

Lessons Identified from UK Exercises and Operations – a Policy Framework

Introduction

1. The UK undertakes a significant amount of exercise activity in addition to those real operations resulting from threats and hazards including terrorism, natural disasters, accidents and industrial action.
2. The simulated or actual response to such exercises and incidents depends upon the nature and scale of the event. Any response will be dealt with at Local, Regional or National level, or a combination of these. The most significant scenarios, in terms of both nature and scale, will fall under the responsibility of an appropriate Lead Government Department at the National level, in accordance with the principles set out in *Central Government Arrangements for Responding to an Emergency – Concept of Operations*¹.
3. The Local and Regional Resilience Fora now in place in England, bring together all of the key organisations which would respond in an emergency. This already provides a mechanism for the collation and distribution of lessons or best practice in a multi-agency environment.

Key Responsibilities in Government

4. Each individual Department and Agency has responsibility for defined areas of policy, plans and procedures falling within their area of work, including the maintenance, review and revision of these in response to lessons identified.
5. On Terrorism the Lead Government Department is the Home Office. In this area of work, the Home Office already maintains a matrix of Lessons Identified arising from the National Counter Terrorist Exercise Programme.
6. The Cabinet Office, Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS), has responsibility for overall Government exercise policy at the National level under the Government Resilience Exercise Policy, this includes, via the relevant Sub-Committee, the subject of Lessons Identified.
7. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) is responsible for providing a capability to plan and respond to emergencies at the regional level. The Regional Resilience Teams, located in each Regional Government Office, already work to co-ordinate Central Government support to Local and Regional incidents. They also facilitate planning, execution and evaluation of key exercise activity at the Local and Regional level.

¹ “Central Government Arrangements for Responding to Emergencies – Concept of Operations (CONOPs) –this guidance is available at: <http://www.ukresilience.info/publications/conops.pdf>

Purpose of developing a Policy Framework

8. The development of the policy framework has been guided by the following main objectives:
 - a. To ensure that lessons are identified and acted upon at the lowest appropriate level and escalated where necessary
 - b. To provide a clear link between lessons emerging and changes to plans and procedures
 - c. To provide a consistent framework for organisations to develop their own supporting arrangements for identifying and recording lessons learned
 - d. To work as far as possible within existing structures at local, regional and national level
 - e. To clarify responsibility for ensuring that lessons are identified and acted upon
 - f. To focus, at the national level, on those lessons raised that affect the multi-agency response or the functioning of key capabilities.

The 'Lessons Identified' Policy Framework

9. The framework below formalises existing, largely informal, arrangements and builds on the long-standing arrangements underpinning the counter-terrorist exercise programme. It proposes that:
 - i. The appropriate Cabinet Committees should have on-going strategic oversight of lessons learned activity, involving other committees as necessary
 - ii. New arrangements managed by the Cabinet Office (CCS) will be put in place to bring together those lessons learned that have implications for the multi-agency response at central, regional or local levels, and for the functioning of key cross-governmental capabilities
 - iii. Lessons learned activity should be part of the day-to-day working of local and regional resilience forums. Criteria should be established to ensure the escalation and / or fast-tracking, as appropriate, of those lessons that need to be addressed at a higher level
 - iv. Best practice guidance will be developed with practitioners and building on advice contained in 'Emergency Preparedness' [<http://www.ukresilience.info/ccact/eppdfs/index.shtml>] and elsewhere, to raise standards and support greater consistency. This will include among other things, identifying lessons learned, roles and responsibilities, definitions, and collection / reporting templates.

Identifying, recording and distributing lessons learned at the local level

10. Most emergencies are managed by local responders with little or no involvement from central government. The Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) requires all Category One responders² to regularly exercise their plans and procedures in collaboration with other agencies, and to put procedures in place to record and capture lessons emerging. However, local practices often vary and where arrangements exist these do not always extend to the regular capturing of lessons emerging from real life emergencies or for spreading these lessons more widely. Therefore, there is value in developing clearer guidance for distribution through local and regional resilience fora to local responders under the CCA, and to central government departments and agencies. As a starting point such guidance should include:

- i. Reaffirming the requirement to capture and assess lessons emerging from exercises and emergencies, including by whom this should be carried out and in what timescale it should be completed
- ii. Providing a recommended format for the recording of such lesson in a simple tabular format, of a type which is familiar in government and other organisations.
- iii. Covering the handling of initial lessons identified reports where significant issues are thought to have been recognised, and which need to be circulated widely (e.g. to all Category One responders) or escalated rapidly to the regional and / or national level
- iv. Recommending a formal role for Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) in reviewing on a regular basis lessons emerging from significant emergencies and exercises in their area.
- v. For emergencies of national significance, a lessons learned workshop or conference should be organised by either the local or regional resilience forum, as appropriate, in order to share learning with other responders.

The role of the Regional Resilience Tier in identifying, recording and distributing lessons learned

11. The Government Offices (GOs) represent central government in the English regions. In each GO a Regional Resilience Team (RRT) has been established to improve co-ordination and the flow of information across and between regions, and between local areas and the centre in preparation for an emergency and, if necessary, in supporting the response to an emergency or subsequent recovery efforts.

