

## **Belfast Emergency Preparedness Group Progress Report for April 2015 – March 2016**

### **Overview**

2015-2016 was a period of transition for Belfast Emergency Preparedness Group (EPG). Following Local Government Reform on 1 April 2015, preparation then began for the reform of central government departments in May 2016 and a review of all the multi-agency plans was carried out to ensure that they remained appropriate. This was a significant undertaking and thanks is given to all those who continue to support this work.

The period was particularly busy in terms of incidents and events and ongoing training, familiarisation and community engagement work continued in the background. Work commenced on a number of areas to try to improve preparedness and communication in practical terms and we are grateful for the assistance which agencies provided to progress the following areas:

- The commencement of work to update the emergency information on the NI Direct website
- The use of the Cabinet Office platform Resilience Direct for sharing information between agencies; and
- The continued development of a multi-agency GIS platform for sharing information in emergencies under the lead of Land and Property Services.

### **Priorities**

Six priorities were identified for 2015/16 of which four (67%) were completed by year end. This included:

- Developing additional pre-designated emergency support centre capacity for the Titanic Quarter and Belfast City Centre
- Creating the Belfast Coastal Flood Response Plan
- Supporting the preparation for the Tall Ships event including production of pre-designated emergency arrangements
- Producing River Telemetry Alert Protocols for the various river telemetry stations around Belfast.

The remaining two priorities which related to the development of supporting arrangements for the national resilience mortuary and template plans for nursing/residential homes were carried forward to the next period.

### **Membership & Structure**

Due to the new Belfast City Council boundaries we welcomed South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust to Belfast EPG. Samaritan's Purse and Save the Children also joined 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)

- Regional Community Resilience Group
- Local Resilience Forum Chairs Conferences
- The Implementation & Development Group of the Civil Contingencies Group (NI) Sub-Group: Sub-Regional Civil Emergency Preparedness
- Safer Belfast Co-ordination Team.

### **Funding & Expenditure**

To support the work of Belfast EPG, the Department of the Environment (now Department for Communities) Local Government Division has contributed to the salary costs of the Belfast EPG programme manager since 2009. While this funding was initially withdrawn at the beginning of the 2015/16, it was reinstated in December 2015.

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.

In September 2015 the Independent Review of Civil Contingencies Arrangements in Local Government was completed and the recommendations were agreed via the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives in Northern Ireland including the requirement for recurrent ring-fenced funding for EPG support. The mechanism to deliver the recommendations of the review is currently under discussion.

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

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

- 40 security alerts for which 36 emergency rest centres were opened to accommodate 32 people<sup>1</sup> (a further emergency rest centre was placed on standby). One involved the full evacuation of a school and the invocation of their emergency arrangements to have the children collected.
- 2 flooding incidents which were declared major incidents and involved the activation of regional teleconference arrangements (one of which resulted in 3 homes flooding in Belfast and the closure of Victoria Park due to the potential threat of inundation)
- 4 fires including the evacuation of a block of flats, 350 people from an oil rig, 40 residents due to an oil tank on fire which destroyed three houses and an acetylene cylinder incident
- 3 transport incidents including a cruise ship which was became damaged on route to Belfast leading to the repatriation of 400 passengers, a search and rescue response to a person who went overboard from a ferry and a precautionary emergency landing of a plane with a technical problem at Belfast International Airport which also required George Best Belfast City Airport to declare a full emergency
- 4 other incidents including the emergency demolition of an unsafe building, a public health response to an outbreak of pneumococcal disease, providing assistance to residents in their homes following a power outage and a protracted confined space rescue from the hold of a ship.

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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

In addition Belfast EPG agreed that recording near misses provides valuable learning and this began to be monitored. There was one reported near miss during the period which involved the controlled grounding of a ship which experienced engine failure to prevent a larger incident occurring.

It is important that EPG members continue to learn from past incidents. Two incidents were formally debriefed during the period and seventeen incidents were discussed by the EPG working groups to capture what went well and any actions required to improve responses in the future. As a result of recommendations from debriefs a number of actions were progressed:

- A protocol was developed for Victoria Park to agree when and how it would be closed if there was a risk of tidal inundation
- Glenmachen Church of God was added as an emergency support centre location.

