INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE PAPER

The Role of Local Authority Fire Services in Emergency Planning

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## List of Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>CDEC</td>
<td>Singapore Civil Defence Executive Committees</td>
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<td>EP</td>
<td>Emergency planning</td>
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<td>SCDF</td>
<td>Singapore Civil Defence Force</td>
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<td>UK</td>
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<td>USA</td>
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Abstract

Differing emergency planning (EP) delivery arrangements presently exist in England and Wales. In some of those arrangements, fire services play a pivotal leading role. In others their role is peripheral.

This project sought to explore what the best practice role of local authority fire services might be. The research is timely, as a new civil protection framework is expected to be enacted by the United Kingdom (UK) Parliament sometime during 2003.

The research found that EP needs to be pursued in an integrated manner but that no particular model of service delivery can achieve that end. Local solutions, which fit local circumstances, are required.

It was found that fire services have the potential to contribute to EP in a number of ways. In particular, they are well placed to develop community schemes which promote social cohesion, and which encourage citizens to play a part in, and take a measure of responsibility for civil resilience.
1 Background to the Investigation

In August 2001 central government published a discussion paper as part of a review of EP arrangements in England and Wales (Cabinet Office, 2001). In December 2002 the Bain Review Team (Bain, 2002) published its final report on UK fire services, a report that had been commissioned by central government as a result of industrial action being taken by the Fire Brigades Union.

Each document suggested that its respective sphere of service delivery is presently underpinned by outdated legislation that provides an inadequate framework for the delivery of modern public services. It therefore appears probable, that in the near future, the legislative basis of EP and fire services will fundamentally change, along with the focus, measurement and assessment of their activities.

The change process in both services takes place against the backdrop of a UK threat profile that has been markedly altered by the 11th September terrorist attacks upon the United States of America (USA).

In some parts of England and Wales the local fire service plays a pivotal, even leading role in EP, whilst in others areas the fire service’s role is largely peripheral. This research project therefore explores what might be the best practice role for local fire services in emergency planning. More particularly, it examines whether EP in England and Wales is best delivered when the function sits under the organisational umbrella of local authority fire services.

2 Hypotheses

Having noted the absence of a best practice role for local authority fire services in the EP function, the following hypotheses were developed to give a focus to the research:

- Placing the EP responsibilities of higher-tier English and Welsh authorities, such as shire counties under the organisational umbrella of local authority fire brigades will:
  1. bring additional resources to bear during pre-incident assessment, prevention, and planning activities through the utilisation of fire brigade risk-management skills and processes
  2. provide a faster and weightier EP response to incidents

3 Objectives

The general focus provided by the hypotheses was used as a basis to develop the following research objectives:

1. Current, EP arrangements in England and Wales will be surveyed
2. Proposals emanating from the Cabinet Office EP Review (Cabinet Office, 2001) will be analysed
3. Issues impacting upon the delivery of EP will be identified
4. Alternative methods of delivering EP will be explored through:
   a. an international study
b. a study of existing arrangements in the UK

5. Stakeholder experiences will be captured, and their views will be solicited regarding suitable arrangements for the future

6. Conclusions will be drawn from the research, and recommendations made as appropriate

4 Research Activities

The project utilises four distinct research activities:

1. A literature review, which continued in an iterative manner throughout much of the project’s life

2. A postal survey questionnaire to local authorities in England and Wales

3. Semi-structured interviews to capture the experiences and views of stakeholders and subject specialists

4. A case study of the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF)

5 Literature Review

It was learnt that ‘as a result of technical progress, developed societies have become more vulnerable to attack’ (Laqueur’s 2001, p.73), and that the world is now seeing ‘a new kind of terrorist driven by fanaticism and hatred rather than limited political objectives’ (Hoge and Rose’s 2001, p.x)

Work that is ongoing in response to the new threats was explored. Of particular note is:

- the UK objective to produce a single framework for dealing with all forms of disruptive challenge to modern society (Cabinet Office, 2001)

- the USA homeland security concept (The Whitehouse website), which aims to coordinate all federal government terrorist prevention activities, and which works with state governments on allied matters

- the US Citizen Corps programme (Citizen Corps website), which has been established to promote a range of measures to make communities safer from the threats of crime, terrorism, and disasters.

