SOUTHLAND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

RESPONSE REVIEW REPORT



Lucy Hicks, General Manager Policy & Government Reform, Environment Southland

November 2024

toa consulting

Emergency Management Southland

Response review report

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Report prepared by:
Jim Tetlow, Toa Consulting

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Acknowledgements

This review has sought to identify key issues that have occurred in recent responses and solutions to improve response capability in the future.

I would like to thank all those involved in the review who gave up their time to discuss these events and provided feedback which will benefit the Southland CDEM Group going forward.

In particular, I would like to acknowledge Lucy Hicks, Tracey Fraser and Douglas Marshall who assisted with the identification of key individuals involved and have provided context to both the events.

The weather event of September 2023 and the response to Bluecliffs in early 2024 required full activation of the Southland emergency management structure. Both responses involved staff from a range of organisations who worked together to resolve issues and meet the needs of impacted communities. Regardless of the issues identified in this review, thanks must be given to all those who responded to the events and were working in the best interests of the Southland community.

Introduction

Background to the review

This report provides an overview of the findings from the review process completed by Toa Consulting on behalf of the Southland Coordinating Executive Group (hereafter referred to as CEG) following the response to two emergency events that occurred in September 2023 and February 2024.

The two events were very different in their response requirements. The September 2023 flood event required multi-agency coordination to flooding across the Gore and Southland districts (and involved elements of the Invercargill City infrastructure), whereas the Bluecliffs 2024 response was in a specific part of the region and involved far fewer players, primarily Environment Southland, Southland District Council and Emergency Management Southland.

The review process

Purpose of the review

The purpose of the review was to identify opportunities for improvements to the response arrangements within the Southland region and areas for development in Readiness as part of the CDEM Group Plan review process. The review process:

- Provided the opportunity for key local authority and EMS staff and governance members to feedback on the responses; and
- Identify areas for improvement within readiness and response activities as part of the Group Plan development

The review process comprised two parts:

- A review of the existing debrief findings from the September 2023 rainfall event as presented to the Southland CEG in early 2024
- Interviews with representatives of local authorities and Emergency Management Southland involved in the response to the events

The scope of the review included:

The operation of the emergency management shared service model, including;

- The role of the Group Emergency Coordination Centre GECC, including responsibilities, resourcing, communication, systems, processes and leadership;
- The operation of local authority departments in support of the response, including infrastructure and assets; and
- The role of Governance in support of readiness and response activities

The review did not include:

- The activities of specific individuals within the responses;
- The activities of individual supporting agencies in response, including the emergency services and non-local authority asset operators; and
- The views of the impacted communities

Expected deliverable

The review findings will be provided to the Coordinating Executive Group (CEG) and Joint Committee members and a series of recommendations made for potential areas of development and improvements to the current arrangements.

Review Stakeholders

The following organisations will form part of the review:

- Emergency Management Southland
- Environment Southland
- Gore District Council
- Invercargill City Council
- Southland District Council

Review timeline

The review process will be conducted between August and October 2024.

Review interviews

The review involved 21 individuals from the following organisations;

Emergency Management Southland

- Tracey Fraser, Acting Group Manager / Team Leader

Environment Southland

- Wilma Falconer, Chief Executive
- Lucy Hicks, General Manager Policy & Government Reform / Group Controller
- Marcus Roy, Policy and Government Manager / Alternate Group Controller
- Paul Le Roux, Health, Safety and Risk Manager / Alternate Group Controller
- Bruce Halligan, Acting General Manager Regulatory Services

Gore District Council

- Mayor Ben Bell
- Jason Domigan, General Manager Critical Services / Alternate Group Controller
- Craig Sinclair, / Former EMS staff member

Invercargill City Council

- Michael Day, Chief Executive / CEG Deputy Chair
- Russell Keen, Three Waters Infrastructure Manager
- Doug Rogers, Manager Strategic Asset planning
- Matt Keil, Manager Infrastructure Operations

National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA)

- Rochelle Faimalo, Regional Emergency Management Advisor

Te Ao Mārama Inc.

