

Overview of NI Civil Contingencies Framework: Building Resilience Together

The Framework merges, and will ultimately replace, eight existing protocols and guideline documents (which are set out below) into one; whilst modernising the language and providing commonality of structures.

- NI Central Crisis Management Arrangements (NICCMA) 2016
- NI Guide to Plan Preparation 2002
- A Guide to Emergency Planning Arrangements in NI September 2011
- Escalation of the Multi-Agency Response 2016
- CCG (NI) Protocol For Multi-Agency Co-ordination Of Local Level Response and Recovery 2016
- Vulnerable People protocols.
- Protocol for the Collaborative Communications Process 2016
- Guide to Risk Assessment in NI – January 2010

The new framework has been formatted to make it a simple to follow guide for both new and experienced civil contingencies practitioners. It takes the reader through the key processes in a logical order of prepare, respond and recover. The document up front sets the scene, amalgamating the NI context into the wider JESIP (Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme) programme.

The document explains the NI context of the mandated parts of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and sets out the arrangements for delivering a common sense, practical approach to integrated civil contingencies planning and response in the absence of secondary legislation at this juncture.

It outlines the unified approach to resilience, by linking together the pre-emptive work done at local government; council and police district level, to the NI Executive. This is again a first in terms of linking structures cohesively and transparently towards the one joint aim of building resilience together. It draws together a best practice template for the readers in what good resilience might look like. It provides clarity of role for each level of building resilience and will join those together in a joint exercising and training plan, once future work is completed on the NI Risk Register. The development of an NI wide exercise and training calendar for civil contingencies is an essential next step to allow for consistency and added value across all partner organisations.

The response phase is where the greatest change has happened. It draws heavily on lessons learned and seeks to offer practical solutions to working in partnership across the response phase. It makes the activation and escalation of multi-agency collaboration an accountable and transparent process and builds upon best practice already in place at the local level. It reminds lead government departments of their responsibilities, and whilst not mandated to run Strategic Co-ordination Groups, it offers realistic options for aiding joint understanding by co-ordinating activity in partnerships. The paper explains how resilience structures can become operational immediately, in response to a crisis; a lesson implemented successfully during the COVID response with CCG (O) and the NIEPG taking on operational roles. The role of the NIHUB in a civil contingency crisis is also explained. It links the, now understood and

successfully implemented, escalation and de-escalation process to the wider tiers of civil contingency management across Northern Ireland.

There follows a chapter on the Recovery phase; the least well-rehearsed phase of all global disasters. The chapter provides consistency of message by showing how de-escalation can work, what constitutes a recovery group and how it can work initially in parallel with the respond phase before it becomes the only active phase. This fulcrum is one of the most commonly misunderstood points of a civil contingency response; how to disengage neatly whilst maintaining shared understanding of ongoing and potentially long-term issues. It provides templates for good practice in maintaining collaboration until the point that life has returned to normal. It provides a glide-path to stepping down from the recovery phase and turning the civil contingencies structures back to the beginning of the cycle; prepare. It builds upon the recovery elements in local government ensuring they remain supported by maintaining shared situational awareness for as long as is necessary.

The final chapters consider special cases such as; vulnerable people, media and communication, and finish with a clear definition of governance in the Northern Ireland context. Good record keeping procedures, of both financial and operational plans, are outlined to ensure transparency for any public enquiries that follow-on from a crisis. It also requires the formal adoption of a lessons learned process that then enables the; review, amend, test and exercise parts of the prepare phase to begin all over again; ensuring that operational knowledge and experience is maximised while it is fresh. This iterative process also means that this Framework itself can be amended quickly with new lessons, and routinely checked for validity, if processes should change, thereby future-proofing the document for the long-term.

The Framework document is supported with a number of detailed appendices, which bring together the information originally in some of the existing protocols. By providing templates and clear guidance in these appendices they support the overall principles of the Framework in improving transparency, cohesion and accountability.

The simplicity of this document is in itself a useful tool for those who need a quick guide to enable them to move quickly to a civil contingency response. It is one source of knowledge in outlining the co-operative approach to problem solving in a crisis.