

**COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR**



**RESILIENCE STRATEGY  
2023 - 2028**

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, the Western Isles and indeed the world has experienced much disruption due to the Covid pandemic. Our reliance on ferries and causeways, along with the severe weather we often experience, leave our island communities particularly vulnerable to transport disruptions, and interruptions to utilities such as power and communications. Certain risks, such as flooding and adverse weather, are likely to be exacerbated as the climate changes and we must also be resilient to new and emerging threats, such as cyber-attacks.

It is against this backdrop that the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Resilience Strategy was developed. Resilience is defined as *“the capacity of an individual, community or system to adapt in order to sustain an acceptable level of function, structure and identity”* in the Preparing Scotland, Scottish Guidance on Resilience (2016).

For the Comhairle, this means ensuring the ongoing delivery of essential public services in times of disruption and supporting the islands to manage emergencies, ensuring the needs of all, and especially the most vulnerable, are met in the event of an emergency or incident.

Partnership-working is vital to enhance resilience, and the Comhairle is committed to continuing to work with our resilience partners and our communities to strengthen resilience and our ability to cope with, respond to and recover from any challenges we face in the Western Isles.

### Vision

The Outer Hebrides are resilient, with the Comhairle and our communities empowered to plan and prepare for challenges, and capable of managing adverse events to recover quickly from disruption, enabling our islands to flourish and prosper.

### Priorities

Our priorities are:

- **Working Together** - *Working together across the Comhairle, with Resilience Partners and our communities*
- **Anticipating Risk** - *Assessing potential risks and our ability to respond*
- **Preparing for Response and Recovery** – *Planning, training, and carrying out exercises in preparation for emergencies*
- **Communicating Effectively** – *Fast and effective communication with partners, employees, and the public*

The Resilience Strategy does not address the management of specific scenarios which might occur, with separate specific emergency plans in place to address these, but instead sets out the Comhairle’s strategic approach to building resilience both internally, and throughout our islands.

## STRATEGIC CONTEXT

### Civil Contingencies Act

The [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#) establishes a statutory framework for emergency preparedness in the UK, with the Civil Contingencies Act (Contingency Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 applying in Scotland. The Act sets out the roles and responsibilities of local responders in law and provides structure and consistency for local responders to cooperate in preparing, planning, and responding to emergencies. The Comhairle's Resilience Strategy aims to ensure that we are meeting our legislative duties with regards to resilience and emergency planning as defined in the Act, whilst also always endeavouring to follow best practice considering our local circumstances to improve resilience in our communities throughout the Western Isles.

Other relevant legislation includes [The Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations 2015 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#) (COMAH), which looks to prevent and limit the effects of major accidents involving dangerous substances, and [The Ionising Radiations Regulations 2017 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#), which provide a framework for dealing with a radiation emergency.

### Local Outcome Improvement Plan

The Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership's detail their vision in the Local Outcome Improvement Plan as being to promote and realise the full potential of the Outer Hebrides as a prosperous, well-educated, and healthy community enjoying a good quality of life, fully realising the benefits of our natural environment and cultural values.

Resilience is key to ensuring the Western Isles can weather any shocks or stresses that threaten the realisation of this vision, and quickly respond and recover from any major incidents or emergencies that do occur.

### Comhairle Corporate Strategy 2022-27

Supporting Resilient Communities and Quality of Life is a priority of the Comhairle's [Corporate Strategy 2022-27 \(cne-siar.gov.uk\)](#). Having safe, inclusive, and resilient communities is essential to achieve the Comhairle's vision of socially and economically thriving communities.

This priority is also reflected in the Comhairle's Climate Change Strategy, acknowledging the need for climate change adaptation action to ensure resilience to the effects of a changing climate, both within the Comhairle and our services, as well as in our communities throughout the Western Isles.

This Resilience Strategy sets out in further detail how the Comhairle will work with partners to support resilient communities within our islands.

### Resilience Responders

The Civil Contingencies Act defines Category 1 and Category 2 Responders as listed below:

#### Category 1 Responders

Local Authorities  
Police  
Fire  
Ambulance

#### Category 2 Responders

Electricity Operators  
Gas Suppliers  
Scottish Water  
Communications Providers

Health Boards  
Scottish Environment Protection Agency  
HM Coastguard  
Integrated Joint Board

Airport Operators  
Harbour Authorities  
NHS National Services Scotland  
Health and Safety Executive  
Railway Operators

As a local authority, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is a Category 1 responder.