- Angie Hopkinson, Mana Whenua Emergency Facilitator - Murihiku

Southland District Council

- Mayor Rob Scott
- Cameron McIntosh, Chief Executive and CEG Chair
- Hartley Hare, Strategic Manager Transport
- Adrian Humphries, Group Manager Regulatory / Recovery Manager
- Regan McNaught, Development and Solid Waste Engineer
- David Connell, Transport team

Limitations to the process

The review process often tends to focus on what can be improved, as these are generally the aspects of the response that people focus on in the aftermath. While we have endeavoured to identify areas of best practice, or where operations were improved over time, this is vastly outweighed by identified issues and suggested areas for improvement within the findings.

Three key individuals were unable to be interviewed as part of the review, due to no longer being in their roles, or on extended leave. These individuals were:

- Simon Mapp, former Group Manager / Group Controller Emergency Management Southland
- Mallory Wood, former EMS Community Advisor
- Fran Mikulicic, Group Manager Infrastructure and Capital Delivery, Southland District Council

These individuals played significant parts in both responses and may potentially have insight on some of the issues raised within this report that has not been included.

Event overviews

Southland flooding event, September 2023

On Thursday 21st September 2023 the Southland region was hit by a rainfall event that resulted in widespread flooding across the Gore District and parts of the Southland District. While a severe weather watch had been issued for rainfall amounts approaching warning criteria, what occurred was beyond the levels expected.

The initial response to the event was centred in Gore and the council activated their Incident Management Team (IMT) around 9am in the morning to manage the initial response. The rainfall caused widespread surface flooding that overwhelmed stormwater and wastewater networks requiring the evacuation of properties, the establishing of a Civil Defence Centre (CDC) and impacts to other critical infrastructure, including key roads and the rail network. A State of Emergency was declared for the district at 1.18pm.

As the event progressed more widespread flooding occurred across the region, further impacting critical infrastructure and causing significant elevation of river systems and impacts to local infrastructure in the Southland district. The GECC was activated around 3pm and it became clear that a wider declaration was required. This was made around 5pm.

The GECC remained active until Saturday 23rd September, when river levels had decreased, and the threat of further rainfall had passed.

Bluecliffs erosion, February 2024

The settlement of Bluecliffs is located in the Southland District and lies adjacent to an active river mouth and high energy coastline. This area has been subject to high levels of erosion in the past and in February 2023 the degree of erosion had reached a stage where properties were experiencing significant loss of land.

Environment Southland (ES) and Southland District Council (SDC) had been investigating ways to address the issue since the September flood event where more erosion had occurred. The issue of opening the river bar under S330 of the Resource Management Act to lessen the affects had been investigated, but it was not felt it would have the level of impact required. As the event progressed the location of a historical landfill site was identified as being at risk and it would require removal to prevent loss into the marine environment. This included a potential explosive risk within the waste.

The decision was taken to declare a State of Emergency to ensure coordination of the response and enable the use of powers within the act to direct actions to be taken, both by organisations involved and the community. This included evacuation of at risk residents, the removal of the landfill site and the opening of the river bar. While removal of the waste occurred, the risk of erosion still remains.

The event was coordinated from the GECC once the state of emergency was in place and led by the Group Controller. The event ran from 8th February until the GECC was stood down on 20th March 2024 once all waste had been removed from the landfill site and the residents were back in their homes.

Review findings

Effective response to adverse events relies on a number of elements; effective response leadership and governance, strong relationships, an appropriate response structure, clear lines of communication, appropriate plans and procedures and suitable facilities, resources and personnel. The review sought to establish where issues were present across each of these elements, and the findings are detailed in the following sections.

Declarations

Whilst the events were quite different from each other, in both events a State of Emergency was implemented; in September 2023 the declaration was made for the Gore District by Mayor Ben Bell, prior to a regionwide declaration being made later in the day, and for Bluecliffs the declaration was made by Mayor Rob Scott for the Waiau Aparima ward.