Literature was reviewed which emphasised the required breadth of EP. A breadth that should encompasses the actual writing, revision, and activation of emergency plans; which should make use of a wide variety of techniques (Alexander, 2002); and which should bring together the normal endeavours of government, voluntary and private agencies in a comprehensive, coordinated manner (EMA - Emergency Management Australia website).

6 Postal Survey Questionnaire

Responses from district councils, county councils and unitary councils were separated into three distinct data sets. It was found that a variety of differing arrangements for delivering EP services existed within each of the three data sets, but that no one model appeared to be particular favoured above others.
Figures 1 – 4 plot the results of the postal survey attitudinal questions. Question responses with a higher mean value (nearer the outer perimeter of the charts) record a less positive attitude to a question statement. Those with a lower mean value (nearer the centre of the chart) record a more positive response.

Figure 1 illustrates that respondents reported positively on a variety of issues such as the post-incident ‘response’ type questions. Other questions, including for example, business continuity planning (Q3.13), training for elected members (3.10), and the planning (Q4.4) and monitoring (Q4.7) of the EP function were reported less positively.

Figure 2 separates the responses by type of authority. The reporting of the post-incident ‘response’ type questions is markedly positive for county, district and unitary councils. However, for London Boroughs, and Metropolitan (non-London) Boroughs, those questions were reported much less positively. Qualitative statements in the general comments section of completed questionnaires help explain these findings. They indicate that such matters come largely within the remit of the lower-tier boroughs. It would appear that respondents therefore tended to feel that those questions demanded a less positive score, as the questions were seeking views about the contribution made by higher-tier authorities.

Figure 3 replicates the county council and district council responses from figure 2. The results are of interest because county and district councils both operate within the two-tier shire county governance model. District council respondents are therefore, in the main being asked to comment on services delivered by the county council, whereas county council respondents are, in the main, being asked to comment on services delivered by their own authority. The results tend to suggest a more positive view towards service delivery by those with direct ownership of those services.

Figure 4 separates the responses by the job role of the respondent. The marginally, but none-the-less distinctively more positive views of the Chief/County EP Officers is worthy of note, reflecting again the observation made above about ownership of responsibilities.
FIGURE 1: QUESTIONNAIRE – ALL RESPONSES

- 3.1 Up to date statutory plans
- 3.2 Planning for local hazards
- 3.3 Statutory plans exercised
- 3.4 Non-stat plans exercised
- 3.5 Services participation in plan exercises
- 3.6 Vol organisation participation in plan exercises
- 3.7 Other agency participation in plan exercises
- 3.8 Exercise lessons into plans
- 3.9 Incident lessons into plans
- 3.10 Training for elected members
- 3.11 Training for partner agencies
- 4.10 Training delivered effectively
- 4.11 Communicationss betw een agencies
- 4.12 Structures to meet duties
- 4.13 Structures for continuous improvement
- 4.14 Info systems to enhance decision making
- 4.15 Business planning of EP
- 4.16 Monitoring of EP function
- 4.17 Training policies
- 4.18 All Responses (n=249)

- 4.8 Risk identification
- 4.9 Plans that fully prepare responders
- 4.10 Operational info gathering

- 3.14.1 Response to flooding
- 3.14.2 Response to severe weather
- 3.14.3 Response to chemicals
- 3.14.4 Response to 'off site' plan initiation
- 3.14.5 Response to general emergency

- 3.15.1 Rest centres
- 3.15.2 Temp mortuary facilities
- 3.15.3 Emergency feeding

- 3.16 EP mobilising / comms
FIGURE 2: QUESTIONNAIRE – RESPONSES BY TYPE OF AUTHORITY

- Not significant (p = 0.10)
- Not significant (p = 0.13)
- Not significant (p = 0.16)
FIGURE 3: QUESTIONNAIRE – COUNTY COUNCIL & DISTRICT COUNCIL RESPONSES

- Not significant (p = 0.16)
- Not significant (p = 0.10)
- Not significant (p = 0.13)

- EP training policies
- Monitoring of EP function
- Business planning of EP
- Information systems to enhance decision making
- Management structures for continuous improvement
- Management structures to meet duties
- Communications between agencies
- EP mobilising / communications
- Emergency feeding
- Temporary mortuary facilities
- Rest centres
- Response to general emergency
- Response to 'off site' plan initiation
- Response to chemicals
- Response to severe weather
- Response to flooding
FIGURE 4: QUESTIONNAIRE – RESPONSES BY JOB ROLE

