



Planning to save:

case studies of efficient emergency planning and response

Foreword

In my role in the Local Government Group and as Leader of Scarborough Council, I know how important it is that local authorities prepare for and can respond to a wide variety of potential emergencies, from flooding and severe weather to animal disease and pandemic flu outbreaks. When emergencies occur, councils provide visible community leadership and a strong knowledge of their own locality.

Emergency planners play a vital role in councils across the country. They work closely with other local partners to ensure that effective plans are in place for all types of emergency. When major incidents happen, they coordinate the council's involvement in response and recovery operations, from keeping the public informed to providing rest centres and alternative accommodation. We simply could not cope with emergencies without them.

A lot of hard work has gone into developing professional, efficient and effective services which meet local needs in planning for, responding to and recovering from emergencies. As a result of the cuts to local authority budgets announced in the spending review, it will be more difficult for councils to sustain services at their current levels and meet their statutory responsibilities in relation to emergencies.

This booklet provides case studies that illustrate the action that local authorities and their partners have taken in three areas to achieve savings in emergency planning while continuing to deliver high quality services:

1. Shared emergency planning services
2. Information management and analysis
3. Communicating with the public.

We hope that these examples will give you some ideas of activity and efficiencies you might want to pursue in your authority.



Cllr Tom Fox,
Leader, Scarborough Council
Emergency Planning Champion, Safer and Stronger Communities Programme Board,
Local Government Group

Local authorities have a crucial role to play in preparing for, responding to and recovering from emergencies and supporting that capability remains a Government priority. Fulfilment of your Civil Contingencies Act duties is an important building block for ensuring the UK is resilient to the full range of threats and hazards.

We recognise that every community has its own priorities. Every organisation has its own competing demands. Every senior manager has their own choices, often difficult. But, as you know better than many, severe weather, disease outbreaks and flooding can, and do, happen in any location, turning the lives of communities upside down. In addition, the financial and reputational implications of insufficient planning can be enormous.

I am aware that local authorities across the country take their emergency planning responsibilities very seriously and that there are numerous examples of councils that have developed innovative approaches to planning for, responding to and recovering from emergencies. The Government will continue to provide support where appropriate, championing innovation that helps you deliver efficiencies, such as the National Resilience Extranet. I am delighted that the Local Government Group has decided to publish these case studies, which we hope will stimulate discussion about how authorities can continue to work efficiently and effectively in future.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the invaluable role you play.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christina Scott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christina Scott

Director, Civil Contingencies Secretariat,
Cabinet Office

Sharing services between councils

Humber Emergency Planning Services – sharing services between unitary councils produces huge savings

The Humber Emergency Planning Service (HEPS) provides a joint service to the four councils in the Humber area (East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Hull City Council, North East Lincolnshire Council and North Lincolnshire Council). It employs 14 members of staff who are based in offices owned by the lead authority, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, but are designated to particular local authorities and spend about 70 per cent of their time working there.

Through sharing their emergency planning services, the four councils have achieved total savings of £240,000 per annum whilst maintaining a service which meets local needs.

Some of these savings come from sharing learning across the councils, which is helped by the fact that they are all unitary authorities and so have similar structures and emergency response arrangements. For example, the lessons learnt by one council in the Humber area on business continuity management have been shared through training sessions delivered by the joint service.

The unit has also achieved savings through standardising approaches across the sub-region, including delivering training across the four councils and developing an emergency plan template, which saves time and helps to ensure that all plans are compatible.