Declaration of an emergency is made to support response activities where normal powers within other legislation is not applicable or appropriate for the scale of the event. The act of declaring a state of emergency enables the Controller to utilise wide ranging powers, as outlined within Sections 85 – 94 of the CDEM Act 2002 and ultimately suspends normal council processes for decision making in the declared area. This gives the Controller the final decision over how the response should proceed. Given the authority a declaration gives a Controller, it is essential to ensure a number of criteria are met to determine if a declaration is required or not, including meeting the definition of an emergency as per the act, an actual or potential risk to life and property being present, the event being beyond the capability of the emergency services or otherwise requiring significant coordination and a requirement to utilise powers of the Controller to manage the event[1].

It was noted by a number of those who were interviewed that the understanding of the powers and arrangements within existing legislation and the application of the legislation varied across many of those involved. While the requirements for a declaration in September 2023 were obvious due to the scale and severity, there was significant differing of opinion across senior leadership and governance as to the need for a declaration for the Bluecliffs event. Some noted that there had been a change at both levels across all local authorities and that the process of inducting individuals into the emergency management structure had been different compared to in the past, which had potentially contributed to the differing levels of understanding of the response process and structure.

The key feedback received regarding both declarations related largely to the lack of a clear process for making the decision, particularly regarding who should be involved and how others are informed of the decision to declare or not. It was felt by several of those interviewed that any declaration for an event within the region impacts all members of the Group, whether made locally or regionally, and therefor needs to have appropriate representation and agreement from governance across all authorities, regardless of whether the event directly affects them as an organisation or not. The

[1] Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002, Part 1, Section 4 – Definitions 'Emergency", Part 4, Section 68 – 73A, Part 5, Section 85 - 94

declaring of an emergency activates the shared service response model and places an emphasis upon the GECC to provide support to the affected authorities. This may have potentially significant impacts on the BAU work of the four local authorities and has a direct financial impact to enable the GECC to undertake this role for extended periods of time.

It was felt that more importance needed to be placed on the role of the Coordinating Executive Group (CEG) and Joint Committee both in response and in readiness. These forums should be used more effectively, compared to a rather ad-hoc approach that was taken in the responses to bring leaders from different organisations together. These are both important forums for ensuring a cohesive and joined up approach across all aspects of response and needs to be given the appropriate level of importance by response leadership. The role of governance is clearly defined within CIMS 3rd Edition[2], where it identifies the role of both political representatives and senior management within the response and this should be reflected through the use of existing committees to support and provide advice to the Controller and Incident Management Team (IMT). Since the events occurred an e-text system has been put in place to ensure that elected officials and senior management across the authorities are informed of activation at the beginning stages of the event.

The role of the Group Controller

The Control function in Southland plays a significant role in response and requires individuals to have the appropriate skills and knowledge to lead events. Given the centralised structure utilised by Southland, the individual in the role of Controller is working on behalf of all local authorities and therefore needs to have the appropriate endorsement of both the CEG and Joint Committee to enable them to make decisions on behalf of each authority, particularly when in a state of emergency, where they have ultimate say of the actions to be taken.

While the Emergency Management Southland (EMS) Group Manager takes on the primary or Group Controller role, there are a few individuals who act as alternates. Some of those interviewed noted that there is a lack of representation across all authorities, with the vast majority of Controllers currently employees of ES. The issue of overall representation of local authorities within the GECC is discussed later in the report, particularly at the Controller level, and this is likely to have contributed to a lack of coordination between organisations.