In December 2015 the first group of Syrian refugees arrived in Belfast. EPG members supported the initial preparations and the EPG programme manager conducted the debrief of the first arrival to aid lessons learned for the arrival of subsequent groups.

### **Event Planning & Response**

The Belfast EPG Programme Manager continues to produce an events list for Belfast each month and this is shared with EPG members to assist their planning. It is also now placed on the public website to enable businesses to horizon scan for events which may require business continuity planning.

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

- 56 cruise ship visits
- Giro d'Italia Gran Fondo cycling event in June 2015
- Tall Ships in July 2015
- Tennent's Vital in August 2015
- BBC Sports Personality of the Year in December 2015.

Multi-agency co-ordinating groups were also established to facilitate multi-agency working for a number of events including the Giro d'Italia Gran Fondo, Tall Ships, BBC Sports Personality of the Year and St Patrick's Day in March 2016.

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

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

- Attending the 'meet and greet' sessions for members of the public from the new areas which have become part of Belfast City Council and promoting emergency preparedness
- 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 and running an exercise for Belfast Metropolitan College regarding their business continuity and emergency plans.
- Providing awareness raising talks to groups including Belfast Metropolitan College students.

In 2015/16 British Red Cross received EU funding to undertake a Community Resilience in Urban Areas project. The Red Cross led the multi-agency group to engage with residents in the Orchardville area to produce a community emergency plan.

### **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:

- 27 people attended emergency support centre training on 22 June 2015
- 20 people attended the harbour familiarisation tour on 16 September 2015
- 13 people attended a Raynet familiarisation training on 18 November 2015.

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

- A Tall Ships exercise was held on 12 May 2015
- NI Water ran an exercise on a freeze-thaw scenario on 13 October 2015.

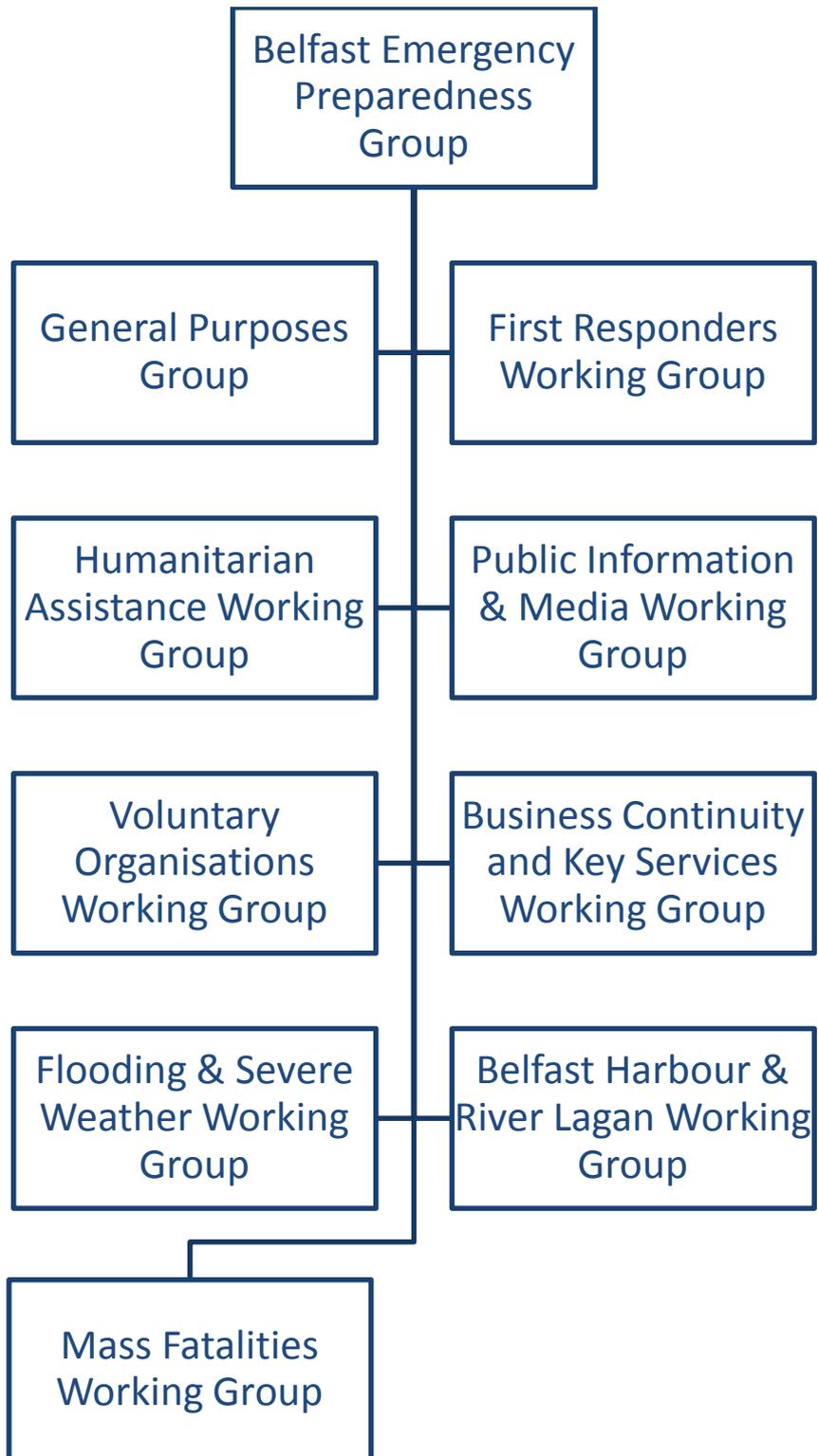
### **Key priorities for the year ended 31 March 17**

