately represented elsewhere. We would like to take this opportunity to thank our members from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Civil Contingencies Policy Branch of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister for their help and support over the years.

During the year, we also welcomed Lagan Search & Rescue and the NI 4x4 Response Network to the Voluntary Organisations Working Group of Belfast EPG.

### **Involvement in Regional and National Groups**

Belfast EPG members participate in a wide range of regional and national emergency planning groups to ensure that they keep up to date with best practice. To avoid duplication of effort the Belfast EPG Programme Manager represents the EPG on a number of groups including the:

- Northern Cross Border Forum (brings together representatives from Scotland, North of England and Northern Ireland to share ideas, best practice and support)
- Local Government Emergency Management Group (LGEMG) Tactical Group (this group ceased mid year due to the new regional structures)
- The Implementation & Development Group, which is a sub-group of the Sub-Regional Civil Emergency Preparedness Group
- Regional Community Resilience Group
- Safer Belfast Co-ordination Team.

The Programme Manager also attended the LRF Chairs Conference in Leeds in October 2014 (with Siobhan Toland, the joint chair) and in London in March 2015 to obtain an update on best practices from the Local Resilience Fora from across the United Kingdom.

### **Funding & Expenditure**

The Department of the Environment Local Government Division contributed £50,000 in 2014/15 to employ a programme manager to support the work of Belfast EPG. Unfortunately this funding has been withdrawn for 2015/16. Following Local Government Reform, the new Chief Executives of the eleven Councils have commissioned an independent review of civil contingencies arrangements in local government. It is anticipated that funding and resourcing will be one of the aspects explored.

Belfast EPG does not receive any core funding. When Belfast Resilience Forum was established in 2004 members initially made a contribution for its establishment and the remaining balance at 31 March 2014 was £2,664.89. Due to member organisations contributing to the costs of running various exercises and trainings during the year there was no expenditure from this balance during the year.

### **Multi-Agency Responses & Debriefs**

In this period NI Water managed a period of Industrial Action by their staff as a level 1 emergency. In recognition that a number of incidents occurred which may have met the definition of a major incident but no formal declaration was made, statistics are now also being collected regarding incidents which have led to the emergency plans of a number of agencies being activated. There have been three occasions during this period when this has occurred due to flooding.

48 incidents required a multi-agency response in Belfast during the period:

- 30 security alerts for which 13 emergency rest centres were opened to accommodate 37 people<sup>1</sup> (a further 9 emergency rest centres were placed on standby)
- 5 flooding incidents including a coastal flood warning and three incidents which led to 53 homes being internally flooded
- 5 transport incidents including an off airfield incident due to an inbound plane reporting an engine on fire
- 3 fires including one on board an inbound ship carrying grain which led to a protracted multi-agency response

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<sup>1</sup> This number does not include all centres opened by the community where statistics would not have been gathered

- 5 other incidents including Industrial Action by NI Water staff, preparation for the risk of Ebola, a potential public disorder incident, a void in an arterial route leading to a road closure and a carbon monoxide incident which required a rest centre.

It is important that EPG members continue to learn from past incidents and while no incident was formally debriefed in Belfast in this period, eleven incidents were discussed by the working groups within the forum to capture what went well and any actions required to improve responses in the future.

### **Event Planning & Response**

The Belfast EPG Programme Manager continues to produce an events list for Belfast each month and this is shared with Forum members to assist their planning.

During the course of the period pre-designated emergency arrangements were prepared for:

- 59 cruise ship visits
- Giro d'Italia cycling event in May 2014
- Tennent's Vital in August 2014
- Carl Frampton Titanic Boxing Showdown in September 2014
- Red Bull Crashed Ice in February 2015.

Work also began on the preparations for Tall Ships 2015 including preparing a multi-agency exercise to test the structures and arrangements for the event which will bring an estimated 500,000 people to Belfast over the four days and a further 500,000 to watch the Tall Ships Parade as the ships leave to start their race.

Multi-agency co-ordinating groups were also established to facilitate multi-agency working for a number of events including the Giro d'Italia, a potentially contentious parade in August 2014, the Christmas Lights switch on in November 2014 and St Patrick's Day in March 2015.

