

Guide to Producing a Community Action Plan in Oxfordshire

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Listening Learning Leading



Many emergencies are dealt with in a co-ordinated joint response by the emergency services, local authorities and the major utilities providers. But there are occasions when communities could help themselves:

- Before the arrival of emergency services and immediately following a disruptive event (such as a fire or explosion) particularly where people have evacuated from properties.
- During widespread events such as a flu pandemic, extensive flooding, storm damage, or deep snow, when outside assistance might be unavailable or delayed because of higher priority (life saving) tasks or road closures. In most instances these events will be preceded by warnings from relevant authorities (Met office, Environment Agency, NHS).
- Following the loss of basic utilities (electricity, gas, water) for an extended period. The probability of this happening is much greater when combined with a period of extreme weather.

Emergency Services' Response to a Disruptive Incident.

The emergency services' responsibilities following a disruptive incident include:

- Saving and protecting life
- Containing the emergency

Community emergency plans **must not try** to replicate these specialist capabilities. They should cover what might be done to provide immediate support to those impacted directly or indirectly by the emergency.

An understanding of the role of the Local Authorities in an incident will help inform the development of a Community Emergency Plan. They will arrive at the scene behind the emergency services to assume responsibility for the welfare of displaced individuals other than those in the care of the medical services. They will co-ordinate the provision of the voluntary services and make arrangements for overnight accommodation, or longer, for those that need it.

Community Response to any Emergency.

Effective community action in such circumstances is made more achievable with the aid of a simple community emergency plan. The first priority of the plan should be to address the short-term welfare needs of individuals within the community affected by the emergency.

It is impractical to produce a (simple) plan covering the actions to be taken in every eventuality. However the **consequences** of many emergencies are similar:

- People displaced from their homes
- Lack of immediate access to professional medical assistance
- Lack of essentials:
 - Shelter
 - Warmth (cooling)

- Water & Food
- Prescription medicines
- Power

This document is intended to provide advice on how to answer some key questions. A simple template is provided as a separate document for your consideration. Before putting pen to paper though, assemble information based on answers to the 5 questions listed below.

Who?

➤ Who will lead and co-ordinate the local response?

The Parish/Town Council should identify a team that comes together in a crisis to manage the community's response to the incident and acts as a link between the statutory emergency response agencies and the community. For the purposes of this document we will call them the Emergency Management Team (EMT) but the choice of title is yours. Think about allocating to members of the team specific responsibilities e.g. lead, deputy, communications, plan review. Consider too what arrangements might be made to cope with the absence of key players.

➤ Who can provide assistance?

A list of volunteers and people with useful skills should be maintained (with their consent). The types of experience, skill base and access to equipment that may prove useful to the community are:

Doctors	Farmers
Nurses	Gas/Electricity Board staff
First Aiders (e.g. St John, Red Cross)	Plumbers
RAYNET Amateur Radio Operators	Electricians
CB Users/Owners	Vets
Police	Mechanics
Fire Fighters	Volunteers (e.g. Women's Institute/WRVS etc)

➤ Who might be vulnerable?

These include the very old, the young and those with disabilities etc. In a small community good neighbourliness will generally be the norm, and those who will need extra help in an emergency are most likely already known. In a larger community it may not be so obvious, and in fact it may not be easy to find out, as much of the information will be covered by the provisions of the Data Protection Act and therefore unobtainable. The plan should therefore include arrangements for door-to-door checks in an emergency, in order to identify anyone in need of special assistance. Where Neighbourhood Watch Schemes exist these will help and consideration should be given as to how this concept might be expanded in a crisis.

Development of such a network for door-to-door checks is one of the most useful and adaptable elements of a community emergency plan.

What?

➤ What might cause a problem?

Local knowledge will help to identify whether there are hazards that increase the chances of an emergency. Watercourses, busy roads (particularly accident blackspots) and local industrial premises are some examples. How to make these features less hazardous is NOT the purpose of a Community Emergency Plan. If action is thought necessary to reduce the risks it should be taken forward as part of local council routine business. The presence of particular hazards within the community catchment area need not make the plan more complex but they will make activation of any plan more likely.