A further issue was highlighted relating to the September rainfall event, which saw two declarations made; an initial declaration for the Gore District and later in the day a region-wide declaration. It is unclear what involvement the Group Controller had in decision making following the Gore District declaration, as the GECC was not activated until mid-afternoon, and it appears most decisions were being taken by the GDC IMT and the Group Controller kept informed. Given the centralised model utilised for response in Southland, once a declaration is made in any area this moves responsibility for the overall response and activities undertaken to the Group Controller as per the CDEM Act 2002 and should ultimately lead to the immediate activation of the GECC. However, this did not occur, and it is unclear how the Group Controller was involved in decision making in the time between the Gore

[2] CIMS 3rd Edition, Section 3.3, Page 32

declaration and the wider declaration, or if powers had been delegated to GDC staff who were leading the response in the early stages of the event.

It was also noted by a number of current controllers that the role needs to be given more importance within organisations. Currently it is an added responsibility to a current role, and this means that there is limited ability to devote the time required to build effective knowledge and relationships appropriate to dealing with a major emergency. Some individuals interviewed felt the leadership within the GECC at the outset of both the September 2023 and Bluecliffs events did not have well established working relationships with governance in the affected authorities prior to the events and this resulted in a lack of understanding and trust between both parties, leading to a complicating of the decision making and strategic management of the responses.

Relationships

For the centralised response model to be effective all authorities need to work in coordination with the GECC and the importance of strong relationships cannot be underestimated. These are developed in readiness and can greatly influence the direction a response takes. Existing relationships between GECC leadership and the governance level clearly influenced some of the decisions and outcomes in both events and these are discussed in the previous section.

It is clear that there was a lack of understanding and knowledge between the GECC and local authority staff in both events. This included the requirements for information sharing and reporting, the capacity and capability to respond and the roles and responsibilities of the GECC versus those of the local authorities. Throughout the interviews it was suggested that previous working relationships that had been developed were no longer in place. It was mentioned that attendance at key committees and meetings, including the CEG, Operations Sub-Committee and Lifelines had diminished in recent times and needed to be given more importance to ensure appropriate relationships are built before a response.

Every response requires relationships with the emergency services, who are often first to respond and a source of good quality initial situational awareness. While no emergency services representatives were interviewed as part of the review process, it was identified that relationships with representatives were occurring at both the GECC and local authority level, particularly in the September 2023 event. At times directions and interactions were occurring solely at the local level with limited oversight of the GECC, which had not activated. It appears that the emergency services are well represented when activation of the GECC occurs, however, it is unclear how these relationships are managed prior to activation of the facility and how the Group Controller is kept informed of the actions being taken.

It is also clear from the review that there is significant opportunity to develop stronger relationships with the wider response organisations, to ensure that situational awareness is increased across all agencies and there is a clear understanding of the requirements for response and the roles and responsibilities for the delivery of key activities.

Response structure

Southland operates a shared services model for the delivery of emergency management within the region. This is overseen by ES as the administering authority and operates under a service level agreement. In response, the GECC takes on the responsibility for key CIMS functions and outputs on behalf of the local authorities (e.g. provision of welfare to affected communities), leaving authorities to manage critical services, including roading and three waters.

All CDEM-led emergencies are run from the GECC facility located on the premises of ES in Invercargill. The majority of those interviewed noted that beyond the service level agreement the requirements and triggers for the GECC activation and its role and responsibilities are not well understood outside of EMS. Triggers do exist for activation of the GECC for major hazards, however, there is a need to ensure these are appropriate to all circumstances and it is clearly identified how the operation of the GECC works to support local authority business continuity arrangements.

It was noted that there was a delay in the GECC standing up to support the September flood event, with the Gore District significantly impacted by mid-morning and the GECC not fully activating until mid-afternoon. It is also evident from the interviews that the roles and responsibilities between the GECC and the local authorities are not clear or well understood. Some of this can be attributed to the lack of existing relationships, but other factors, such as a lack of clear plans and procedures between the GECC and councils, business continuity arrangements and a lack of training of key individuals and function leads all played a part. Without a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the GECC and local authorities, the centralised model will never satisfy the needs of all partners.

