Business Plan

County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum

Preparing for Emergencies in County Durham and Darlington

Date: April 2025- March 2026

County Durham and Darlington
Local Resilience Forum

Foreword by the Chair of County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum, Chief Fire Officer Steve Helps

The last few years have been unprecedented in terms of the work the Local Resilience Forum (LRF), has undertaken in response to planning for and responding to severe weather, civil disturbances and interruptions to essential services. All the while, learning lessons and improving our collective response following major incidents, which have occurred across the country.

On average one major incident occurs within England every week and over recent years the LRF have held Strategic Coordinating Groups (SCG) and have been under a major incident declaration for a significant amount of time. The response arrangements have involved an enormous effort from a great deal of the category one and two responders as well as other key partners. I'm extremely proud of the way the LRF plan, test and exercise and respond to major incidents.

The resilience landscape is changing and with the National Resilience Strategy outlining the future of resilience across the UK, we look forward to strengthening our partnership across County Durham and Darlington in support. The expectation and role of the LRF continues to increase and we look forward to central government's plans to strengthen and provide sustainable funding to ensure the LRF has the resources and capacity it needs to meet the expectations of our communities, partners, and central government.

This Business Plan outlines the strategic aims and objectives of the LRF along with the business priorities. As we know, the LRF will only be successful in serving its communities if there is a shared vision, a shared understanding of risk and a willingness to work together to improve the quality of service to the communities of County Durham and Darlington.
This plan ensures we are focussed on being as well prepared as possible to meet the risks facing our communities and developing the LRF to meet future requirements. The business priorities are guided by the current national threats and the risks identified by the local community risk register along with considering the changing landscape to enable the LRF to respond effectively to the challenges it may face.

Steve Helps, Chair of the Local Resilience Forum and Chief Fire Officer, County Durham and Darlington Fire & Rescue Service.

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SECTION 1

Our Area

County Durham

Situated in the Northeast of England, County Durham stretches from Peterlee and Seaham in the east, to Harwood and Killhope in the west and Burnopfield in the north to Barningham in the south. County Durham is a large and diverse area. It is home to over half a million people, making it in terms of population size the largest local authority in the Northeast and the sixth largest in England. It covers an area of 2,226 km squared (859 square miles).

Commonly regarded as a predominantly rural area, the county varies in character from remote and sparsely populated areas in the west to former coalfield communities in the centre and east, where villages tend to accommodate thousands rather than hundreds. Around 93% of the population lives east of the A68 road, in approximately half of the county by area. County Durham has 12 major centres of population, each acting as a service centre for surrounding communities which provides employment, shopping and other services.

County Durham, along with other areas across the country, is experiencing an ever-ageing population which is predicted to increase significantly over the next ten to twenty years.

Darlington

Darlington is a large market town in the Northeast of England and lies on the River Skerne, a tributary of the River Tees.

Darlington is a key economic asset within the Northeast of, with a sphere of influence that reaches into the Tees Valley, the wider Northeast region and beyond. Sectoral strengths include the business and professional service sector, manufacturing, advanced engineering and construction, with emerging strengths in digital and media, subsea, telehealth and telecare.

As well as the large engineering sites based in the town, Darlington is also home to many businesses within the modern and developing industries including Information Technology. The Government have now set up a Darlington Economic Campus, with Darlington now hosting offices for the Treasury, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Department for International Trade.

SECTION 2

Some of the Risks We Face
Risks in County Durham and Darlington

The County Durham and Darlington Community Risk Register (CRR) is a multi-agency publication that highlights risks that have the highest likelihood and potential to have significant impact, causing disruption to the County Durham and Darlington area and its communities. It is derived from two sources:

The National Risk Register (NRR) – The public facing version of the National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA). The 2023 National Risk Register sets out the range of risks and challenges we face which have the potential to cause significant disruption to the UK and explains what the government and partners are doing to mitigate these risks and how we all can prepare for and respond to them.

The National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA 2022) – An **Official-Sensitive** document which informs the national and regional considerations regarding malicious and non-malicious risks facing the UK or its interests overseas. Each risk is presented as a Reasonable Worst-Case Scenario (RWCS) and details the likelihood of the risk manifesting and its consequences across a range of areas should it occur.