(There are 3 sites in Oxfordshire for which special arrangements apply. Parish/Town Councils in the vicinity of these sites are already aware of specific plans for these installations)

Extreme weather conditions create a range of potential problems. In many cases the effects of such weather events are predictable for a local community. You will need to decide if any action could be taken on receipt of weather or flood warning to lessen the impact of the event. You should also consider what action, if any, might be taken after the event to maintain 'business as usual'.

➤ What local resources might be useful?

Together with the skills and experience offered by local people, a list of useful resources, including who owns them is a key element of the plan. Examples are:

Resource	Possible Source
Portable generators	Farmers, builders
Water pumps	Farmers
Sandbags & sand **	Farmers, builders, garden centres, nurseries
Lighting	Farmers, builders, light industry
Two-way radio	Radio amateurs, commercial vehicles, farmers
Heating & fuel stocks	Farmers, schools, hotels, residents
Chain saws	Farmers, landscape gardeners, tree surgeons, residents
4 x 4 vehicles	Farmers, private owners
Tractors, trailers, ropes	Farmers

** Local authorities have no statutory obligation to provide material for flood protection. Oxfordshire District Councils will supply limited amounts of sandbags and sand as an emergency measure. Householders are advised strongly not to rely on them being able to

respond to all needs in an emergency. Householders whose homes are particularly prone to flooding should take independent action to protect their property. You may decide as a community that you wish to take collective action to prepare for this eventuality in protecting communal assets. See Annex for District Council Contact numbers for sandbags

Where?

➤ **Might you shelter people displaced from their homes or businesses?**

Accepted terminology within Oxfordshire for such a facility is a “Reception Centre”. Arrangements for its provision are a **very important** element of any community emergency plan. Possible venues include village halls, sports facilities, barns, outbuildings or local schools. Select at least

2 venues separated by a minimum of 500 metres with good access from more than one direction and, ideally, suitable for coach-sized vehicles. They should be outside any flood plain and accessible in widespread flooding.

It is recommended that, as a third option, reciprocal arrangements should be made with a neighbouring community. Useful attributes for a Reception Centre include:

Potable water	Lighting
Heating	Kitchen facilities
Toilets	Landline Telephone
Seating	An area for pets

Community responsibility for Reception Centre should be limited to:

Identification of suitable facilities.

Development of arrangements for access at short notice, day or night.

Informing District Council emergency planners of arrangements in place.

Local Authorities will be able to co-ordinate support from social services, voluntary agencies (WRVS, Red Cross, St John etc) and health services and to direct them to the Reception Centre. Having checked with evacuees, they will decide if a Rest Centre is required (in a different location) more suited to longer term support (say 2 or 3 nights). In many cases, a Reception Centre provides an opportunity for those displaced by the emergency to gather their thoughts and to make their own arrangements to stay with friends or relatives if necessary.

Community involvement in opening a Reception Centre is much less likely following a disruptive event, when emergency services are quickly on the scene, than it would be in a large scale event where responding agency resources are scarce.

➤ **Might the EMT meet?**

As with the Reception Centre, have more than one option. It might be possible to collocate with the Reception Centre.

When?

➤ When should the plan be activated?

Disruptive Event: particularly when people have been evacuated from their homes. If numbers are small, it might not be necessary to open the Reception Centre; a local pub might suffice. It is important to provide a simple checklist in the plan to ensure that key points are not missed. An example of such a checklist is provided in the Emergency Plan template.

Weather Warnings: You may decide that there are actions you wish to take on receipt of severe weather or flood warnings. If this is the case, you will need to have members of the EMT who monitor the general weather situation and take more interest if there is a deteriorating forecast. The Met Office provides the National Severe Weather Warning Service which can be found by following the link below:

[Met Office: Weather and climate change](#)

The most urgent of these are flash warnings of severe or extreme weather. They are issued when the Met Office has 80% or greater confidence that severe weather is expected in the next few hours. Decide which of these warnings you wish to use as the trigger for activating measures you may have identified to minimise the local impact.

