



### **Introduction**

The role of the local authority chief executive and other senior staff in local government presents a unique mixture of risk, complexity and accountability. A single day may turn their eye to education, elections, elderly care, environmental issues and economic development. Civil emergencies, by their very nature, are not always considered as part of the day job, despite their clear importance. The chief executive's role in civil emergencies is often overlooked, but must not be neglected. Recent weather events of the summer of 2013 and the winter of 2013/14 have demonstrated the need for councils to act quickly, carefully and effectively when emergencies strike, and all the predictions point to a greater frequency of destructive weather patterns. Indeed the role of the chief executive in civil resilience goes beyond the very public image of extreme weather events, and this role must be supported, recognised and hailed when carried out effectively.

All principal local authorities are Category 1 ('core') responders under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. As such, they are (alongside the emergency services, some health bodies and the Environment Agency) subject to the full set of civil protection duties in the Act.

### **National context**

In January 2014, the Government announced a rapid review of the lessons learned from Christmas and New Year flooding. The areas to be investigated fell into four broad themes:

- i. the ability of local councils and other organisations to respond quickly and effectively out of normal working hours to meet the urgent needs of affected communities;
- ii. the way in which council and utilities communicate with their customers in an emergency, including out of normal working hours;
- iii. the activation and leadership of the government response to such emergencies
- iv. the communication with customer, re-connection and compensation provided by the energy companies

DCLG conducted a review which found that local authorities generally performed well; it recognised the work being undertaken by many authorities to identify and evacuate vulnerable residents, to set up rest centres or provide temporary accommodation, distribute sand bags and much more. In some areas, residents experienced problems from a failure of power companies to quickly reconnect people.



However, it also found a few examples of local authorities being less ready and responsive to provide help to their residents, either unresponsive out of hours, especially over Christmas, or in not being responsive to those needing help in coping with homes being flooded or clearing up afterwards. In consequence, the sector as a whole risks being criticised for poor performance, where isolated failures have tarnished the reputation of all.

In response to the background outlined above, Solace founded a Civil Resilience network for cross-sector collaboration and learning. A survey was then conducted to gauge the views of Solace members to determine the areas and topics to be covered in more detail, and where there are the greatest requirements for support.

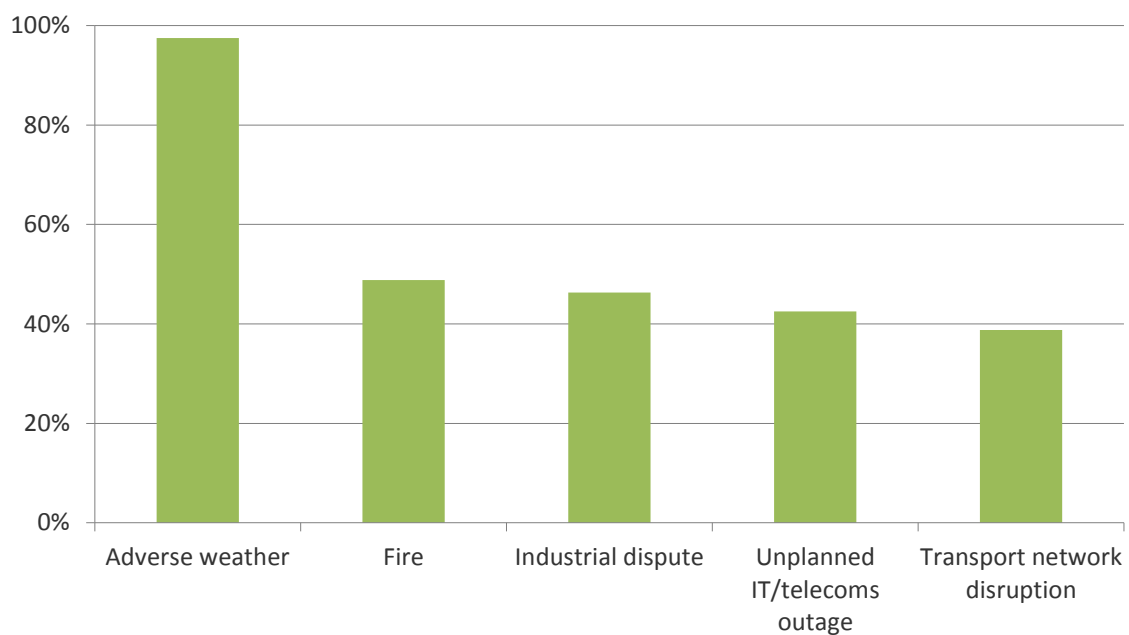
The survey was responded to by Solace members from across the UK; 96 responses were received and over three quarters of these were from current serving chief executives and senior managers. Responses came from districts, counties, metropolitan/unitary/London boroughs and fire authorities.