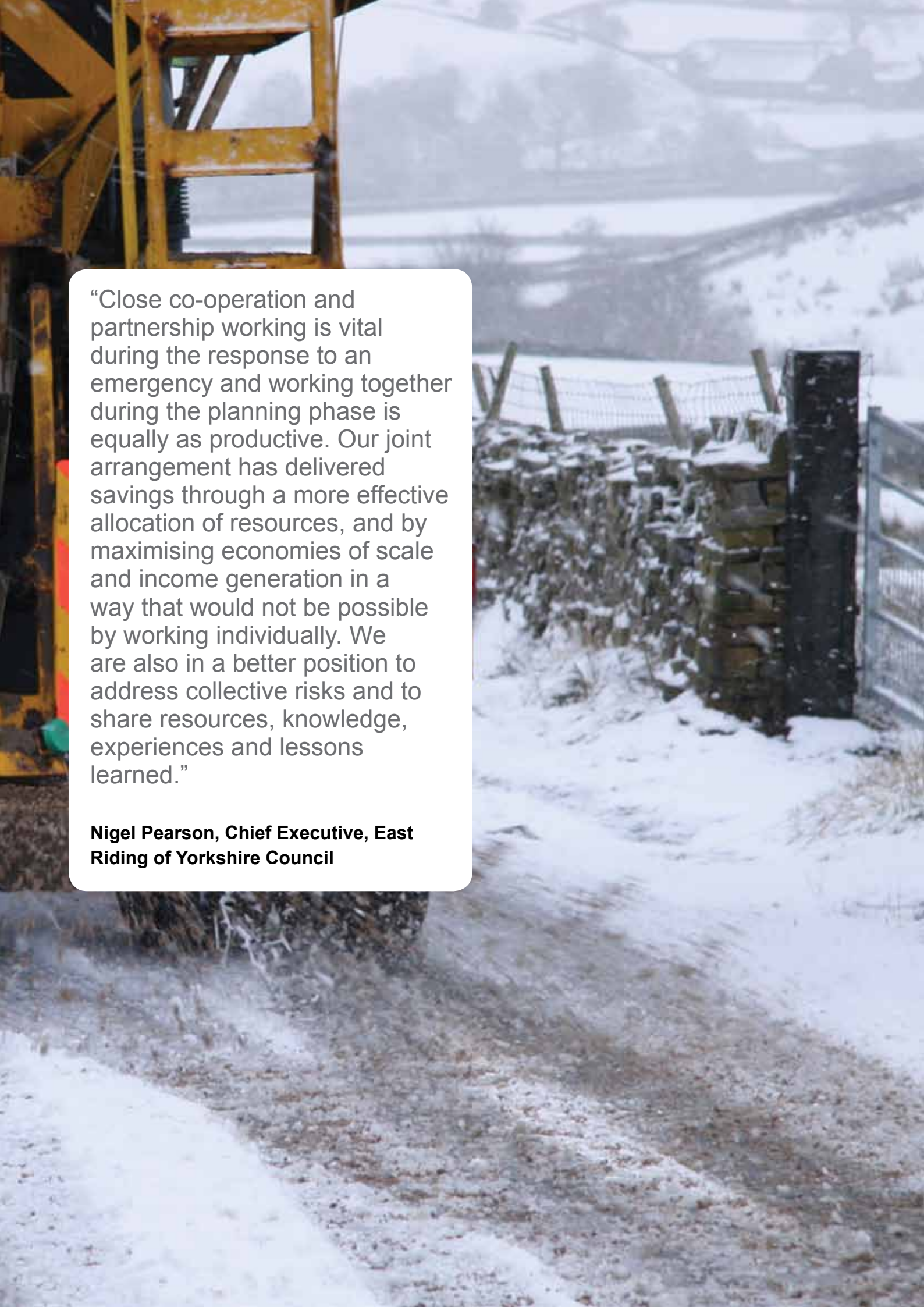
The service also generates savings through sharing staff resources and expertise. Each council takes lead responsibility for an area of the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) and represents the joint unit at meetings on this issue, which results in significant savings in officer time. The flexibility of the team means that extra members of staff can be allocated to support specific councils as necessary during emergencies, major events or during significant periods of workload.