Flood Warnings: If river flooding is a problem for the community, ensure members of the EMT sign up to the Environment Agency's "Floodline Warnings Direct". This is a free service that provides flood warnings direct to you by telephone, mobile, email, SMS text message and fax.

You can sign up for Floodline Warnings Direct by calling **Floodline on 0845 988 1188** or online by following the link below.

[Sign up for Floodline Warnings Direct](#)

Power Failure: If the community experiences an extended power failure you may wish to activate procedures for checking on the welfare of those identified as vulnerable. Remember, cordless telephones will not work in a power cut though landlines and mobile telephones should be OK. You might also find out whether the pubs/restaurants/cafes have alternative means of cooking. If so, consider adding that information to the list of local resources. The impact of an extended power failure is exaggerated in very cold weather when warmth and access to hot food is important, particularly to those identified as vulnerable.

How?

Communication! Communication! Communication!

Good communication is vital throughout the process of assembling the information required to draft the plan, in activating the plan and in co-ordinating activity during the emergency. It is recommended that you avoid 'sprinkling' contact details throughout the plan but consolidate them in contact lists as shown in the template.

The contact list is the most perishable part of the plan and so requires frequent review to ensure details are current. Since the plan will contain personal information, think very carefully about the distribution list and include a statement on the front cover, an example of which is shown in the template.

Health & Safety

Emergency situations by their very nature can be dangerous. People will take greater risk to help each other than they might in normal circumstances. Emergencies place great stress on individuals leading some quickly to lose their common sense. If this happens, a responder can soon turn into a casualty.

Where plant, machinery and special purpose vehicles are used it is vital to ensure, where possible, that people using them are experienced, trained and qualified and that someone is keeping an overall watch on safety issues. If there is time, think through what is being attempted, what might go wrong and what can be done to reduce the chances of something untoward happening.

Parish or Town Councils wishing to harness voluntary support during emergencies will need to check with their insurance companies their position with respect to public liability for anything other than low risk activities by volunteers.

Keep it Simple!

If you decide to develop a community emergency plan, or to modify an existing one, try to keep it to essentials. You cannot devise plans to cope with every eventuality but you can put in place arrangements that would be useful in a variety of situations. As a minimum you should:

- **Identify an emergency management team.**
- **Identify volunteers**

- **Identify those who may be vulnerable**
- **Identify 2 potential Reception Centres and arrangements for opening them at short notice.**
- **Have current contact lists.**

If you have a plan already and it works for you, do not make wholesale changes to conform to the suggested format.

Communities particularly prone to the effects of extreme weather may wish to consider additional measures to limit its impact.

Annex to the Oxfordshire Guide to Producing Community Emergency Plans

Is your Property about to be flooded? Do you need Sandbags in a hurry?

Whilst local authorities have no statutory obligation to provide material for flood protection, most will supply sandbags as an emergency measure.

However householders are advised to not rely on the Council being able to respond to all needs in an emergency and to consider measures that they can take themselves, in advance to prepare for potential flooding that may affect them or their property in the future.

Householders and businesses should make their own plans to handle a flood emergency including providing their own sandbags which can be bought from builders' merchants. Growbags, bin liners or plastic bags filled with earth can also be effective in keeping water out.

	<u>Office Hours</u>	<u>Emergency Out of Office Hours</u>
Cherwell DC	01295 252535	01295 221531
Oxford City	01865 249811	07802 904000
South Oxfordshire DC	01491 823000	01491 824033
Vale of the White horse DC	01235 520202	01235 524886
West Oxfordshire DC	01993 861000	01993 705056

- Sandbags are only distributed to individual householders or areas in an emergency situation but when demand is high it may not be possible to meet all requests.

Councils will give delivery priority to vulnerable groups and the infirm. Other residents may arrange to collect them from designated drop-off points and council depots.