### **Key Deliverables – Awareness raising and Community Resilience**

Improving emergency preparedness has always been a priority. In this period a number of activities were undertaken to enhance this work:

- B prepared events: These are run for local businesses to promote emergency and business continuity planning and also to raise any topical issues such as upcoming events or new risks. Following last year's events for nursing/residential homes the Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority asked to work in partnership to deliver a Northern Ireland wide event and 163 attended on 20 November 2014.
- Working with the Older People's Winter Preparedness Group to ensure that key preparedness advice is given via all the agencies. Attending the winter sessions for older people to provide advice directly to the public and to give out Household Emergency Life-saving Plans.
- Providing advice and support to Invest NI, Clanmil Housing Association and Belfast Metropolitan College regarding their business continuity and emergency plans.
- Providing awareness raising talks to groups including Belfast Metropolitan College students, Environmental Health students and US Consulate Staff.

Following the establishment of the Regional Community Resilience Group in January 2013, Forum members worked with two local communities in the Sydenham and Finaghy areas to support them to develop their local community emergency plan. Unfortunately the Finaghy area experienced flooding shortly after their community emergency plan was developed but the next local meeting gave residents an opportunity to discuss how the plan had worked and what improvements were needed. In April 2014 the pilot areas from Castlereagh (Cregagh and Braniel) transferred to Belfast under Local Government Reform. Belfast representatives began liaison with residents in the run up to the transfer to help aid the transition. At the time of writing this report community emergency plans have been completed in Sydenham, Finaghy and Braniel and the Cregagh plan is in draft. In 2015/16 British Red Cross will lead a programme of work to engage with local residents and undertake a walkthrough of each plan to ensure they are fit for purpose. Work is also beginning in relation to engaging with residents in the Finaghy Road North area to see if they would like to develop a community emergency plan for their area and the Sydenham area are developing a pilot Flood Warden Scheme.

### **Key Deliverables – Exercises and familiarisation sessions**

To ensure that everyone can work together in emergencies, the EPG runs annual familiarisation sessions and exercises. In this period, an Emergency Support Centre familiarisation session was held on 21 October 2014 with approximately 45 attendees and a Harbour Familiarisation Session was held on 5 November 2014 with 31 attendees.

There were also a number of multi-agency exercises organised by members:

- George Best Belfast City Airport ran their bi-annual exercise in September 2014
- The Odyssey ran a workshop and exercise to test their plans in September 2014
- MoD ran their bi-annual Command and Staff Training in January 2015.