The shared service approach also enables the unit to recruit specialist staff to work across all four authorities. For example, HEPS employs specialist control of major accidents and hazards officers who provide advice to all four of the councils. As some of the authorities have only a limited number of these sites, they could not afford to employ specialist officers on their own.

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“Close co-operation and partnership working is vital during the response to an emergency and working together during the planning phase is equally as productive. Our joint arrangement has delivered savings through a more effective allocation of resources, and by maximising economies of scale and income generation in a way that would not be possible by working individually. We are also in a better position to address collective risks and to share resources, knowledge, experiences and lessons learned.”

Nigel Pearson, Chief Executive, East Riding of Yorkshire Council



“Not only does Hampshire’s joint approach make economic sense in terms of reduced costs but it also provides a much more robust and resilient service. The district councils clearly benefit from a collaborative approach which provides them with access to a central team of emergency planning experts. It also enables more effective partnership working with other agencies at a strategic level.”

**Peter Grimwood, Chief Executive Officer,
Fareham Borough Council**

Hampshire County Council – an equal partnership between county and district councils generates savings

Ten of the district councils in Hampshire contract with Hampshire County Council to provide emergency planning services, an arrangement which has generated significant savings whilst ensuring that all parties are able to meet their statutory emergency planning responsibilities under the CCA.

Each council contributes 70 per cent of their revenue support grant allocation for emergency planning and identifies a senior officer to act as the key contact for the county council emergency planning team. In return the county council provides an officer in each district council for half a day per week, trains their staff, supports them to write emergency plans and assists them in preparing for emergencies. In the event of an emergency, officers from the county council provide expert advice and guidance to senior officers in the district council.

The county council provides a range of services to the district councils which have generated savings, including:

- **A generic template for emergency plans** that has been adapted by districts to suit local circumstances, which has saved staff time in developing plans.
- **Negotiations with a private contractor** to provide localised weather forecasting services, which will be more cost effective than individual negotiations.
- **Training exercises involving staff from all the districts**, which reduces costs, increases the viability of training sessions and ensures that authorities in the county respond to emergencies in a co-ordinated manner.

- **Producing a memorandum of understanding template** and facilitating the development of mutual aid agreements across all the districts.
- **Providing and maintaining a central GIS facility** which all district councils have access to.

A genuine commitment to partnership working has been key to the success of this approach in Hampshire. All authorities are recognised as equal partners and the district councils are represented at strategic emergency planning meetings by a single nominated chief executive, which ensures that they have a voice at a strategic level whilst avoiding duplication. It is also important that all partners recognise that under these arrangements the statutory responsibilities of the district council under the CCA remain, and the role of the county council is to provide assistance to districts in discharging these responsibilities.

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Sharing services between councils and partner organisations

Staffordshire Civil Contingencies Unit achieves savings and improves delivery

The Staffordshire Civil Contingencies Unit is a small, expert unit which provides support on civil contingencies and emergency planning issues to 22 organisations in Staffordshire, including 10 local authorities, the emergency services, NHS trusts and the Environment Agency. The unit is hosted by Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, but all partners contribute to the budget for the unit depending on the level of service that they receive.

The team has 11 staff and it provides a range of shared services for the 10 local authority partners which mean they do not need to employ their own emergency planning officers if they choose not to.

The unit acts as an 'insurance policy' for the partner organisations by providing a 24-hour, 365-days a year on call service to support them in performing their statutory duties under the CCA in the event of an emergency.

The team is also responsible for writing and maintaining collective emergency plans on behalf of all partner organisations, including flood plans and recovery plans. It pulls together all the key partners to write the plans in a way that no single organisation would be able to do.

The unit also achieves savings by designing and delivering multi-agency training sessions and exercises for members of the Staffordshire Resilience Forum. This removes the need for all 22 partners to develop their own training courses and ensures that there is a high degree of consistency in the key skills of staff across the partnership. Bringing partners together around the table for workshops and exercises also provides an opportunity to share information and make linkages that otherwise would not occur.