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

- Supporting the creation and reproduction of a number of plans as regional EPG plans including the Mass Fatality Plan, Public Information & Media Plan, Recovery Plan and First Responders Framework
- Multi-agency familiarisation sessions and exercising of the new EPG plans
- Creating a template plan for sharing with nursing/residential homes
- Updating the Belfast Flood Plan including river telemetry plans
- Updating the Emergency Support Centres plan including risk assessment arrangements and completion of site specific templates for key buildings
- Supporting the review and exercising of the offsite plans for the Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) sites in Belfast
- Reviewing the Cruise Ship Emergency Plan
- Scoping the requirements of the new Reservoirs Bill
- Progressing the development of the Belfast Mass Evacuation Plan.

**Belfast Emergency Preparedness Group Programme Manager  
November 2016**

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



## Appendix II

### Summary of incident statistics compiled by Belfast EPG: April 2011 to Mar 2016

	Apr 11 – Mar 12	Apr 12 – Mar 13	Apr 13- Mar 14	Apr 14- Mar 15	Apr 15- Mar 16
<b>Security alerts</b>	48	49	68	30	40
<b>Weather related incidents</b>	4	7	10	5	2
<b>Fire</b>	1	5	2	3	4
<b>Transport related</b>	4	1	1	5	3
<b>Public disorder/protests</b>	4	14	9	1	0
<b>Other</b>	4	3	9	4	4
<b>Total</b>	65	79	99	48	53
<b>Near miss<sup>2</sup></b>					1
<b>Rest centres opened</b>	27	25	40	14	36
<b>Rest centre on standby</b>	6	9	9	9	1
<b>Approximate number attended rest centres <sup>3</sup></b>	317	132	446	38	32
<b>Declared major incidents</b>	1	2	2	0	2
<b>Emergency plans activated on a multi-agency basis<sup>4</sup></b>	-	-	-	4	0
<b>Formal debriefs conducted</b>	3	2	4	0	2
<b>Incidents discussed by a Working Group to determine any recommendations</b>	7	10	13	11	17

<sup>2</sup> Near misses have only been recorded since 2015/16

<sup>3</sup> Figures are approximate as statistics are not held on rest centres opened by the community

<sup>4</sup> Activation of emergency plans only recorded from 2014/15