While certain risks are described it does not mean that they will occur in the region. It means there is a possibility of them happening and therefore all agencies within the LRF have plans in place to respond to such incidents.

The CRR is the result of professional judgement from a range of contributors, historical evidence, scientific input and expert analysis in evaluating the key risks facing County Durham and Darlington. The risks described within the CRR reflect the risk landscape and the likelihood and impact of risk scenarios occurring within County Durham and Darlington. These risks include:

- Human disease
- Animal disease
- Flooding
- Utility failure
- Cyber-attacks
- Malicious attacks
- Wildfire
- Adverse weather

The LRF works towards mitigating the impact and responding effectively to our high risks to support community resilience for the people of County Durham and Darlington.

In 2024 government moved to a dynamic risk assessment methodology whereby risk assessments are now reviewed on a rolling programme. This means that LRF risk profiles can and do change regularly.

To address the ever-changing risk landscape CDDLRF have included Communication and Media Strategies as a standing agenda item on all working group agendas. This allows for

partners to share upcoming and relevant risks for the following quarter, along with any relevant media campaigns that can be used by partners as deemed appropriate.

In addition, capability gaps that are identified because of lessons identified through training and exercise, and incidents are actioned through the debrief process and the CDDLRF Audit Board.

Diagram 1 highlights some of the highest risks currently facing County Durham and Darlington (March 2025).

RISK MATRIX					
I M P A C T	5		National electricity transmission system	Pandemic Cyber Attack	
	4	Heatwave	Malicious Attack Animal Disease	Cold and Snow Emerging Infectious Disease	
	3			Fluvial Flooding	
	2		Wildfire		
	1				
		1	2	3	4	5
LIKELIHOOD					

Risk	Description
Pandemic	A new virus, to which people have no immunity, emerges and starts spreading as easily as an existing virus e.g. influenza. As well as their potential to cause serious harm to human health, they threaten wider social and economic damage and disruption.
Severe Weather (cold and snow, heatwave)	This risk covers the extremes of weather and includes: for at least one week, multiple regions of the UK are subject to low temperatures and snow (falling and lying) coinciding with a daily mean temperature of below -3ºC, and daily maximum temperature in excess of 28°C and minimum temperatures in excess of 15°C over most of a region for at least 5 consecutive days.
Fluvial Flooding	A massive river flood event or series of concurrent events across multiple regions following a sustained period of heavy rainfall extending over two weeks, possibly combined with snow melt and surface water flooding.
National Electricity Transmission	Total blackout for up to 5 days due to loss of the National Electricity Transmission System with the potential for wide area power disruptions for up to 14 days.
Cyber attacks	Cyber space has become central to our economy and our society. Increasing our reliance on cyber space brings new opportunities but also new threats. While cyber space fosters open markets and open societies, this very openness can also make us more vulnerable to criminals, hackers, foreign intelligence services who want to harm us by compromising or damaging our critical data and systems. The social impact of a cyber attack and the potential to cause disruption in every corner of society, public service and business is significant and accounts for a disproportionate percentile of the NSRA 2022.
Malicious attacks	This risk covers the broad range of malicious attacks that have been experienced in other parts of the United Kingdom, from a lone actor carrying out a specific targeted attack to a wider incident involving multiple persons with various attack methodologies.
Adverse weather	The weather in County Durham and Darlington is extremely varied and dynamic. Weather patterns around the Pennines in West Durham can bring torrential rain and extremely severe snow and ice (the highest road in the County is the A66 trans-Pennine route at Bowes Moor). The weather in Teesdale and Weardale can be idyllic at the same time as mountainous seas are battering the coast.
Emerging Infectious Diseases	Disease emergence results from interactions between microbes and humans. These can be complex and multi-factorial. For example, population movement may result in the spread of a previously localised infection to a city where there is poor public health infrastructure, resulting in its establishment in the wider population. Emerging Transmissible disease can spread via humans and animals with recent examples being Ebola, Avian Influenza, pandemic and Malaria.
Animal Disease	Many diseases may be passed from animal to animal; in some cases they can be passed to humans. The impacts include risk to animal and human health, disruption to the food industry, and damage to the economy, tourism and recreation sectors.