By way of a background on the respondents of the survey, over a third (39 per cent) attend local resilience forum (LRF) executive meetings and 98 per cent have either partial or complete understanding of Local Authority duties under Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (CCA 2004). 90 per cent have a formal role as part of the organisation's emergency response plans.

100 per cent of respondents are familiar with local authorities' statutory duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, 45 per cent mostly and 55 per cent partially; and 100 per cent said they comply with these statutory duties.

**What civil resilience issues has your organisation dealt with in the last 5 years?**



The graph above demonstrates the areas which members are experiencing civil resilience emergencies. Looking at the types of issues that have caused a civil emergency in the last five years, 98 per cent have had an emergency due to adverse weather, 48 per cent due to fire, 47 per cent from industrial disputes and 42 per cent from IT/telecoms failure.

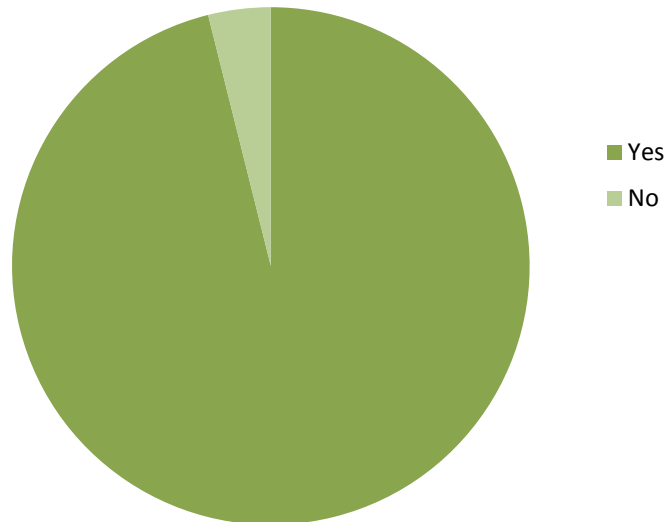
In terms of the effect these emergencies have had on councils, unsurprisingly adverse weather caused the greatest disruption, with 71 per cent of members suffering in this way. This is followed by IT/telecoms emergencies at 47 per cent, implying that whilst more members have seen industrial disputes affect business continuity, the affect they have had is more limited.



96 per cent of respondents feel that they are well trained to deal with civil resilience issues. The majority (80 per cent) of 'gold commanders' have taken part in training exercises in the last 5 years.

The training that members undertake has often included a combination of desk-top exercises, strategic exercises and simulation events. This includes Emergency Planning College courses; Gold and Silver command courses and a variety of LRF and refresher day courses.

### Have you felt adequately trained for dealing with civil emergencies you have encountered?



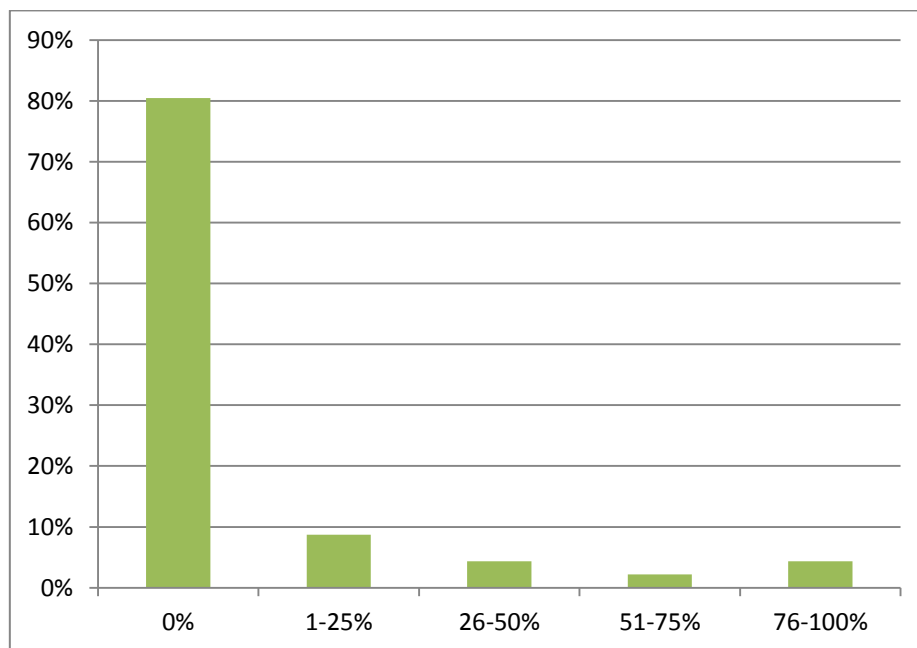
Due to the varying demands put in individual councils, it is clear that members have also undertaken a range of courses to match specific individual needs, such as counter-terrorism activities, flooding simulations and courses on utilities disruption. The training members find most useful is a combination of seminars and practical sessions.