One aspect of the centralised model that needs to be clearly defined is how response in potentially isolated and more remote parts of the region is managed under a full activation of the Group. Due to the potential isolation of GDC from Invercargill, the council undertook several actions during the September floods that might have been more appropriate at a regional level, including declaration and welfare delivery. On occasion there was a potential duplication of effort, largely due to a lack of communication, particularly in the provision of welfare and liaison with the emergency services.

While it is essential for local authorities to establish and resource a local IMT to manage business continuity and maintain a degree of local delivery, it is essential that this is in coordination with the GECC to prevent confusion and duplication of effort. As previously mentioned, it is not clear how the Group Controller was involved in decision making following the Gore declaration and this needs to be clearly defined in future events.

In other parts of the region there is a strong reliance upon Community response to support the centralised model. It is essential that there is a clear understanding, whether at the local authority or community response level, of the roles and responsibilities and delegations for decision making that are provided to the community and how this will be supported to ensure it is sustainable, safe and appropriate for the impacts of the event.

Resourcing the response

EMS currently employs seven staff who hold BAU portfolios as well as specialist response roles. At the time of the September flood event the team were greatly reduced in capability, having lost an experienced staff member and having another highly experienced staff member on leave, in addition to one full time role being vacant. This left three full time staff to manage the activation and operation of the centre. At the outset of the Bluecliffs response the team was still greatly diminished from full capacity, with new staff members only recently joining the team and a highly experienced staff member on leave. This undoubtedly impacted the effectiveness of the responses and led to knowledge and process gaps within key functions.

Many of those interviewed noted that the GECC is heavily staffed by ES in key roles, and this has resulted in a number of factors that may have impacts on response. Firstly, the use of predominantly ES staff across the CIMS functions results in a lack of local authority knowledge, networks and linkages into council services. This is particularly true of several functions, where the lack of local staff in the GECC led to delays and misunderstandings regarding response operations and activities. Secondly, it has created a perception that it is not truly representative of all local authorities, leading to some local authority departments to respond in isolation, rather than integrate into the centre. Thirdly, the current resourcing of the GECC is unsustainable without the input of additional staff resources from all the territorial authorities. It was noted that elements of the Bluecliffs response improved once SDC staff were embedded in the GECC and could provide local knowledge, utilise existing networks and be better supported by a wider response structure.

The location of the GECC was also raised as a potential barrier by some involved in the review. The GECC is currently located on the ES premises and those from other organisations noted that the location and access to the facility may also contribute to the perception of it not being the response centre for SDC, ICC and GDC.

Although not directly related to the responses, it was also noted that the attendance at training events in readiness varies greatly across authorities, with some having very low attendance numbers, meaning that there is a deficiency in knowledge regarding the operation of the GECC and the roles and responsibilities of the CIMS functions. It is critical that all local authorities ensure staff are encouraged and enabled to attend training to promote knowledge and understanding of the role of the GECC and how events are managed across the region.

Communication

Communication is always at the forefront of effective response. Without clearly established lines of communication, both internal and external, any response, regardless of size, will more than likely suffer a lack of coordination.

A number of individuals who were interviewed noted that communications in both responses was an area requiring significant improvement in the future. Many noted that there was not a clear common

operating picture across all agencies and that the information flows between the GECC and local authorities were ad-hoc in nature and require a clearer process to maintain good situational awareness across all partners. This led to actions being taken by some partners that were not known to the GECC and other members of the CDEM Group. Each authority has an existing @cdsouthland email address to receive and provide information to the GECC, however, the existence of these addresses appears to not be well known within the local authorities.

The declaration made in Gore for the September 2023 event prior to the Group-wide declaration is an example of where better communication is required across the CDEM Group members. Although the Group Controller was aware and supportive of the decision, many of the other CDEM Group members, including at the governance level, were not fully informed until after the declaration was in place. Given the centralised response model and the authority and powers a declaration provides the Group Controller, this is something that needs to be better communicated to the CEG and Joint Committee, as it has potential impacts to the wider response and requirements for activation of the GECC to support the response. As previously mentioned, an e-text system has been put in place to ensure governance is kept informed of activation and key decisions throughout response.

