



# Northumberland County Council

## COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 JANUARY 2022

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### REVIEW OF STORM ARWEN RESPONSE: SCOPING REPORT

**Report of:** Jackie Roll, Head of Electoral and Democratic Services

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#### **Purpose of report**

Immediately following Storm Arwen, a scrutiny review was requested to examine the response of the County Council and involved partners, the impact on Communities and lessons learned for the future. This report sets out the scope of the review including terms of reference and a list of consultees.

#### **Recommendation:**

**To consider and agree the following:**

- **Consider the terms of reference/scope of the review**
- **Agree the membership of the review committee**
- **Agree a list of consultees/interviews**
- **Agree how communities will be consulted**
- **Agree a timetable for the review to be completed**
- **Agree that the findings of the review will ultimately be reported to full council**

#### **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to the “How”, “Living”, “Connecting” priority included in the current NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2022

#### **Key issues**

Many residents and business have been affected by Storm Arwen with recovery efforts still underway. The response to Storm Arwen was a multi-agency approach with LRF partners including the military being involved.

A large number of homes and businesses were left without power across the county for up to two weeks. The Council immediately initiated its emergency planning arrangements, establishing an incident room and a co-ordinated, multi-agency response. This included, for example, welfare visits, calls and necessary follow-up support to vulnerable residents and clients known to Social Services and wider Health Services. Alongside this, Council services undertook a wide range of repairs and clean ups to roads and infrastructure. These activities were undertaken largely within the resources of council services, local partners, councillors and volunteer organisations. However, when it became clear that power would not be restored to a significant number of homes in the timeframe initially anticipated, a major incident was declared on 3 December. This helped military support to be sought to significantly widen door-to-door welfare visits to all households that remained without power at that time.

It is possible that extreme weather events may become more frequent due to climate change and the longer-term aspects of the review will consider what we can learn from this incident to strengthen the response to extreme weather events in the future.

## **Background**

On 26<sup>th</sup> November 2021, Storm Arwen brought winds of up to 100kmh to Northumberland. Storm Arwen resulted in widespread damage leaving many without power for up to two weeks. The storm affected many areas in the Northeast, including neighbouring authorities, with Northumberland being the worst affected.

The Local Resilience Forum's (LRF) Tactical Coordination Group (TCG) was called together to deal with Storm Arwen, initially chaired by the Police. The lead was passed to Northumberland County Council on 28 November and an incident room was established at West Hartford Fire Station with members of Northumberland County Council, Northumbria Police, Northumberland Fire and Rescue and latterly Northern Powergrid and then the military. The TCG continued to meet virtually throughout the incident.

A major incident was declared on 3 December 2021 and a request for Military support was submitted. The military were dispatched to support the Council with door-to-door welfare checks across the County. This was to enhance and accelerate the operational work that had already been taking place in communities.

The Major Incident was stood down on 8 December and the incident room was closed. The Military Aid to the Civil Authority (MACA) request expired at 23:59 on 8 December.

## **Terms of Reference**

The review aims to examine the disruption caused by Storm Arwen and the response to that disruption, as well as identifying gaps in current systems and ways of improving future

policy and plans, both within the County Council, and also with partner organisations and the community to ensure we can build better resilience for events in the future.

The review will include:

- Reviewing council policies and procedures
- Gathering evidence from members of the public
- Gathering evidence from partner organisations and County Council officers
- Gathering evidence from MPs, County Councillors, and Town and Parish Councillors

### **Public Engagement**

It is vital, in order for this review to provide learning and strong recommendations for improvement, that residents are involved throughout this review. Members of the public will be encouraged to submit their experiences to the Committee for inclusion in the review. The Council will seek both positive and constructive feedback from communities to help understand the impact the Storm Arwen response has had and what the Council can do to better improve its resilience.

Community engagement will run parallel with the formal evidence gathering sessions. Initial discussions have taken place with the research sector to ascertain the best way to enhance community involvement with this review. Due to the nature of research and the teams involved, it is anticipated there would be minimal costs included.

### **Partner Organisations**

The response involved partners from a range of other organisations and their experience and feedback is vital to ensuring this review is comprehensive and meaningful. It is expected that this review will call on evidence from partner organisations such as:

- Northern Powergrid
- Scottish Power
- Telecommunication operators (e.g., BT, EE, O2)
- Northumbria Water
- Northumbria Police
- Voluntary Services (e.g., Mountain Rescue, Red Cross)
- Military

### **Other Evidence**

Evidence will also be sought from MPs, County Councillors and Town and Parish Councillors and most importantly our residents.

The review will examine a number of documents involved in the response including evidence from debrief sessions internally and with partner organisations. Evidence gathering sessions will be held through the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee in which key stakeholders will be invited to attend and share their experience of the Storm Arwen Response.

### **Proposed Timetable for Review**

It is proposed that the review will be completed as follows. The dates will be finalised as participants availability is confirmed:

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date</b>
Agreement of ToR		Communities and Place OSC	12 <sup>th</sup> January 2022
Community Research	Residents and Businesses		January 2022 – March 2022
1 <sup>st</sup> Evidence Gathering Session	Industry Partners (NPG, NWL, Telecommunication companies)	Review Committee	Mid-February 2022
2 <sup>nd</sup> Evidence Gathering Session	Internal Partners (Officers, LRF)	Review Committee	End of February 2022
3 <sup>rd</sup> Evidence Gathering Session	MPs, Councillors, Town and Parish Councillors, Voluntary sector	Review Committee	March 2022
Interim Progress Report		Communities and Place OSC	April 2022
4 <sup>th</sup> Evidence Gathering Session	Feedback from community research	Review Committee	April 2022
Final Report		OSC/ Full Council	July 2022

Discussions are on-going with a number of research teams who could work to collect the views of the community for this review. Northumberland residents are at the heart of this review and the public will have the opportunity to provide their feedback throughout the process.

### **Evidence Gathering Sessions**

The number of evidence sessions may change. It is possible that evidence given during these sessions may need further follow up in other sessions or via other means such as

written responses. The number of required evidence sessions will not be known until the 1<sup>st</sup> session has taken place.

It is recommended that the evidence sessions are undertaken as part of a task and finish group.

### **Consideration of Findings**

The findings will be considered in a written report and recommendations to full council and may be subject to Scrutiny by the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

### **Conclusion**

The scope of the review is designed to ensure that a comprehensive review is undertaken of the response to Storm Arwen and to make recommendations for the future with the community at their heart.

### **Recommendation**

**To consider and agree the following:**

- **Consider the terms of reference/scope of the review**
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REPORT AUTHOR:

Jackie Roll, Head of Democratic Services