² Further information on Category One Responders can be found at http://www.ukresilience.info/ccact/eppdfs/ep_chap_02.pdf

12. The continuation of these responsibilities in the post-incident phase logically extends to helping to facilitate and co-ordinate the identification, recording and collation of lessons from local and, if required, regional level debrief process³. This will help to extract those local & regional lessons which may be appropriate for consideration by Central Government. Consideration will be given to developing with DCLG (RCU) guidance for RRTs detailing:

- i. The requirement on RRTs to capture and assess lessons emerging from regional level exercises and emergencies, and where lessons emerging at local level have wider implications to collate these also. This will also include clear timescales over which these should be prepared.
- ii. Providing a recommended format for the recording of such lessons in a simple tabular format, of a type which is familiar in government and other organisations.
- iii. Covering RRTs input, in support of affected LRFs, to the process of preparing immediate lessons identified reports where significant issues are thought to have been recognised and which need to be escalated rapidly to the regional and / or national level.
- iv. Recommending a formal role for Regional Resilience Forums in reviewing on a regular basis lessons emerging from significant emergencies and exercises in their area.
- v. Proposing that for emergencies of national significance, a 'lessons learned workshop' should be organised by either the local or regional resilience forum as appropriate to share learning with other responders.

Co-ordinating lessons learned activity at the national level

13. It is expected that Central Government Departments will continue to conduct internal lessons learned processes in accordance with current practices. These processes will serve to identify issues of cross-departmental significance which, when supplemented by national issues identified via the appropriate RRTs, will form the core of national lessons identified reports suitable for cross-departmental consideration by the relevant Cabinet committees.

14. The Lead Government Department for Tier 1 exercises should produce a post-exercise report within three months of the exercise's completion. The Report should incorporate an evaluation of the exercise and a thematic description of key lessons identified. As complete a summary as possible focusing on multi-agency and transferable knowledge and expertise should be published on Departmental websites and UK

³ Regional level debriefs may be appropriate in wide-area or multi site incidents and could supplement, or replace local level debriefs.

Resilience in order to facilitate dissemination to key responders and the public. Security considerations should dictate the level of detail made available, but should not automatically preclude publication. This is in line with current international best practice and formalises the systems some departments have already established into an agreed standard;

15. The Lead Government Department following an emergency necessitating the activation of the central response machinery should produce a post-incident report within three months of the end of the response phase. A summary focusing in particular on the multi-agency issues and transferable knowledge and expertise and should be published on departmental websites and UK Resilience in order to facilitate dissemination to key responders and the public. Consideration should be given to publishing a separate report into lessons from the recovery phase of the incident. This framework may need to be adapted where an independent or external inquiry has been commissioned.
16. The Cabinet Office Civil Contingencies Secretariat will facilitate an annual lessons identified seminar with national, regional and local stakeholders. The purpose of this seminar will be to present key lessons from exercises and operations in an environment that will facilitate learning and ensure lessons identified are shared as widely as possible. All key departments and agencies should participate as necessary along with representatives from the regional and local tiers.
17. The Cabinet Office (CCS) will establish a system for collating any Strategic or cross-cutting Lessons Identified submitted by individual Government Departments (including the DCLG on behalf of the Government Offices in the Regions).
18. The system established should seek to:
 - a. Record the receipt of Lessons Identified in the established common format.
 - b. Allocate the responsibility to act upon, investigate or clarify individual Lessons or groups of related Lessons via one or more of the following:
 - i. Attributing Lessons to a standard **Resilience Workstream** as part of the **Capabilities Programme**⁴.
 - ii. Create a **new time limited Lessons Identified Workstream** for which a given Department or Agency will have the lead responsibility.
 - iii. Ensuring **effective distribution of lessons identified at the national level** with implications for multi-agency response arrangements at the:

⁴ Details on the Capabilities Programme can be found at <http://www.ukresilience.info/preparedness/ukgovernment/capabilities.shtm>

- a. local level through informal guidance, as necessary, to Category one and two responders by RRTs and the UK Resilience website⁵; revisions to relevant courses / new courses at the Emergency Planning College and regular updates to Emergency Preparedness and the Emergency Response and Recovery.
- b. Regional level through regular discussion of lessons at monthly meetings of Regional Resilience directors, supported by additional guidance and briefing as necessary.
- c. National level through amendments to the Central Government Concept of Operations for the response to an Emergency and to relevant Lead Department plans and procedures.

19. The system established should also ensure that a robust audit trail is maintained in respect of the consideration and allocation of given Lessons or groups of Lessons, and that progress against delivery in this regard is tracked by either:

- a. in the case of i), above, the **Capabilities Programme Board**;
or,
- b. in the case of ii), above, **the relevant Cabinet Committee**).

20. Departments and Agencies responsible for delivery against a given Lessons Identified Workstream will be encouraged to make use of a standard format in order to aid at a glance updates on status to be reported by the appropriate means.

21. The Cabinet Office (CCS) will have responsibility for co-ordinating this work across government including engaging stakeholders at local, regional and national level during the development of guidance documents and will make regular progress reports via the relevant Cabinet Committees.

⁵ <http://www.ukresilience.info/index.shtm>

Flow Diagram of Lessons Identified Process (Simplified)

