

Exercise Hilton

Equality Impact Assessment for a Major Incident Response (Thursday 23rd July 2009)

Exercise Report

Introduction

Exercise Hilton was conducted as a DCC Partnership Table Top Exercise, to identify possible equality considerations that may arise, during and immediately after responding to an emergency incident.

The exercise was attended by members of the Emergency Services, Local Authority, Devon Equality Partnership other diversity groups (see annex). It was based over three stages.

Stage 1

The Response- Hotel and nightclub fire, allowing for the numerous diversity strands to be incorporated. Scenario included a civil partnership party with guests including LGB and transsexual friends, hotel residents on the street in nightwear, a group of non English speaking Kosovan school children with no teachers present, a group of elderly tourists with various physical disability needs and the discovery that some female residents and children had been placed at the hotel due to domestic violence issues.

Stage 2

Rest Centre- Due to the evacuation of the Hotel residents and party goers were stranded, the Police requested that the Local Authority establish a rest centre. This allowed the exercise to develop further by identifying the equality and needs issues that were present or may occur on arrival at and whilst present at the rest centre. Due to time of day and limited police resources available a formal Survivor Reception Centre (SRC) was not established and these aspects were considered within the Rest Centre along with media access.

Stage 3

Aftermath- Immediate issues not expanding into longer term recovery aspects, but included religious and racial issues that arose over a misguided suspicion as to cause of fire/explosion, fuelled by rumour and media comment.

The purpose of this document is to summarise the feedback obtained into a three point process against the relevant stages as follows, with a recommendation to way forward.

General conclusions

The Response

Good Practice Noted:

The Combined Agencies Emergency response plan (CAERP) along with the Blue light Services actions when attending and dealing with the chaos phase (including evacuation, cordoning and establishing a SRC) were discussed. Generally this practiced response was accepted as event driven with an understanding of the obvious restrictions and commitments put on to the staff as they initially attended and dealt with the incident.

Learning Point to Consider:

The way this stage was written, drew the attendees into thinking like first responders, with immediate considerations as to preservation of life (Human Rights – Right to Life), investigation, which initially prioritised over potential diversity issues. This was an interesting point as often in hindsight the response phase is questioned or criticised why an individual's needs were not taken into account.

As the groups began to take more account of the diversity issues, the immediate concerns were still focused on rescue; what if 'wheel chair users or those with sight and hearing impairments are still trapped with no lifts', 'language difficulties in understanding evacuation process or potentially, illegal immigrants hiding within the building rather than come into contact with a large uniform presence'.

The groups then looked beyond the life saving phase to what was happening on the street and recognised all of the diversity strands that were arising in brief:

LGB and Transsexual issues - Males dressed in drag may become subject of physical or verbal abuse by those outside the cordon area who may have been drinking. Some individuals may not have 'Come out' to friends, families or colleagues and would have concerns about being identified by the media.

Residents in nightwear or wrapped in bedding – concerns re protecting from the elements and personal dignity (relevant to gender).

Kosovan school children or any unaccompanied child and language issues as a whole – Who would be put in charge of children, CRB check etc? Communication issues with language and trying to impart instructions or information, feasibility of Language Line Telephone Interpreting Service or phrase book whilst on the street.

Elderly Tourists and Disability issues – Just because you are elderly does not make you vulnerable! Consideration as to how to deal with all aspects of physical and mental impairments affecting anyone involved, young or old discussed at length. From loss of mobility device or hearing aid to correct assistance offered.

Domestic violence victims – concerns raised about potential vulnerability with further loss (personal property, self esteem) within their lives and potential for media to identify their location to abuser.

Media – The whole aspect of media onsite was subject of intense concern, although the groups recognised the need for freedom of speech and accurate reporting of news, concerns were raised over the lack of control. The fact that they could and probably would try to breach cordons, take pictures of those most vulnerable and as a result of broadcasting (particularly LGB / Children / DV victim aspects) potentially interfere with someone's private life. Aspects of immediate uploading of information to News Sites, Facebook etc. also raised concerns e.g. by non media involvement, the use of camera phones.

Cordoning and separation of those involved – The group understood the aspects of cordoning which offered some protection to those immediately involved, but felt they should be removed from public view ASAP. There was also concern that the individual groups should be separated to offer further protection; children and victims in particular, consideration as to the LGB and transsexual party and foreign nationals to address potential misplaced prejudice or discrimination issues. Although there is also an element of all being victims of the same event and having a common bond with self support, so an area of concern that need monitoring and perhaps dealt with on an individual basis.

