

Chief Executives' Group – North Yorkshire and York

18 June 2015

Review of Strategic Co-ordination Group arrangements

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To apprise the Chief Executives' Group on the outcomes of a preliminary review of Strategic Co-ordination Group arrangements for county and City of York areas and to propose a set of initial actions for agreement at this meeting.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Colleagues will recall the discussion at the last meeting of this Group in February, which itself had been prompted by the recent Gold Symposium, regarding various aspects of the multi-agency response to major and critical incidents at the Strategic Coordination Group (SCG) level. Speakers at the Symposium recounted their personal experiences of an SCG. Delegates also received a presentation from a legal perspective.
- 2.2 It was agreed that a further report be brought to this meeting setting out areas for improvement following a review of local arrangements.

3.0 Issues for consideration

- 3.1 Whilst local contingencies for response to major and critical incidents falls within the remit of the North Yorkshire Local Resilience Forum (NYLRF), only a small proportion of the total cadre of strategic (gold) level managers from the various Category 1 and 2 responder agencies, actually attend NYLRF strategic meetings, or have any regular direct input to the SCG arrangements. For this reason it was considered beneficial to gain top level input and support to proposals for improvement, hence the matter being brought to a meeting of the Chief Executives Group.
- 3.2 As public sector organisations are dealing with the challenges of increasing budgetary constraint, a smaller workforce and/or increasing demand for services, it is essential that individually and collectively, Category 1 responders understand the combined capacity and capability available for any response. This includes Gold level incident command arrangements (i.e. SCG). The sort of challenges presented during the widespread flooding across the Thames Valley and South West areas of England, serve to highlight this.
- 3.3 NYLRF has in place an extensive suite of plans for various emergency events and these are periodically tested through various exercises. Most recently NYLRF has produced guidance for partners' use. This covers issues of how and in what circumstances the various tiers of command will be set up, and includes information about pre-determined SCG venues and prompt cards for various roles that need to be performed. This guidance serves as a useful aide-memoire of what to consider, what needs to be done and so forth, for those officers either considering the need for, or taking part in, an SCG or TCG.

- 3.4 However, the guidance document does make explicit that the majority of SCGs will be by teleconference. Whilst this may be true, it is clear from the presentations received at the Gold Symposium that a physical SCG may be required in certain circumstances and that these may need to be in operation continuously for several days. Such was the complexity and activity levels of the command operation during the widespread flooding in the South West recently that a physical SCG was needed continuously for several days initially, followed by several weeks on every second day. It would be folly therefore, to work on the premise that familiarity with dialling into a teleconference only, equipped with a copy of the NYLRF Response to Major & Critical Incidents guidance, will suffice in North Yorkshire and City of York areas preparations.
- 3.5 Anyone who may be called to take part in an SCG ought to be familiar with the requirement of the role, the physical environment in which the SCG will take place, the IT and communications available, and how the entire SCG arena functions as a whole. With this in mind it is proposed that a register of named Gold level officers be established and maintained by NYLRF secretariat, against which familiarisation training and periodic attendance at exercises will be planned and scheduled.
- 3.6 Given the downsizing and collaborative arrangements being pursued generally, it may well be that some Cat 1 and Cat 2 responder organisations only have as few as two or three Gold level officers within their respective organisational structure. In light of the points raised at the Gold Symposium, CEO colleagues are asked to arrange for a self-assessment to be carried out of their own organisation's capacity to sustain an appropriate Gold level representation at a physical SCG. If necessary, in order to sustain an SCG, what mutual assistance arrangements are in place, or require to be set up, to achieve the necessary capacity and capability?
- 3.7 It is also proposed that the exercise programme be refreshed and re-energised to ensure that every Gold level officer has the opportunity to take part in an exercise periodically; once per year is the suggested frequency. From an exercise planning perspective, this will mean the same exercise being run two or three times to enable each Gold level officer to complete it.
- 3.8 A further issue highlighted during the review is the current list of venues where an SCG can be convened; NY Police, Newby Wiske; NYCC, County Hall; and City of York Council, West Offices, are all listed in the guidance. As a precursor to a revised exercise programme being introduced as mentioned above, it is proposed that Gold level officers attend a familiarisation session, where the physical environment can be set up as an SCG, where remote access to IT systems and communications equipment can be tested and where Gold officers can receive a demonstration of how the SCG is expected to function.
- 3.9 However, given that County Hall is undergoing fairly extensive structural work at the present time, NYLRF Coordination Group has agreed that at this moment in time the conference rooms at Newby Wiske would be the venue and the Council Chambers at NYCC, County Hall, would be the backup venue. Given also that the NYP intend to vacate their premises at Newby Wiske over the medium term in keeping with the PCC's manifesto pledge, there would be merit in requesting that consideration be given to adequate SCG provision at any new NYP HQ premises. Taken together, it would seem sensible to agree to undertake an assessment of the estate of partner organisations to identify all suitable venues for an SCG either as a temporary or a substantive arrangement over the short term and medium term. It would also be prudent to confirm the timeframe that the Newby Wiske venue is expected to remain available for use as an SCG. Any facilities (or potential) for video and/or voice recording of SCG in operation during an incident, as discussed at the last meeting, should feature as part of this assessment.

4.0 Next Steps

- 4.1 Following liaison with officers involved in NYLRF, it is proposed to hold a further Gold Symposium on the morning of Friday 20th Nov 2015, at City of York Council Offices.
- 4.2 Whilst the detail needs to be worked up, this will include some or all of the following:
- A facilities test session to test agencies' IT and phone connections and run through of an example scenario
 - A briefing session on the Response to Major and Critical Incidents document
 - An overview of possible scenarios that might affect North Yorkshire and require an SCG to be established
 - Presentation on the Cumbrian shooting by the Assistant Chief Constable from Cumbria Police
- 4.3 One option to consider is whether Gold officers bring with them anyone they would normally expect to have at an SCG, such as a support officer or loggist.
- 4.4 A second date is proposed for February 2016, this time at County Hall, and will be a repeat event for those who cannot make the first date, the aim being that all Gold level officers will attend one of the two events. Although intended as a repeat session, any outcomes from the first event will be taken forward into the second. The rationale for setting only two dates, and doing so in good time, is that there would be sufficient time to promote these dates so that all Gold officers could attend at least one of the sessions and hold two quality events rather than risk diluting them over, say, four.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

- 5.1 The Gold Symposium held in January 2015 was thought provoking and prompted a review of SCG arrangements within the North Yorkshire/City of York area. A key issue from the review is the need for an SCG venue that is fit for purpose, as teleconferencing, whilst the default approach, will not always be sufficient in the early and in some cases, advanced stages of a response to major and critical incidents.
- 5.2 In order for a physical SCG to fulfil its purpose effectively, those Gold level officers who might be required to take part in an SCG need to be familiar with the arrangements overall and be confident in their role as part of it. To achieve this, some initial actions have been proposed, key of which are to confirm who are the Gold level officers from across all Cat 1 and Cat 2 organisations, and then to put in place a programme of familiarisation training that builds familiarity and confidence in the SCG environment and their role as a member of the SCG. These foundations will then be built upon through a refreshed programme of exercises that will contain sufficient opportunities for all Gold officers to experience an SCG scenario at periodic intervals, suggested to be annually.
- 5.3 The Chief Executive officers are asked to consider this report and support the proposed actions and 'next steps' set out in this report.

Nigel Hutchinson

Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service

8 June 2015