Following a review in late 2010, the unit is likely to change its approach in response to the reduced resources available to local authorities and other partners. Rather than focussing on the number of days that staff spend on site with each organisation, the unit will focus on working smartly and flexibly to deliver key outputs and outcomes for the organisations.

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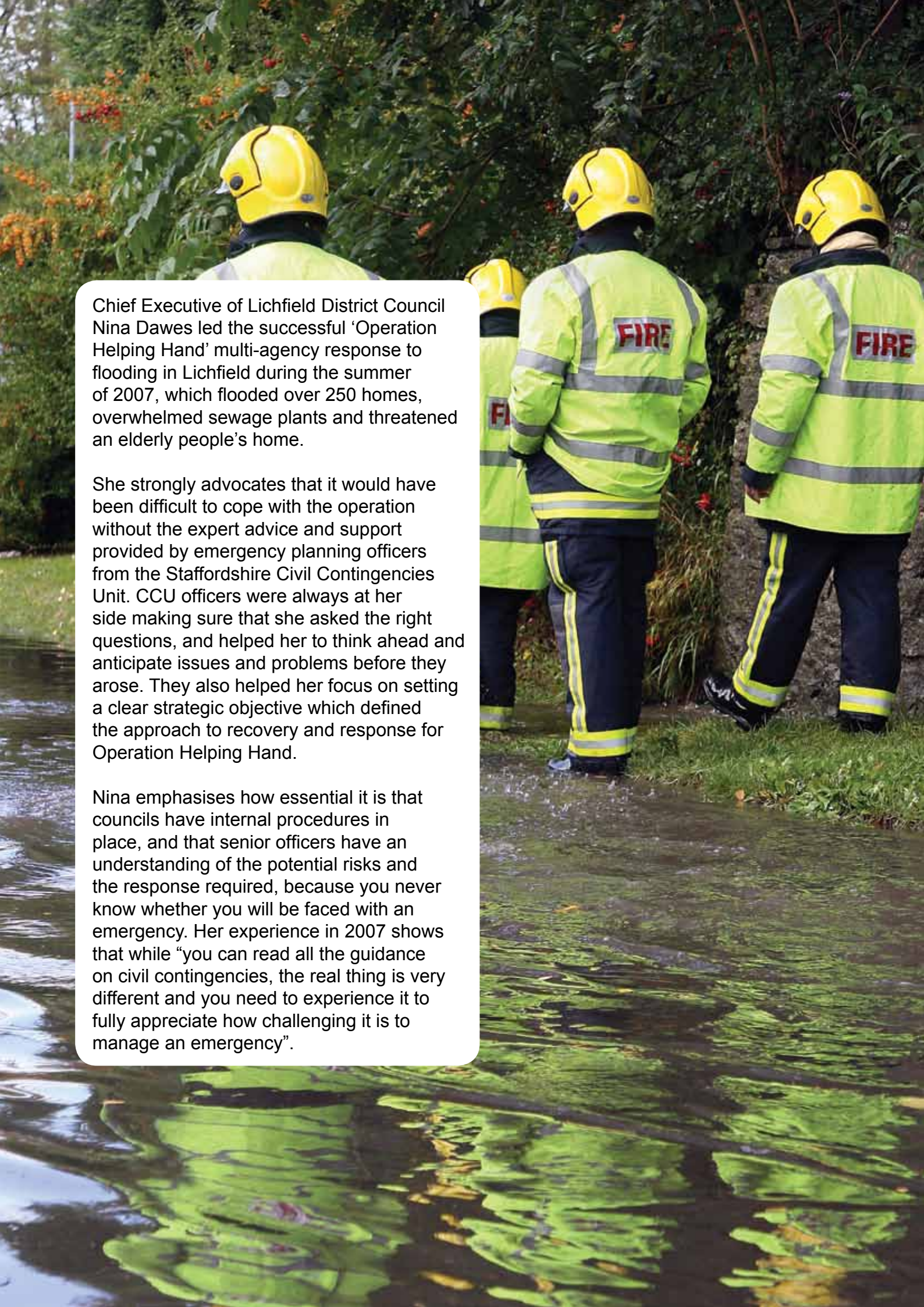
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A photograph showing several firefighters from behind, wearing bright yellow high-visibility jackets with 'FIRE' written on the back and yellow helmets. They are standing on a grassy bank next to a body of water, possibly a flooded area. The background is filled with dense green foliage and some orange flowers. The water in the foreground is dark and reflects the surrounding greenery.