Try to Ensure:

- That all responders and those who may be identified to assist at an incident have training or awareness of Equality and Diversity (E&D), thereby allowing a greater understanding in identifying groups or individuals who may have additional needs.
- That the FRS and responders have an SOPs (what's this?)_in place for identifying the potential diversity and needs issues of the victims requiring rescue. One example raised was that removing someone with a brittle bone disease, without seeking advice from the person as to their condition, may actually cause harm.
- That as soon as is reasonably practical an individual responder on site (probably Police initially) is identified and tasked to take account of the immediate potential E&D issues and co-ordinate a response (logging decisions and actions).
- That the Police Force Incident Manager (Silver level) is adequately trained and aware of the range of E&D issues and considers this as an early action within the decision log.
- That at Gold level the use of an E&D specialist be employed at an early stage.

- That the responding partners inform their own E&D leads in adequate time that they can offer a meaningful response and relevant assistance (including liaison with opposite numbers in the response and partner agencies as required).
- That subject to event and resources available, those victims in an incident are removed from public view as soon possible to a survivor reception centre (SRC), where the issues re survivor, victim, witness, suspect and forensic evidence can be considered and E&D issues, group and individual needs addressed as required.
- Emergency Services and response agencies not to use acronyms/jargon when speaking to partners or victims.

Recommendations:

R1	Each responding Agency should identify a lead person for equality and diversity (E&D), who are properly trained
R2	Each responding Agency includes E&D reps on their alerting cascades, to be alerted as appropriate
R3	In an incident involving significant numbers of people, the lead E&D rep (Police) should ensure that potential E&D needs are recorded, with a note made of the outcome
R4	First-line responding agencies should have standard operating procedures in place to be aware of potential diversity needs in victims requiring rescue and protection
R5	Each responding Agency ensures all responders and those who may be identified to assist receive E&D training

The Rest Centre

Good Practice Noted:

That written plans were in place to respond to an incident requiring a rest centre, with pre-identified and planned premises. Floor plans were prepared allowing for potential needs such as prayer, quiet areas, children’s play areas, medical, breast feeding, food and beverage and suitable sleeping arrangements, if required.

That systems were in place to send identified and trained staff (mainly from DCC Adult Care Services) and other professionals (Children and Young Person Services for unaccompanied minors) to manage and staff the facility, including maintaining a record of those present and potential requirements.

That volunteer agencies such as WRVS, British Red Cross (BRC), Salvation Army (SA), St John and faith groups were engaged to provide additional support.

That systems were in place to communicate with the Police to re-unite people with family and friends and identify those who had been listed as a possible missing person.

That systems were in place to update those present as to current position of events as known.

Learning Point to Consider:

It was suggested that further separate areas be identified to place individual groups who may be the target for separate ridicule, prejudice or discrimination. For example the men in drag who were part of the LGB party or visible minority ethnic groups in the event of a suspected bombing, where they might receive misplaced targeting. Consideration given to separately accommodated the DV victims as they may be suffering with additional pressures.

That volunteer groups such as SA and BRC who display crosses may upset non religious (prefer secularism) or LGB individuals (experience homophobia/anti-gay attitudes on religious grounds).

That Rest Centre Managers suitably trained in E&D issues and their staff have received E&D awareness training to identify and deal with an individual’s needs or spot potential problems leading to prejudice or discrimination arising.

That identified staff and volunteers present may not provide a suitable diverse response with an adequate understanding of a particular individual or group’s needs.

Media issues raised a number of concerns, as it is well documented that unscrupulous individuals have used all sorts of tricks in the past to gain access to a venue or the victims, including purporting to be a victim themselves. Concerns also raised regarding a victim using their own camera phone to take pictures for news or message forum updates, which may interfere with another’s privacy or cause disruption.

General security was discussed with the fear that you may have an offender within the victims, an arsonist who set the fire, a violent offender, someone carrying a weapon, a conman, possible sex offender or paedophile who may want to use the opportunity to identify a future target.

Try to Ensure:

- That RC Managers have received E&D Training.
- E&D Training / Awareness is included for staff and volunteers.
- Consideration is extended to increase identified support from other diversity groups and individuals or that they are called on an ad hoc basis to provide specialist input as required.
- That any volunteer working within the Rest Centre, works to a code of conduct, making them aware of E&D issues and does not judge an individual or group by appearance or affiliation, that they do not display or endorse prejudice or discrimination.
- That a code of conduct for those present, contains a list of rules to include, no photography, no disruptive behaviour and a Zero Tolerance proviso – this could be easily justified on the basis of Health and Safety.
- Staff and volunteers, when monitoring the rest centre, also provide a listening ear to identify potential problems such as disruptive behaviour that may arise or individuals displaying concerning or suspicious behaviour to another and bring to the attention of the RC Manager.
- That suitable security is in place to try and prevent unauthorised access. An awareness of the possibility of individuals gaining entry and monitoring to identify a possible intruder.
- Considering a search process or metal detectors to identify cameras or weapons.
- A media strategy is in place allowing for briefing and potential access to site or individuals by agreement and appointment.