### **Key priorities for the year ended 31 March 16**

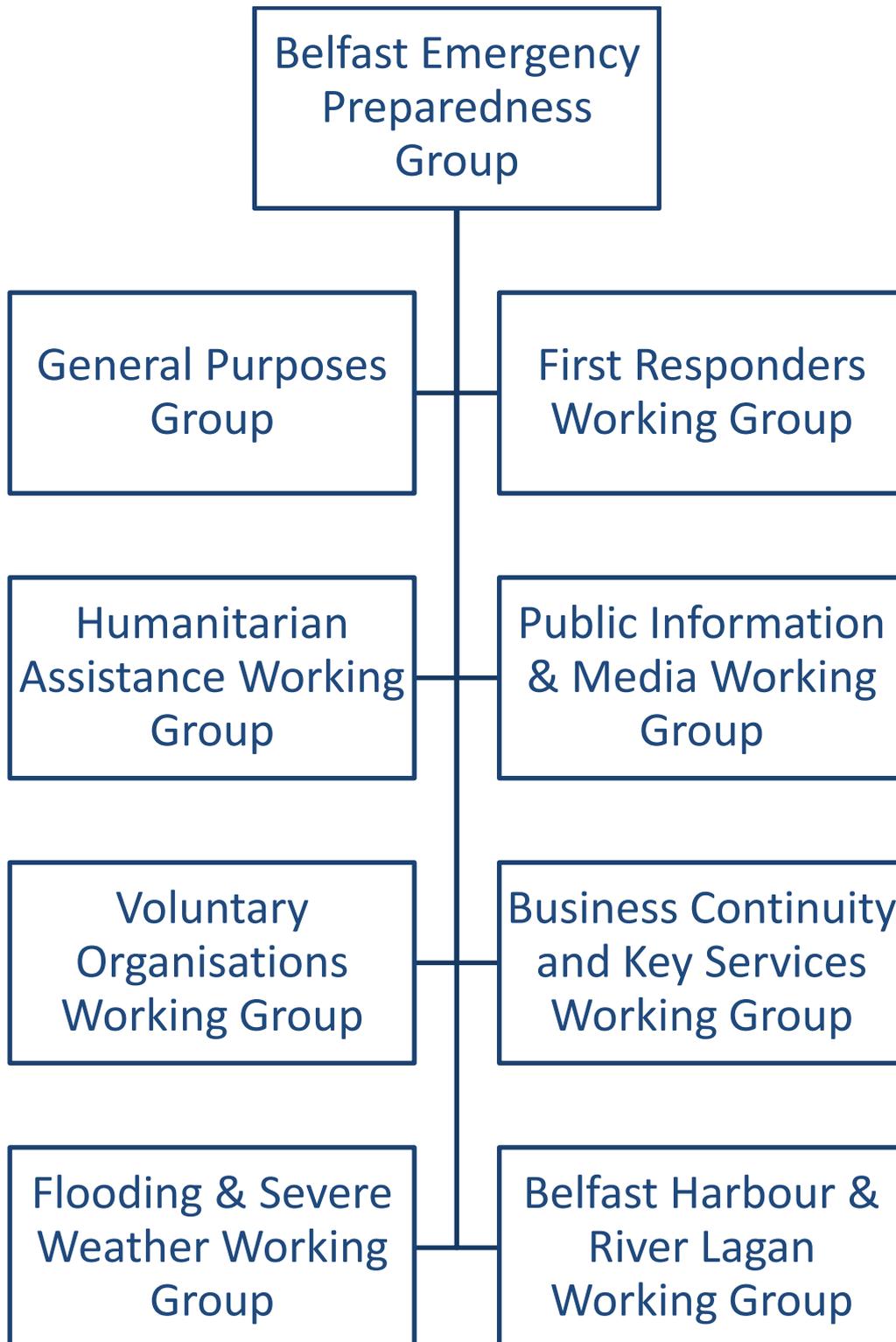
The Belfast EPG has now set the priorities for the next year which include:

- Finalisation of additional emergency support centre arrangements for Belfast City Centre
- Finalising the support arrangements in relation to the deployment of the national and local resilience mortuary arrangements in a mass fatality incident
- Finalisation of the Belfast Coastal Flood Response Plan
- Supporting the emergency preparation for Tall Ships 2015
- Producing River Telemetry Alert Protocols for each of the telemetry locations in Belfast
- Creating a template business continuity/emergency plan for nursing and residential homes
- Continuing to work with local communities to develop community emergency plans.

Members also continue to support the formation of the new sub-regional emergency arrangements and template plans for use across all the Emergency Preparedness Groups in Northern Ireland.

**Belfast Emergency Preparedness Group Programme Manager  
July 2015**

**Appendix I – Belfast Emergency Preparedness Group Structure**



## Appendix II

### Summary of incident statistics compiled by Belfast Resilience: April 2011 to Mar 2015

	<b>Apr 2011 – Mar 12</b>	<b>Apr 2012 – Mar 2013</b>	<b>Apr 2013- Mar 2014</b>	<b>Apr 2014- Mar 2015</b>
<b>Security alerts</b>	48	49	68	30
<b>Weather related incidents</b>	4	7	10	5
<b>Fire</b>	1	5	2	3
<b>Transport related</b>	4	1	1	5
<b>Public disorder/protests</b>	4	14	9	1
<b>Other</b>	4	3	9	4
<b>Total</b>	65	79	99	48
<b>Rest centres opened</b>	27	25	40	14
<b>Rest centre on standby</b>	6	9	9	9
<b>Approximate number attended rest centres <sup>2</sup></b>	317	132	446	38
<b>Declared major incidents</b>	1	2	2	0
<b>Emergency plans activated on a multi-agency basis<sup>3</sup></b>	-	-	-	4
<b>Formal debriefs conducted</b>	3	2	4	0
<b>Incidents discussed by a Working Group to determine any recommendations</b>	7	10	13	11

<sup>2</sup> Figures are approximate as statistics are not held on rest centres opened by the community

<sup>3</sup> Activation of emergency plans only recorded from 2014/15