Throughout both responses the GECC provided information to partners through a range of methods; multi-agency briefings (virtual meetings), IMT meetings and direct contact to relevant departments. Many of those interviewed felt that these meetings did not meet the needs of the response and on occasion provided very few tangible outcomes. In addition, the IMT meetings within the GECC in both events required better structure to ensure clear outcomes and better communication of impacts across all group members.

It was noted by some that the way information was shared at different levels was inconsistent. Those in governance roles noted that they received little feedback following IMT discussions or major decisions and that on occasion the communication was limited. They noted that they received more information from their own council staff, rather than from the GECC, who were coordinating the response. It was also noted that the communication to iwi / Mana Whenua was inconsistent and did not enable them to have a clear understanding of all aspects of the responses and how they could support.

Communication to the public is critical in any event. The information provided can greatly support the actions of communities and needs to be received in a consistent and coordinated manner to reduce the risk of the wrong actions being taken or confused messaging.

During both events communication with the impacted communities was required to support response activities. Communications to the public came from a range of sources; Governance, GECC PIM, local authority comms and individual responding agencies. At times this messaging was not coordinated and potentially resulted in some complications to the response efforts. It is vital that in future events the role of PIM in the GECC is the lead for messaging related to the response to provide one source of truth for the event. While individual organisations can still issue messages specific to their areas of responsibility, they must still ensure this is coordinated with the GECC PIM to ensure consistency and minimise duplication.

Some noted that the PIM role within the GECC is not well resourced or represented by all local authorities. It is critical that this role is resourced appropriately and connected into the responding organisations to ensure the centralised model is effective in communicating with the public. It is also vital that governance is linked into the PIM function to ensure that there is consistent key messages provided, and they have the latest information available to them.

Plans, procedures and systems

As has been mentioned prior, there appears to be a lack of understanding of plans and procedures for some aspects of response. This includes the activation and operation of the GECC, the sharing of information across response partners, the management of public communications and the use of forums in response such as the Welfare Coordination Group (WCG) and Lifelines Advisory Group (LAG). Since the events, EMS has begun undertaking a review of all plans and procedures and is prioritising the review of these as part of the current work programme.

With regard to the activation of the GECC, while triggers for major hazards do exist, there is a need for this to be supported by a clear concept of operations, which details the roles and responsibilities of each Group member when operating under the centralised GECC model. This is critical to ensure a consistent approach when dealing with emergency events and to integrate the business continuity arrangements of each local authority and the regional council.

It was noted that the systems utilised within the GECC need to be accessible to all partners to ensure a clear common operating picture and situational awareness. Currently the GECC utilises a Microsoft Teams environment to manage information, and this is combined with GIS platforms to provide visual information. While the information is available to those within the GECC, it is not easily accessible those outside, meaning many communications require the use of email and transferring of data into the system. The integration of all partners into a centralised information management system will greatly improve the ability of all group members to contribute and receive information related to the response.

Forums for discussion play a large part in supporting information sharing and decision making in response. This includes IMT meetings, briefings and established BAU forums such as the CEG, Joint Committee, WCG and Lifelines. It appears that there was little structure to many of these forums and in some cases, these were not utilised to help maintain a common operating picture. There are very few procedures in place for the running of these forums and their role within response.

While the Bluecliffs event had some very specific response activities compared to more common events, there were aspects of the event that required consistent approaches similar to any other response. The September flood event involved more common response activities; however, it appears that current planning for undertaking these activities at the time of the event was inconsistent and not well known across the Group. Aspects of response such as declaration, evacuation, provision of welfare services (including the establishing of CDC's), public communications, information collection and dissemination, planning and logistics share common procedures across all hazards and should be planned for and practiced in readiness.