The most common way councils fund the dealing with and responding to a civil emergency is through their own council reserves, with a quarter using 100 per cent council reserves, and two thirds using them to some extent. A significant number of councils (29 per cent) use a dedicated civil resilience budget to wholly fund the response to an emergency, and just 1 per cent of councils surveyed used local business contributions, and this never amounting to more than 10 per cent of the total spend.

61 per cent of councils have not used the Bellwin scheme to fund their most recent emergency response, and just over one percent have used it as the sole funding stream for the emergency. Of those who have claimed through the Bellwin scheme, there has been a significant mismatch between claiming and receiving.

### What proportion of total claims through the Bellwin Scheme have been received, for your most recent civil emergency?



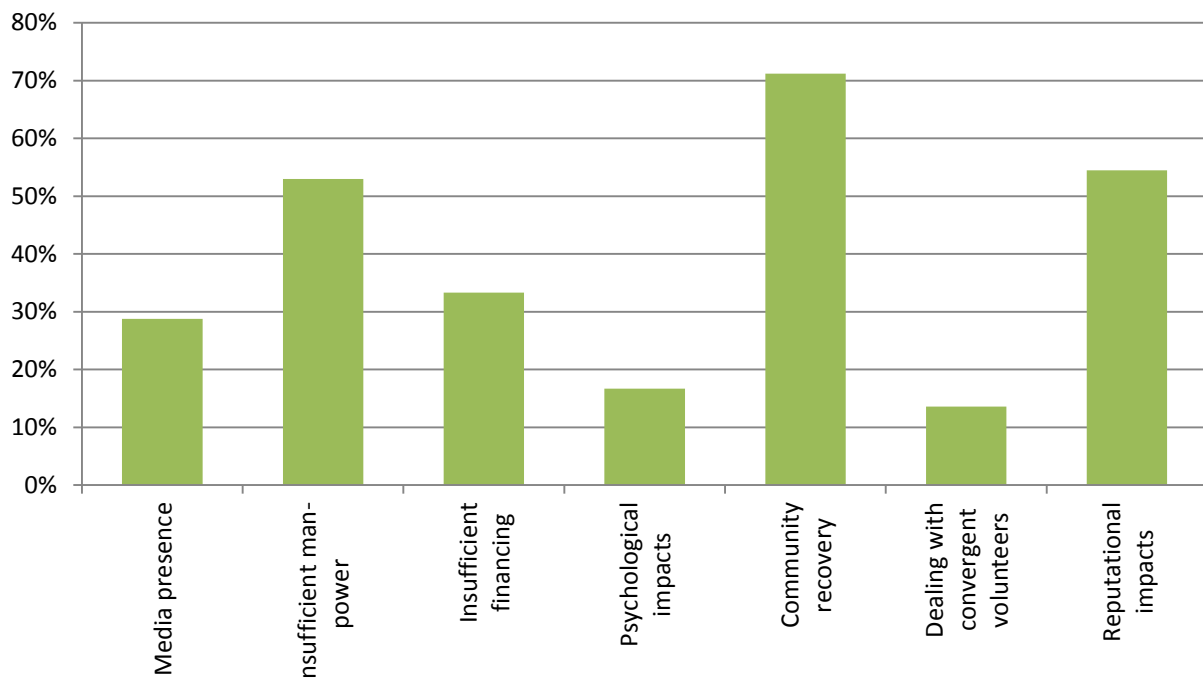
*Proportion of total claims*

The survey shows that just 6.5 per cent recovered more than 50 per cent of the funding through the Bellwin scheme, and four fifths (80 per cent) have received nothing at all.



Councils generally feel well supported once blue light services have left, but a fifth have stated that they were insufficiently supported after the immediate threat had passed. Community recovery and reputational impacts were identified as the most significant threats to councils after blue light services have left.