- Not significant (p = 0.19)
- Not significant (p = 0.12)
- Not significant (p = 0.10)
- Not significant (p = 0.09)
- Not significant (p = 0.09)
- Not significant (p = 0.52)

- Chief/County EP Officer (n = 32)
- EP Manager (n = 33)
- EP Officer (n = 63)
- District Council EP Liaison Officer (n = 78)
- London or non-London Metropolitan Borough EP Liaison Officer (n = 4)
- Some other role (n = 37)
7 Semi-structured Interviews

Interviewees generally displayed a broad awareness of the risks that need to be guarded against. During the discussion of such matters, EP practitioners tended to articulate a number of common concerns, which included:

- the sustainability of the EP response during a long running incident
- dwindling financial resources
- lack of progress with business continuity planning

Questionnaire respondents and interviewees provided personal summaries of the EP service delivery responsibilities of their local authorities. A consolidated picture was consequently formed in which it emerged that:

- unitary councils are generally responsible for the entire EP function in their areas
- in a two-tier shire county the county council EP unit’s duties will typically include most of the formal planning and training, together with the initiation of the EP response. During an incident, a District Council EP Liaison Officer will typically mobilise local resources to support the community with temporary housing, feeding and other basic necessities.
- a similar apportionment of duties to that which takes place in shire counties also occurs in:
  - London, between the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority and London Boroughs
  - other metropolitan conurbations, between a Metropolitan Fire and Civil Defence Authority and the Boroughs

Of the many EP service delivery solutions reported by interviewees and questionnaire respondents, a number in some way brought EP units and fire services together. They ranged from The EP Unit sitting inside the fire service for administrative purposes only, to the wholesale integration of the EP unit as an integral part of the fire service. A wide variety of inter-agency partnership arrangements to support service delivery were also reported.

Information was provided by respondents as to progress being made with a draft Civil Contingencies Bill. It is expected to be published some time around May/June 2003. The bill will designate two distinct categories of organisation. Both categories are likely to be required to share information, and co-operate on civil contingency issues. Additionally, category one organisations are likely to be obliged to risk assess, plan, develop capabilities, mitigate risk, respond and warn the public. Fire services are likely to be designated as category one organisations.

The government offices of the regions have a remit for EP. Amongst questionnaire respondents and interviewees, there appeared to be a discernable expectation that this regional EP capability would be progressively developed over the coming years, and some articulated support for such an approach.

A variety of initiatives were strongly championed by EP stakeholders as requiring action. They included:

- business continuity planning
- public educational programmes
- training and exercising regimes
- compiling registers of local risks

In the main, EP practitioners supported the retention of EP services within tradition local authority EP Units. Where comments were received which supported this project’s hypotheses they tended to come from fire officers, or EP practitioners who worked in a fire service domain.

A number of comments were received which argued that the police constabularies, rather than fire services, might be a more natural home for EP. Other respondents maintained that the key to successful EP is to make sure that it is integrated across all partner agencies. They also felt that, where EP sits organisationally, is much less important than how all the organisations relate to each other.

8 Case Study

The SCDF has a much broader remit than any single UK blue light service, for it is the nation’s first responder organisation within a multi-layered ‘total defence’ concept (Total Defence Online). The five main elements of Singaporean ‘total defence’ are:

1. military defence
2. civil defence
3. economic defence (industrial co-operation, economic contingency planning and the stockpiling of reserves)
4. social defence (maintaining religious and racial harmony, and citizens supporting one another)
5. psychological defence (patriotic loyalty and pride)

The SCDF is organised on military lines. Its principal management structure is illustrated in figure 5 and its divisional structure is illustrated in figure 6
FIGURE 5: SCDF COMMAND STRUCTURE

FIGURE 6: SCDF DIVISIONAL STRUCTURE
There are three categories of SCDF personnel:

- Active National Service personnel who serve on fire stations for 2 or 2.5 years
- Reservist personnel who have completed their active service, but who are committed to the SCDF reserve until they are middle aged
- Regular personnel who are recruited within a two-tier entry system to junior officer and officer ranks

The SCDF have also recruited 60,000 civil defence volunteers. They receive basic training in first aid, food distribution and fire safety. There is not a particularly strong volunteer ethos in Singapore. Consequently, the recruitment and retention of civil defence volunteers is challenging.