The role of Emergency Management Southland

Throughout the review process the role of EMS in both readiness and response was raised. While EMS provide the day to day provision of emergency management in the region, this does not remove the responsibility from the local authorities to be prepared to respond and support the GECC's operation. At no point did in the review process did anyone disagree with the current model of a shared service, but many of those interviewed noted there is a need to review how the service is provided to ensure that it effectively delivers across the 4Rs within each authority. While this is was not a specific requirement of the review, the feedback received is important to enable better coordination of events in the future.

With the EMS Group Manager also taking on the role of Group Controller, the issue of who the role reports to in both BAU and response was raised by several people involved. While this does not specifically relate to the responses, it does have some bearing upon how organisations are coordinated and work together in response. The role of the Group Manager is to ensure the region is prepared to respond to adverse events and this relies upon building strong working partnerships across all partner organisations. It was felt that the person taking up the role in the future needs to ensure regular reporting beyond ES and outside of the CEG and Joint Committee meetings and that the visibility of this role within the local authorities needs to be increased.

One point that was consistently raised was that the visibility and perception of EMS within local authorities has changed over time. Many of those interviewed noted that the role of EMS in response was not well understood beyond those in leadership roles and this contributed to a lack of coordination and trust in the system. It was also noted that current EMS staff are not well known to those in key roles in some authorities and this could be improved through more regular opportunities on both sides to connect through training and exercising, attendance at readiness forums such as the Lifelines Advisory Group and inclusion of EMS staff in the development of local authority business continuity arrangements.

Recommendations

The review process has identified the following recommendations to the Southland CDEM Group:

Response Leadership and Governance

1. Ensure that the role of Group Controller is representative of all local authorities and ensure that those selected for the role are given the appropriate time within their BAU roles to build relationships with Governance across all organisations
2. Ensure the role of Group Manager has consistent reporting to Governance beyond the CEG and Joint Committee through regular meetings with local authority representatives
3. Ensure participation across all authorities in governance training provided by EMS, including Senior leaders within each authority to ensure understanding of the role of EMS, the GECC and local authorities in both declared and non-declared events
4. Exercise the roles and responsibilities of Governance as part of wider Group exercises and ensure that attendance at these is prioritised by both elected officials and senior management across all authorities

Relationships

5. Forums such as CEG, the Operations Sub-committee, WCG and Lifelines must be given an appropriate level of importance by all members and that attendance to these is consistent and at the right level to build effective relationships and understanding of capacity and capability across the group
6. Increase the visibility of EMS within local authorities at both strategic and operational levels to promote relationships and understanding of roles and responsibilities
7. Undertake regular training and exercising of the GECC and Group members to build better understanding of roles and responsibilities and develop relationships
8. Provide opportunities for the Group Controllers and key function leads to develop working relationships across all responding agencies in addition to training and exercising. This could include a Regional Emergency Management Forum to share current work programmes and activities with all partners

Response structure and resourcing

9. Review the arrangements of the centralised response model to ensure it meets the needs of all local authorities. This includes reviewing the roles and responsibilities of all member organisations, triggers for escalation of response and the response requirements for potentially isolated areas of the region
10. Review the current staffing within the GECC to ensure it is able to respond effectively over a prolonged period of time. This includes ensuring more staff resourcing is provided by local authorities in key roles and functions to ensure it is fully representative of all local authorities

Communications

11. Ensure the PIM function in the GECC is staffed and prioritised by all local authorities and is utilised to coordinate and share all communications relating to response to provide one source of truth to the community and reduce confusion or mixed messaging
12. Ensure staff within all authorities are enabled and encouraged to attend training and exercising events and this is prioritised by senior management
13. Investigate further development of the centralised information management system to include all partners and enables communication and information sharing

Plans and procedures

14. Continue to prioritise and review current SOP's, plans and procedures to ensure they are fit for purpose and reflect the needs of the Group members and community
15. Ensure a clear and consistent procedure for making declarations is developed to better support Governance members and Group Controllers in decision making