Wildfire	A wildfire is an uncontrolled fire that burns vegetation, such as grass, heather, woodland, crops and scrubland. Climate change is likely to lead to changes in the weather patterns that affect the UK, with longer drier summers anticipated. This could lead to drier vegetation and more frequent, larger wildfires.

SECTION 3

Strategic Aim and Objectives

Aim

County Durham and Darlington LRF sits at the apex of County Durham and Darlington's local civil protection arrangements. Its overall purpose is to ensure that there is an appropriate level of preparedness, within available resources, to enable an effective multi-agency response to emergencies which may have a significant impact on the communities of County Durham and Darlington.

Objectives

1. To maintain a robust governance structure for the LRF to ensure that it is responsive, accountable, and able to fulfil its responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 including promoting business continuity arrangements, whether that be in partnership or as individual organisations, so as to fulfil statutory obligations.

2. To continue to use the additional funding provided from the Government to develop the capacity of the LRF, and LRF Team, to deliver successfully against the increased expectations brought about from the review of the National Resilience Strategy and the Civil Contingencies Act.

3. To continually monitor the national risk and threat landscape, identifying the local context and ensuring that sufficient and realistic multi-agency plans and procedures exist to deal with the consequences when events occur, and any capability gaps are identified. To approve and manage the Community Risk Register, raise awareness of new and emerging risks and ensure that the risk process provides a robust basis for future emergency planning.

4. To continually engage with and develop sustainable community resilience arrangements to ensure that the public understand the measures to take in the event of an emergency and to ensure that the resources of the Category 1 and 2 responders can be focused on the most vulnerable people in the community.

5. To provide a framework to develop the organisation and individual competencies of the LRF members to ensure effective multi-agency emergency management exists, through the planning, risk, training and exercising cycle. To embed best practice within the field of integrated emergency management across all aspects of the LRF and its partner organisations.

6. To maintain an integrated, robust and "fit for purpose" communications strategy that enables internal communications between LRF members and has appropriate mechanisms in place to warn and inform the public in the event of an emergency occurring and which is also adaptable to utilise technology and social media to provide warning and informing information to a wider audience.

7. To ensure that workable and resilient cross border arrangements with other LRFs are in place.

8. To address the recommendations relative to the LRF following the publication of the Manchester Arena Inquiry and Grenfell Tower and progress this work through a local or regional LRF group.

SECTION 4

How will County Durham and Darlington LRF achieve its responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act?

This Business Plan brings together the LRF resilience priorities into one key strategic document. It both directs and underpins the planning process and enables the LRF to focus its delivery of civil protection activities, directing and prioritising its work based on the risks and threats to the area and communities of County Durham and Darlington.

The document is reviewed annually by the Strategic Board. Whilst providing guidance on short term objectives and priorities, the plan will also look forward to providing longer term strategic direction.

Section 6 of this document outlines the Business Priorities that underpin the strategic objectives of the LRF. Each objective is supported by key deliverables and assigned to an action owner. Start, milestone and finish dates are agreed as part of the business planning process and monitored through the Tactical Business Group.

SECTION 6

Business Priorities

BP No	Objective
BP 3	To carry out a readiness assessment on the key risks and threats for County Durham and Darlington
BP 39	To action the Community Resilience Plan
BP 50	To carry out a strategic horizon scanning event
BP 52	To refresh the LRF business plan
BP 58	To focus on training to ensure competency within the LRF
BP 75	To address the recommendations relative to the LRF following the publication of the Manchester Arena Enquiry
BP78	To maintain preparations for warning and informing of the public before, during and after emergencies and of risks affecting them and how to prepare and respond to emergencies.
BP79	To maintain and continually develop the Death Management arrangements across CDDLRF
BP80	To address the recommendations relative to the LRF following the publication of the Grenfell Enquiry
BP81	To carry out a Resilience Standards review