A network of local Civil Defence Executive Committees (CDECs) maintains links between the SCDF and the volunteers. The SCDF collate statistics for each electoral area and flag up trends to the local CDEC. Each CDEC runs its own self-help programme, which is shaped to the risk profile of the area.

The SCDF operate a ‘Community Safety and Security Programme’, with associated awards and other incentives. They aim to have at least one member of every household trained in basic civil defence skills.

Singapore is seen as maintaining arguably one of the most robust domestic defence systems in the world. However, Jane’s (2002) Chem-Bio Web, takes the view that other nations would be ‘hard pressed to emulate the Singaporean model’, because much of its success is built upon the small size of the nation and its particularly robust security laws.

9 Conclusions

The post-cold war world is unstable, and western nations are vulnerable by virtue of their technological sophistication. To be effective in such an environment, EP needs to be delivered as an integrated emergency management system, which brings together the endeavours of public agencies, other organisations and private citizens.

Postal survey questionnaire results suggest that business continuity planning, training of elected members and monitoring of the EP function are areas of service delivery that merit further development. Whilst fire services have a part to play in such matters, no material evidence was gathered which suggested that the EP function needs, as a matter of course, to reside within fire services in order to pursue them.

Questionnaire respondents did not appear to view any particular model of EP service delivery significantly more positively than others.

Under a new civil contingencies bill, Fire Services are likely to be designated as category one organisations with attendant responsibility to risk assess, plan, develop capabilities, mitigate risk, respond, warn the public, share information and co-operate with other organisations.

The government offices of the regions have a remit for EP. If a civil contingencies bill does transpire, the resulting framework is therefore likely to bring many fire services in close, material contact with regional governance for the first time.

Some facets of the civil, economic and social elements of the Singaporean ‘total defence’ doctrine provide a powerful framework for shaping UK fire services’ wider
community safety vision. Concepts that might, with modification be adopted in the UK include:

- the use of volunteer schemes
- committee structures and award schemes, to facilitate and encourage participation in volunteer schemes
- targets/aspirations to have at least one member of every household trained in basic civil emergency skills
- programmes that promote and facilitate religious and racial harmony under the banner of ‘social defence’

Fire services should not presume that engaging volunteers in local resilience programmes would necessarily fail through a lack of public support. The overall volume of public involvement in volunteering schemes in the UK, and the success of the Singaporean Civil Defence Volunteer scheme, gives reason to be optimistic.

The findings from the research activities failed to generate a body of evidence that proved the research hypotheses. The evidence instead, tended rather to support non-prescriptive, local delivery arrangements, matched to local circumstances.

10 Recommendations

1. Action should not be taken to impose a single EP service delivery model in England and Wales. Instead, local solutions, which fit local circumstances, should be applauded.

2. Unless the final shape of the forthcoming national civil contingency framework militates against it, UK fire services should, in full consultation with their local partners, actively consider developing community schemes to promote civil resilience. The civil, social, and economic elements of the ‘total defence’ concept should be informally utilised to help generate creative public programmes.

3. Encouraging private citizens to play a part in, and take responsibility for, community resilience should be a theme of emergent schemes. Initiatives might include:
   - the evolution of home fire safety visits to include advice on civil protection issues (family disaster supply kits, family disaster plans, and other measures)
   - supporting and facilitating business continuity planning
   - developing and delivering programmes to promote racial and religious harmony
   - the establishment of volunteer schemes
   - supporting volunteer schemes by facilitating the establishment of citizen led steering committees
   - making community fire stations available as a resource for voluntary schemes

4. A civil contingencies bill is likely to be published in draft form some time in 2003. Fire Services should therefore begin preparatory planning:
   - for the additional responsibilities that are likely to fall to them
- to prepare their community safety management information systems for possible integration with those of partner agencies
- to develop a meaningful relationship with their respective government offices of the regions

5. Once the proposed legislation is enacted, and once the post-industrial dispute form and function of UK fire services is known, further research should take place as necessary, in order to more explicitly shape the role of fire services in EP.

6. Fire services should develop a vision, whereby civil contingency aspects of their work are seen as integral facets of their community safety role, and which are only one part of an integrated civil resilience partnership involving public agencies, other organisations and private citizens.
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