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**SEVERE WEATHER AND POWER CUTS – JANUARY 2-7 2012**

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**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report update the Committee on some of the issues identified during the severe weather and prolonged power cuts during early January 2012.

**2 RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the issues identified and consider the role that communities might play in future emergency situations.

**3 DETAIL**

- 3.1 Argyll and Bute suffered significant damage as a result of a storm on 2 January 2012. This resulted in protracted disruption to some services including power. In some areas the power was not fully restored until 7 January.
- 3.2 The Council worked closely with the police, the fire service and Scottish Hydro Electric Power Division (SHEPD) during this period to manage the situation and provide support to people who were at risk.
- 3.3 An internal debrief has taken place at senior officer level in the Council and at the time of writing the report, a strategic partner debrief is planned for 31 January.
- 3.4 The council's roads and amenity services responded quickly and effectively to clear roads and many citizens worked to clear smaller transport routes.
- 3.5 Following the initial storm impact, the absence of power in many areas became the main issue to be dealt with. Although the council was aware that some areas were without power on Tuesday and Wednesday, the widespread impact was not clear until Thursday morning, when over 400 communities/dwellings were identified by SHEPD as being without power.
- 3.6 The council's priority was to ensure that service delivery and support to vulnerable people was continued throughout the period. This was carried out.
- 3.7 The continued power outages resulted in:

- Loss of telephone communications (landlines) in some areas
- Resultant loss of 999 service
- Inability to make calls if no analogue phone was available (walk about phones did not work)
- Loss of power to mobile phone masts leading to no mobile coverage
- No communications via internet, fax or email
- No communications via television
- No access to radio coverage unless battery operated radio available

This impact on communications infrastructure for a prolonged period of time made the relay of information extremely difficult and challenging. Employees delivering services on the ground were unable to contact central controls to update on the situation. This in turn made the identification of areas where power continued to be out very difficult and communication with the people who continued to be affected very difficult.

- 3.8 In areas where there was no communication, air wave radios were made available by the police to critical employees. Generators were provided to larger settlements (e.g. Rothesay) that had prolonged power outage. These were however restricted in number and were not available for Islay or Tarbert. Mobile catering units were provided by SHEPD in Bute and Lochgilphead. Provision was made by the Council to establish rest centres to provide a place of warmth and hot food/drink.
- 3.8 The continued power outages raised issues for people not known to be vulnerable but who could have become vulnerable after 2 or 3 days without power, particularly in remoter areas. These were the groups that the council and police, working with the voluntary sector, sought to contact directly to find out if they needed assistance and to advise them of where they could get a hot meal.
- 3.9 The difficulties presented by the communications issues resulted in some duplication of effort by organisations. This will be addressed in future.
- 3.10 The multi agency debrief on 31 January will identify areas for improvement in joint working if this situation should arise again. This will include assessing the need for back up generator equipment for core services such as telecoms, care homes etc. The Scottish Affairs Select Committee in Westminster is collating evidence on the robustness of the grid in Scotland and will report in late February/March.
- 3.11 Many communities provided support for one another, looking out for potentially vulnerable neighbours and sharing resources. This action

complemented that of the service delivery organisations, enabling them to concentrate on supporting the most vulnerable and at risk.

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 It is possible that we will see increased frequency of severe weather that, combined with the high proportion of forestry in Argyll and the fact that many power lines are above ground, may result in further service disruption in future. It is important that the service organisations are well prepared to respond, that good communication is established with the power companies and that communities and individuals develop their own small scale resilience to cope with periods of service disruption.

#### **5 IMPLICATIONS**

Policy	None
Financial	None
Personnel	None
Legal	None
Equal Opportunities	None

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