In addition to the Category 1 and Category 2 responders as defined by the act, listed above, other agencies may also have an important role to play in resilience. The other agencies involved will vary depending on the nature of the emergency however may include:

- the military
- the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS)
- Transport Scotland
- commercial organisations
- the Scottish Government
- the voluntary sector

### **Legislative Duties**

As a Category 1 Responder, the Civil Contingencies Act places the following legal duties upon the Comhairle:

- Duty to **assess risk**
- Duty to **maintain emergency plans**
- Duty to **maintain business continuity plan and provide guidance on continuity**
- Duty to **communicate with the public**
- Duty to **co-operate**
- Duty to **share information**

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The Comhairle’s strategic priorities on Resilience align with our statutory duties as a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act. The key aims across the strategy’s four Strategic Priorities and the associated expected outcomes are as follows:

<b>Working Together</b>  <i>Working together across the Comhairle, with Resilience Partners and our communities</i>	<b>Anticipating Risks</b>  <i>Assessing potential risks and our ability to respond</i>	<b>Preparing for Response and Recovery</b>  <i>Planning, training and carrying out exercises in preparation for emergencies</i>	<b>Communicating Effectively</b>  <i>Fast and effective communication with partners, employees, and the public</i>
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## STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

Integrated Emergency Management is embedded within the Comhairle.	Risks to Comhairle services are systematically assessed and minimised.	The Comhairle has robust, up-to-date emergency plans in place.	Crisis communication is integral to the Comhairle’s emergency management processes.
We communicate and collaborate regularly with our resilience partners.	The risks most likely to cause disruption or develop into a major incident or emergency locally are identified and assessed.	Our Resilience Network responds effectively in the event of an emergency.	The public is warned and informed in the event of emerging risks and emergencies.
Individuals, households, and communities are informed and empowered to enhance resilience.	Potential risks and implications specific to our island communities are identified and understood.	Our response to emergency scenarios has been tried and tested.	The Comhairle has regular and reliable means of communication with employees.
Commercial enterprises and service providers are supported to build resilience.	Communities, businesses, and individuals throughout our islands are aware of potential risks.	The needs of all, including the most vulnerable, are met in the event of an emergency.	The Comhairle has means of rapidly communicating with Resilience Partners, including community groups and volunteers.

## **WORKING TOGETHER**

### **Integrated Emergency Management**

Our Resilience Strategy is underpinned by the principles of Integrated Emergency Management (IEM). Working together effectively within and amongst organisations to develop flexible, adaptable arrangements for dealing with different types of emergencies is at the heart of IEM, with five key activities involved in the process. These are:

- Assessment
- Prevention
- Preparation
- Response
- Recovery

The Comhairle is committed to incorporating IEM into our everyday processes and procedures, routinely undertaking these five activities across our organisation as well as in partnership with other organisations.

Integrated Emergency Management within the Comhairle is split into two main work streams – these are Business Continuity Management and Community Resilience. Corporate Business Continuity focuses on maintaining the Comhairle’s critical public services across the Western Isles during times of disruption. The Community Resilience workstream concerns the management of any major incident or emergency likely to occur or which has occurred in the Western Isles.

The Comhairle uses [Preparing Scotland Guidance \(ready.scot\)](#) on resilience to ensure our approach to Integrated Emergency Management meets good practice guidelines both within our own organisation at the Comhairle and when working together with our partners.

### **Resilience Teams**

The Comhairle’s Corporate Management Team provides strategic direction and long-term planning for the Comhairle’s Integrated Emergency Management activities, covering both Corporate Business Continuity Planning and Community Resilience.

In the event of an incident, a Comhairle Incident Management Team will be set up to coordinate the management of the incident. The team will work together with services to assess the situation, agree a plan of action to maintain or resume critical services, and review progress as the situation develops. Service Recovery Teams will activate business continuity plans to recover services as required, with a Site Recovery Team and IT Recovery Team also in place to deal with any on-site issues affecting services.

The Comhairle’s core Community Resilience Team consists of the Resilience and Training Manager and the Head of HR and Performance, with Training Officers, the Council Officer and the Media Coordinator providing support as required. A wider Resilience Network of Senior Officers within the Comhairle work together to respond to incidents affecting the Comhairle. Officers involved in the response to an emergency will vary depending on the nature of the incident, but may include officers from Health and Social Care, Consumer and Environmental Services, Property and Infrastructure, Municipal Services, Education and Harbours, for example. The Resilience Lead for Uist and Barra will act as first point of contact, sharing and informing as required, acting as on-site liaison officer and carrying out any actions required in the event of incidents occurring or likely to occur in Uist and Barra.