Recommendations:

R6	Ensure that equality and diversity is included as a topic in training all volunteers for Rest Centres, including RC managers
R7	A code of conduct should be developed for RC’s, included in training and displayed prominently (where time permits) in an established RC
R8	Security arrangements should be in place to prevent unauthorised entry, or entry with potentially harmful items (eg weapons), as identified in the on-site dynamic risk assessment
R9	Ensure a clear media / communications strategy is in place, covering access to RC’s

The Aftermath

Good Practice Noted:

That a media strategy would be put in place to ensure open, honest and timely updates in an attempt to deter inaccurate rumour.

Police have front line designated diversity staff, which was noted as good practice. That in a Gold led Major Incident Response, one of the Strategic Aims would be ‘Recovery’, that this should be led by the Local Authority as a separate group reporting back with immediate ongoing matters, but retaining lead after the actual emergency has finished to ensure the return to ‘normality’, community cohesion, future support and regeneration aspects.

That an exit strategy, would be put in place at an early stage.

Learning Point to Consider:

In respect of the exercise a scenario developed which allowed incorrect rumour to focus on the possible involvement of Islamic extremists. This would require involvement of community leaders and faith groups at an early stage and a co-ordinated and accurate media message to be given at an early stage.

It was identified that it was just not the Muslim communities that could face a possible backlash but also other visible ethnic minorities, Sikhs are often targeted due to how they dress (e.g. Turban).

The Exercise identified that the Hotel owners were Jewish, this may have an affect of other individuals wishing to target them or members of that faith, which may also require support.

Try to Ensure:

- The Recovery response is managed and correctly co-ordinated.
- Clear guidance given and boundaries set on the role of each agency, particularly during wind down. An exit strategy to be in place and adhered to.
- Support lines in place to update on additional or ongoing information.
- Information provided to areas outside of Devon is correct, so avoiding misunderstanding and interpretation.

Recommendation:

R10	Recovery planning should be in place in the aftermath of major incidents
-----	--

Exercise Hilton - Attendees

Name	Representing
Brendan Brookshaw	Devon & Cornwall Police
Helen Smith	Living Options
David Ireson	Exeter Diocese
Ian Hobbs	Devon County Council (DCC)– Community Strategy Officer
Dai Morriss	Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service
John Grellier	Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service
Paul Bourton	North Devon Council
Andy Hunt	Intercom Trust
Diane Lawrence	Rejuvenation
Moir Macdonald	Fawcett Devon
Iain Jeffery	D & C Police
Sarah Sharpe	D & C Police
Andy Oakley	D&S Fire & Rescue Service
Janet Crocker	Devon Senior Council
Ed Moffat	Devon Faiths Forum
Jo Higson	Government Office South West
Tony Williams	Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital
Doug Eltham	DCC Environment / Climate Change
Tracie Joliffe	The Knowledge Group (facilitator)
Stephen O'Rourke	DCC Emergency Planning
Judith Hardiman	DCC Emergency Planning
Richard Horne	DCC Emergency Planning
Jo Hooper	DCC Corporate Equality Officer

Exercise Hilton

- Action Plan

REF	RECOMMENDATION	CURRENT STATUS (DEC 09)	RESP	TIMEFRAME
R1	Each responding Agency should identify a lead person for equality and diversity (E&D), who are properly trained		ALL	
R2	Each responding Agency includes E&D reps on their alerting cascades, to be alerted as appropriate	DCC have appropriate contacts identified	ALL	
R3	In an incident involving significant numbers of people, the lead E&D rep (Police) should ensure that potential E&D needs are recorded, with a note made of the outcome		POLICE	
R4	First-line responding agencies should have standard operating procedures in place to be aware of potential diversity needs in victims requiring rescue and protection		F&RS POLICE SWAST	
R5	Each responding Agency ensures all responders and those who may be identified to assist receive E&D training		ALL	
R6	Ensure that equality and diversity is included as a topic in training all volunteers for Rest Centres, including RC managers		LA's	
R7	A code of conduct should be developed for RC's, included in training and displayed prominently (where time permits) in an established RC		LA's	
R8	Security arrangements should be in place to prevent unauthorised entry, or entry with potentially harmful items (eg weapons), as identified in the on-site dynamic risk assessment		LA's	
R9	Ensure a clear media / communications strategy is in place, covering access to RC's		LA's	
R10	Recovery planning should be in place in the aftermath of major incidents	This is now custom and practice, although the LRF has still to develop a strategic framework for this locally	LRF	

