

## **Shieldaig Community Council**

### **Emergency Planning and Community Resilience**

#### **Background**

This paper considers whether there would be value in reviewing and updating the work done on emergency planning and building community resilience by successive Shieldaig community councils in the late 1990's. The current Community Council set up our small group for the purpose and we hope that this report will help it to decide whether and how to take the work forward.

#### **General**

The Group's view was that the world, including Shieldaig, has become a more uncertain and fragile place over the last 10 years. We are now exposed to a wider range of potentially more disruptive emergencies than we have faced in the past. And if these events affect wide areas of the country, it is inevitable that the national and regional emergency services will be too stretched to provide much support to small remote communities like ours, certainly initially. The first response, within the framework of national and regional advice, if it is to be timely and effective, will have to be local. Shieldaig starts with the advantage that it is a community where the sinews of community reliance – where people still “look out for one another” – are strong. This would be true if an emergency happened tomorrow. The issue for consideration is whether a modest amount of planning done now would be likely to make the community response to a future emergency faster and more effective. And central to this is the judgment of how much preplanning would still be relevant across the wide range of very different sorts of emergencies which might occur.

#### **Possible Emergencies**

Following is a list of some of the most likely areas of risk; but with an important note of caution; the unexpected has a habit of happening. The exercise 10 years ago made no mention of pandemics! And we have taken a deliberate decision to give no consideration to defence related issues.

#### **Powercuts**

Over the years, we have become used to relatively brief, locally based power cuts and in the main SSE(N) have handled them well and kept our communities well informed. However with the transition to renewables, the risk of much larger scale and longer lasting outages is growing. Furthermore, our increasing dependence on electrical powered equipment (including cars) means that the loss of electrical power will have a much more significant effect on our daily lives than would have been the case in the past. The widespread disruption resulting from the recent power cuts in Spain and Portugal should be a wake-up call.

Power cuts resulting from winter storms with widespread damage to distribution networks would be particularly challenging.

## **Wildfires**

With springs and summers becoming drier, wildfires are becoming more common across the whole of the UK including the Highlands. It seems likely that the impact of climate change will intensify the problem. The increase in woodland cover, while welcome for other reasons, will increase the fuel load in the event of a fire.

Recognising the risks, a local wildfire planning group was set up in 2012 to improve advance planning by the estates and the Fire Service and to coordinate the use of resources in the event of an incident. Consideration should probably now be given to widening the membership of the group and more closely involving the local communities themselves.

## **Disruption to water supplies**

Those living in the coastal communities, outwith Shieldaig itself, already have the challenge of providing and maintaining their own water supplies (and coping with the impact of power cuts.) Shieldaig residents depend on output from the Shieldaig treatment works which extracts water from the river, uses electrical power for pumping and carries [3] days reserves in the high level tank which feeds the village by gravity.

Scottish Water has done a good job in maintaining supplies to the village over the 12 years that the new treatment plant has been operating. But there have been a number of occasions when there have been problems and back-up supplies of potable water have had to be brought in by tankers. It would be useful to have a discussion with Scottish Water about their resilience planning for the plant and what in the event of a major emergency the community could do to help (eg self imposed restrictions).

## **Blocked roads and coastal flooding**

These are treated together for convenience as both are likely consequences of severe winter storms and very heavy rainfall. The road blockages could result from fallen trees, roads undermined by water or landslips. Although Shieldaig doesn't have a history of such emergencies, experience in other parts of Scotland and in Europe suggests that climate change is likely to produce more weather events and more damage like this in future. And the restricted and fragile nature of the local road network could leave our various communities isolated and in the short term more dependent on other forms of transport (eg by sea).

## **Breakdowns in cyber security**

This wasn't seen as an issue when the last emergency plan was prepared. But it's certainly an increasing area of risk now, with much more shopping, including for food, done on-line from national or regional organisations and delivered locally. The first line of defence is clearly for the businesses concerned to tighten up their own cyber security and they are being pressed to do this by the government. The issue then, particularly for people living in remote areas like ours, is whether we should look to source more of what we need by supporting local businesses which can more easily cope with such risks and whether we should hold more personal reserves of items essential for day to day living.

## **Pandemics etc**

The health experts tell us that the only question is what form the next pandemic will take and when it will occur. However, given the uncertainties there is very little that can be done locally by way of contingency planning. The experience of Covid suggests that the key response will be centrally led planning and procurement of vaccines. The community car scheme will probably remain an important resource for the safe transport of those without their own cars to local health centres and for delivering medicines.

## **Recommendations and next steps**

The Group's recommendation is that the Shieldaig Emergency Plan of 2019 should be reviewed and updated. The risks have undoubtedly increased. However while considerable uncertainties are inevitable, carefully focused planning and resilience building should be able to help Shieldaig cope with a range of the possible emergencies set out above. To be effective and acceptable, the exercise must be kept simple, it must be based on good communication with the local community and it must be kept up to date. The work should be shared with other local community councils with similar interests.

Our recommended priorities for early action are to –

1. update the list of contacts to ensure that all the communities in the Community Council area can communicate effectively with each other in the case of an emergency (the telephone tree)
2. update the list of key external contacts (eg SSE(N); SW)
3. review the communication systems and backups now available in the area (and likely to be available in an emergency) to enable the links at 1 and 2 (landlines, mobile phones, starlink, radios etc)
4. contact the key external bodies for their advice on the risk assessments from their perspectives and to check that our community resilience building measures seem sensible.
5. start building an inventory of important resources which businesses and individuals in the area would be willing to make available to others in the event of an emergency (eg boats, fuel)
6. draw up a list of community organisations likely to be helpful in an emergency (eg GP surgeries, 1<sup>st</sup> responders, Community Car Scheme)
7. consider whether it would be helpful to organize training in particular skills (eg the use of drones and chainsaws )

We look forward to hearing what the Community Council would like us to do.

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