

# Community Resilience and Major Emergencies – Birmingham's Experience and Perspective

*Martin Tolman,  
Head of Birmingham Resilience Team*



# Setting The Scene

- **City of strategic and economic importance**
- **National financial & transport hubs**
- **City of >1 million within 80sq miles**
- **80 Neighbourhoods**
- **Diverse communities**
- **Small centralised city centre / 5000 businesses**
- **500,000 daily inward journeys (120,000 to finance district alone)**



# Real Emergencies – Real Lessons

## Terrorist related incidents:

- City Centre Evacuation
- Arrest of suspects from failed 21st July bombings
- Glasgow etc.
- Birmingham Tornado
- Civil unrest in Lozells



# Real Emergencies – Real Lessons

- Second World War Ordnance
- Major fires / explosions causing building collapse & closure of major highways
- Flooding across the City



# Real Emergencies – Real Lessons

## The Birmingham Tornado

- 28<sup>th</sup> July / T4 / 115-136mph
- 5066 properties in path
- No fatalities / 20 injured
- 90% trees in 7 parks destroyed

In less than four minutes the locality had been transformed from a typical inner city residential and business area into something more akin to a war zone.



# Real Emergencies – Real Lessons

## Top Down

Leaving it just to  
the professionals!



## Bottom Up

Recognising that if we  
are to cope then we will  
ALSO need to depend  
on people, communities  
and businesses knowing  
what they can do for  
themselves.



# Our Approach

- In any major emergency, the extent to which the impact on people, environment, business and wider community life can be mitigated will in large part be determined by the extent to which citizens are prepared and able to respond to a wide range of threats and hazards.
- Communities have a considerable role to play in influencing and shaping all facets of integrated emergency management. It is not just about 'preparedness'. For example, community involvement can be critical to ensuring that the 'assumptions' of emergency planners are rooted in reality.



# Our Approach

- Building resilience is unlikely to be successful unless it is promoted as part of wider strategies for encouraging community involvement, well-being and partnership.
- Consequently the resilience ‘delivery’ mechanisms should, almost entirely, be based on existing community organisations, networks and partnerships.
- It is not TOO difficult – start at home!



## **Example: Meeting Welfare Needs**

- **Maximise self help whilst maintaining scalable response capability**
- **Evacuation OR Invacuation?**
- **Network of reception centres as immediate places of safety**
- **Less dependency on mass transport OR own vehicles**
- **Needs of vulnerable people more likely to be met where communities are self reliant**
- **Rest centres provide accommodation of last resort**
- **Welfare and general needs met by rapid response and crisis support**
- **Communication critical but must meet diverse needs and be accessible**
- **Recovery expected to start within hours**
- **Humanitarian Assistance Centres – Welfare and Information Support Officers**



## Example: Severe Weather/ Flood Watch

### - Alert Stage

- Flooding workshop & toolkit
- Establish communications with neighbourhood contacts (SMS etc – inform monitoring)
- Neighbourhood contacts advise local community, check drains, monitor river levels, report to council duty officer
- Selly Park, Northfield, Frankley



# Flood Imminent

Operational Flood Warning or one hour from onset of severe weather

- Activate Council Emergency Co-ordination Centre
- Establish dedicated community liaison line
- Neighbourhood contacts advise local community, check drains, monitor river levels, report to CECC, deploy flood defences
- Establish Council Emergency Information Line
- Anticipate evacuation measures
- Up-date website



# Flooding Occurs

- Within the hour deploy Council Emergency Information Line boards / leaflets
- Up date website
- Press/Media releases
- 3 – 4 hours council teams door to door providing advice, gathering information (familiar faces)
- 3 – 4 hours establish Public Information Points – Emergency Response Vehicle/Neighbourhood Offices/Community Centres/Front Living Rooms



## Exception??: Witton Flood Action Group

*From* – No resilience AND feeling let down by the statutory sector

*Now* – Not only have a self help approach but are integral to multi agency response including communication and information sharing.



# Witton Flood Action Group

- Community led group that meets on a monthly basis
- Designated Flood Wardens
- Deploy when threat of flooding
- Ensure flood defences are deployed
- Facilitate two way communication with CECC
- Take responsibility for vulnerable people



# Conclusion

Improving the resilience of society, as a whole, requires us to undertake consistent work that reaches out to citizens and their organisations, wherever they might be.

We do NOT regard our communities simply as passive recipients of advice from emergency planning professionals. Rather we regard our communities as 'equal' partners who are more than capable of helping shape the resilience of Birmingham in ALL aspects of integrated Emergency management.

- Risk assessment, emergency planning, training and exercising, warning and informing and indeed response and recovery – there are NO no-go areas for community engagement.
- We believe that the key to a stronger, safer and more resilient Birmingham is the people of Birmingham.



Birmingham  
resilience team

The logo consists of a horizontal row of seven small blue circles, with a slightly longer horizontal line segment in the center.

# Questions?