## Resilience Partnerships

Whilst the Comhairle's own internal processes and activities are vital in enabling the continued delivery of critical public services, in addition to playing an essential role in the response and recovery of the local community in the event of a major incident, working together in partnership with other organisations has been demonstrated to greatly increase the effectiveness of emergency management. As well as the Category 1 and Category 2 responders defined in the Civil Contingencies Act, the Voluntary sector, commerce, a wide range of other organisations and even individuals and households all have a role to play in working together to develop resilient communities in our islands. Working with all of these partners allows a wider range of skills and knowledge to be shared and utilised towards developing resilience. Understanding the priorities, resources and capabilities of our partners enables effective, coordinated emergency management from planning and preparation to response and recovery for our islands.

The Civil Contingencies Act established a framework for organisations to work together in Resilience Partnerships. There are three Regional Resilience Partnerships (RRPs) in Scotland which support multi-agency coordination in the North, East and West of Scotland. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is a partner of the North of Scotland RRP, which brings together all organisations with legal duties relating to resilience and emergency management in the region.

These include:

- Local Authorities in the North of Scotland RRP
- Police Scotland
- Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
- Scottish Ambulance Service
- NHS Health Boards in the North of Scotland
- Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)
- HM Coastguard
- Meteorological Office
- Utility companies
- Voluntary sector
- Integrated Joint Boards

These partner organisations meet regularly through the RRP to work together on building resilience through activities which include identifying risks, capacities, and skills gaps, and developing and testing emergency plans. The RRP coordinates the work of Local Resilience Partnerships (LRPs), with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar a partner organisation of the Highlands and Islands LRP. The LRP meets at least quarterly and supports the RRP by ensuring local arrangements for resilience and emergency management are in place. The Western Isles Emergency Planning Coordinating Group (WIEPCG) coordinates resilience and emergency planning within the Western Isles.

The Comhairle has partnership agreements in place and collaborates and communicates regularly with our partners in these three key partnerships to ensure work on building resilience in the islands is coordinated and effective. This work ranges from assessing key risks, to planning and preparing for potential emergencies, and responding to and recovering from any major incidents which do occur. The Comhairle's work with these partners is ongoing, taking place routinely throughout the year, every year, to ensure that partners are able to work together effectively in the event of an emergency. If an incident does occur, the Comhairle will support other Category 1 & 2 responders to deal with the emergency, taking the role of lead responder as appropriate, depending on the nature of the incident.



## **Individuals & Households**

Community resilience depends not only on the actions of responders but also on individuals and households, voluntary and community groups, and commercial enterprises and service providers, all working together. The Comhairle takes a lead on community engagement to empower local communities, businesses, individuals, and households to take action to build community resilience, through supporting community groups and educating and informing the public.

Individuals and households can improve their resilience by taking steps to prepare for an emergency before it occurs. These steps include staying informed of risks, making an emergency plan, preparing an emergency kit, and learning useful skills such as first aid. Further detail on these actions is available at [Prepare \(ready.scot\)](#).

If an emergency or incident does occur, it is important to know how to respond. Ready Scotland provides advice on how to [Respond \(ready.scot\)](#) to a number of incidents which could affect those living in Scotland including Severe Weather, Travel Disruption, Loss of Utilities, Terrorism and Cyber incident.

The Comhairle also provides Community Safety advice on a wide range of topics which individuals and households can use to take appropriate action as required in order to stay safe.

## **Community Groups**

Community Groups and Volunteers can be invaluable in assisting responders to deal with an emergency. Working together with local community resilience or emergency groups can help responders such as the Comhairle to communicate and support individuals and households effectively. This was well demonstrated during the Covid-19 pandemic, with groups such as Resilient Uist and Cobhair Bharraigh providing significant community support to the vulnerable and playing a role in keeping the local community informed. The Comhairle will continue to work with community groups on Integrated Emergency Management to support the effective preparation for and response to emergencies.

The Comhairle will provide advice and support to Community Groups looking to increase community resilience wherever possible. Further resources community groups including resources such as a Community Resilience Checklist is available at [Community Groups \(ready.scot\)](#).