**What are the biggest threats to the council in dealing with the aftermath of an emergency, once 'blue light' services have departed?**



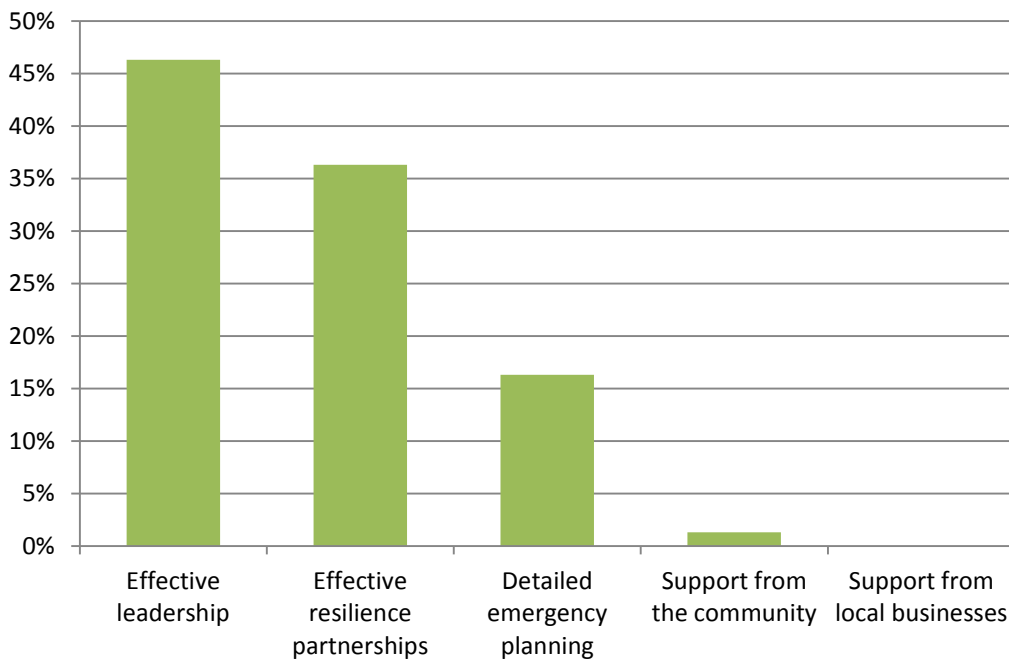
97 per cent of councils have good relationships with their partner emergency services, and 96 per cent have plans of some degree to work across authority boundaries in a co-ordinated approach. Indeed over half of the authorities surveyed have existing cross-boundary plans to deal with civil emergencies, with only 4 per cent not seeking any inter-council relationship.

Just over half of councils manage civil emergencies within their authority boundaries, and 31 per cent operate with a partner agency. 11 per cent of council's civil resilience is managed by their fire authority.

The majority of councils (76 per cent) require existing staff in the media relations team to undertake additional work in responding to an emergency, with 21 per cent having a dedicated media team for civil emergencies.

90 per cent of councils are contactable to report ‘non blue-light’ emergencies, and 95 per cent are available to obtain emergency planning advice. The method of contact is most commonly through a 24hr telephone service or out of hours control room, manned by dedicated staff. It is also the case in some authorities that at times of emergency, additional out of hours services are manned by volunteers and council staff. The type of support varies across authorities, and is sometimes shared across council boundaries.

**What are the most critical features in effectively dealing with civil emergencies?**



The survey found that effective leadership is the most important aspect in dealing with civil emergencies (46 per cent) and developing effective partnerships is the next most important (37 per cent). Support from local businesses is not seen by any respondents as the most important factor in effectively dealing with a civil emergency, and a very small number see little support from the community as the most important factor. No doubt effective leadership would include co-ordinating local support and business support where necessary, but is not deemed to be the initial point of support for local residents. It is clear that an amount of all of the above would be helpful, but when categorized it is leadership that is deemed most crucial.



Councils feel that they would achieve the largest benefit to civil resilience work through additional staffing (33 per cent) and greater inter-council support (25 per cent). 15 per cent also would see the most benefit from better media support, and direct financial support, although clearly there is a financial aspect to all of the above answers.

Finally, 99 per cent of councils have deemed themselves as having effectively responded to their most recent civil emergency. This gives a clear indication of the success that councils are currently operating at in emergency planning and resilience.

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*The findings from this survey have been circulated to the Solace Civil Resilience policy network for further consideration and discussion, and will provide some background for upcoming local/central government discussions on the theme. The findings will also provide a basis for discussion at the [Building Resilience: Emergency Planning and Recovery](#) session at the upcoming [Solace Summit in October 2014](#), and will be used going forward to determine the range and type of support that should be made available to senior staff who are working in this area.*

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