Chief Executive of Lichfield District Council Nina Dawes led the successful 'Operation Helping Hand' multi-agency response to flooding in Lichfield during the summer of 2007, which flooded over 250 homes, overwhelmed sewage plants and threatened an elderly people's home.

She strongly advocates that it would have been difficult to cope with the operation without the expert advice and support provided by emergency planning officers from the Staffordshire Civil Contingencies Unit. CCU officers were always at her side making sure that she asked the right questions, and helped her to think ahead and anticipate issues and problems before they arose. They also helped her focus on setting a clear strategic objective which defined the approach to recovery and response for Operation Helping Hand.

Nina emphasises how essential it is that councils have internal procedures in place, and that senior officers have an understanding of the potential risks and the response required, because you never know whether you will be faced with an emergency. Her experience in 2007 shows that while "you can read all the guidance on civil contingencies, the real thing is very different and you need to experience it to fully appreciate how challenging it is to manage an emergency".

Cleveland Joint Emergency Planning Unit creates co-operation and savings in cost and officer time

A Joint Emergency Planning Unit has been established in Cleveland which incorporates officers from four local authorities, Cleveland Police, the North East Ambulance Service and Cleveland Fire and Rescue Service.

The local authority section of the unit delivers a comprehensive emergency and resilience planning service to the four unitary local authorities in Cleveland and is financed through a joint arrangement with Hartlepool Borough Council acting as the 'host' authority. An Emergency Planning Joint Committee of senior elected members with executive functions from each council oversees the local authority element. It approves the unit's annual plan and monitors progress against its key objectives and performance indicators.

There is a strong spirit of co-operation in the unit which enhances the delivery of emergency planning services. Co-location means that staff interact daily, share information and quickly solve problems. Officers also feel able to explore new ideas with colleagues from other services and receive unbiased advice and guidance.

These joint arrangements achieve significant savings in cost and officer time. Sharing accommodation achieves savings in rent, administration and other costs. It also means that emergency planners from all the organisations can be assembled easily for meetings.

The unit also delivers training and exercises for internal staff and other partners, which gives participants a greater understanding of the roles and responsibilities of other organisations and the benefits of multi-agency working and co-operation. The joint

unit also raises the profile of emergency planning in the area by producing strategies and activities which have the backing of all seven organisations.

One of the key success factors is the commitment from all partner organisations to making the joint arrangements work. The corporate leadership in all seven partner organisations has helped ensure 'buy-in' from key service areas to emergency response arrangements and service area response plans.

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Information management and analysis

Bristol City Council – generating savings through Geographic Information Systems

Bristol City Council has developed a fully automated set of Geographic Information System (GIS) tools which help responders to quickly understand an emergency situation, plan an effective response and make more informed decisions as the situation develops.

The GIS tools bring together aerial photographs and Ordnance Survey Maps at different scales with a range of different data sets that are vital for emergency planning. These include local weather conditions, hazards and threats, population and evacuation estimates, reports of vulnerable people, community infrastructure, council assets and land ownership. The tools allow users to quickly locate an incident, extract and analyse relevant data for the surrounding area, and create several mapping and report outputs from standard templates.

The GIS tools remove the need to gather relevant data from across the council and its partners when an emergency occurs and have condensed the data analysis process from hundreds of processes to a few simple and logical steps. This has reduced the time taken to produce vital analysis, maps and reports from six hours to approximately 20 minutes.

The GIS tools enable the council and its partners to make quicker and more informed decisions during an emergency, which can ultimately help save lives. For example, when a suspected unexploded WWII bomb was discovered in the banks of the River Avon in April 2010, the council produced maps which assisted the Tactical Command Team to identify the location of vulnerable people, the areas that were at risk and potential evacuation routes.

The GIS tools have also been used to improve emergency planning processes. For example, emergency planners have produced detailed flood maps to inform discussions with other council services about their responsibilities and how they would maintain business continuity if flooding occurred. The GIS tools also allow maps and data to be included in emergency plans and, if an emergency occurs, corresponding, updated maps can be produced to assist those involved in the response.

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Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council – innovative system increases efficiency and improves emergency response

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council has developed an innovative Emergency Planning Incident Management System which has revolutionised the way that the council responds to incidents.

As a result of previous emergencies and a number of emergency planning exercises, the council recognised that it faced a key challenge in managing the huge volumes of information generated during emergencies and ensuring that it is accessible to everyone involved in the response.

The new incident management system provides up-to-the minute data which enables emergency planners to see the whole picture as an emergency unfolds. Dedicated log-keepers enter reports about the emergency from people on the ground on to a live incident board as it happens. Mapping officers then use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to quickly map this information against key datasets, including the location of vulnerable people and properties and key infrastructure. The maps are available to officers in the council's emergency operations room instantly and can also be viewed on 3000 desktops across the council via a password-protected intranet system.

The new system was used during flooding in Rotherham in 2007 and 2009 and has led to improved decision-making and speedier responses to problems on the ground. It ensures that council staff are well informed as incidents develop and are able to give the public and the media an accurate picture of events. It has also replaced time-consuming paper records with a clear audit trail which can be analysed and used to improve the council's response to future emergencies.

This innovative solution was developed by the council's IT team with support from staff at a major telecommunications company as part of a public-private partnership arrangement. Much of the necessary software and hardware for the system was already in place, but as part of the implementation of the programme the council invested in new GIS technology and staff training.

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Communication

Hertfordshire County Council – using an integrated approach to providing information to the public

In response to the explosion at the Buncefield fuel storage depot in 2005, Hertfordshire County Council and its partners developed an efficient and effective approach to providing information to the public. Rather than establishing and staffing information centres in the community, during the Buncefield incident they used a combination of the council's website and Customer Service Centre, supplemented by public meetings on specific issues involving a range of organisations.

During the Buncefield emergency, Hertfordshire County Council ensured that its website contained up-to-date information and was consistent with the information provided on the websites of other organisations. As a result, the website became a focal point for public information during the incident and the site received 2 million hits in four days and 5,000 unique visitors per hour at the peak of each day. This saved considerable staff time in providing basic information to the public.

The council's Customer Services Centre, which is contracted out to a private company, took over from the police in handling all information enquiries from local residents and businesses. The helpline number was widely circulated and the centre extended its opening hours following the incident.

This relieved the pressure on council services which did not have the capacity to deal with the huge volume of enquiries and allowed the police and emergency services to focus on emergency calls.

One of the most common questions asked by residents during the emergency was whether individual schools were open or closed. In December 2009 Hertfordshire County Council launched its Critical Information Dissemination System which enables schools to automatically notify the county council website and local radio stations so that parents can find out whether a school is open or closed. This system can save council staff time in contacting individual schools and in dealing with enquiries from parents. It is also being used to inform the public about the closure of waste services, libraries and other front line council services during emergencies and in periods of severe weather.

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We would be interested to hear of any other examples of good practice in delivering efficient emergency planning services. Please contact us using the details on the back page.

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**Local
Government
Group**

The Local Government Group is made up of six organisations which support, promote and improve local government.



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