## **Businesses**

Business resilience is the ability of a business or organisation to adapt in the event of disruption. By improving business resilience through having business continuity plans in place, commercial enterprises and service providers should be more resilient and able to adapt to resume activities and continue to provide services in the event of disruptions.

As a Local Authority, the Comhairle has a legal duty to provide advice and guidance to local businesses and organisations on Business Resilience. The Comhairle delivers this through [Business Gateway \(cne-siar.gov.uk\)](#) which offers a broad range of advice, support, and financial assistance to new and developing businesses. This includes activities ranging from digital support to business planning including assessing risks and making business continuity plans to enable businesses to navigate challenges as they arise.

The Comhairle provides further Business Continuity advice online and also contributes to the resilience of organisations across the Western Isles through warning and informing when an incident or emergency occurs or is likely to occur.

**Outcomes**

Integrated Emergency Management is embedded within the Comhairle.	Individuals, households, and communities are informed and empowered to enhance resilience.
We communicate and collaborate regularly with our resilience partners.	Commercial enterprises and service providers are supported to build resilience.

## ANTICIPATING RISKS

### Risk Assessment

Assessing risk is fundamental to developing resilience and one of the five key activities underpinning Integrated Emergency Management. A systematic Risk Assessment process can be used to anticipate risks through identifying hazards and threats and assessing the likelihood of occurrence and potential impacts with regards to the local context. Sharing this information with Resilience Partners and further assessing the skills, resources, and capability gaps of responders enables risks to be better understood. Anticipating and understanding risks in this way allows prioritisation of how responders should plan, prepare, and respond, including identifying training needs and gaps in planning, for example. Communicating with the public is the final step in the risk assessment process.

### Comhairle Risk Registers

The Comhairle's Strategic Risk Register reflects risks to achieving the Corporate Strategy. To successfully achieve the strategic priorities set out in the Corporate Strategy, the Comhairle must be prepared for a disruption to its services. Business Continuity Management prepares for such disruptive events. Services identify operational risks, enabling up-to-date and tested Business Continuity Plans to be put in place to manage these risks where possible. The second stage of the Comhairle's Business Continuity process is a Risk Assessment. Services carry out risk assessments regularly to identify and rank the risks most likely to cause a business interruption and prioritise risk reduction activities. The information gathered from services through this process is then collated to form a Corporate Business Continuity plan which is reviewed annually and kept up to date as risks evolve. By identifying the main risks and the skills and resources available to respond, as well as any actions that can be taken to reduce the risks and their impacts, the Comhairle is much better able to anticipate and understand events that could affect service delivery.

### North of Scotland Regional Resilience Partnership Community Risk Register

As part of the Civil Contingencies Act, Regional Resilience Partnerships (RRPs) must undertake risk assessments and maintain and publish Community Risk Registers. The [Community Risk Register \(firescotland.gov.uk\)](https://firescotland.gov.uk) (CRR) identifies the risks that have the most potential to cause disruption or develop into a major incident or emergency locally. The CRR is developed from the risk assessments carried out by each of the RRP's partner agencies, with risks identified and potential impacts and the likelihood of the risk occurring all considered as part of the risk assessment process. The Comhairle shares information from Risk Assessments carried out with the RRP to help inform the Community Risk Register.

The North of Scotland Community Risk Register 2021 identified potential risks with the highest likelihood of significant impact as being:

- Pandemic Disease
- Severe Weather
- Flooding
- Interruption to Utilities
- Industrial Site Accidents
- Transport Disruptions
- Pollution and Contamination
- Significant Cyber Attack

The Western Isles Emergency Planning Coordinating Group (WIEPCG) is also developing a risk register specific to the Western Isles, providing greater detail on sites and activities in the islands which could be potential risks, and detailing the responsible organisation for leading the response for each type of emergency considered.

### **Pandemic Disease**

Pandemic disease has the potential to affect a large number of people, through illness, anxiety, or loss of life, and significantly disrupt daily life and services including health services, school and education, public transport, with wider impacts on businesses, the economy and jobs. Many of these effects have been experienced recently not only in the Western Isles but across the world during the Covid-19 global pandemic.

While pandemics have an NHS lead, and NHS Western Isles were the lead agency for the pandemic response, the Comhairle had a lead role through the Care for People Group, supporting those in the community who were vulnerable, shielded, or unable to access essential services. The Comhairle set up a shielding hub and ran a volunteer helpline and support service before the end of March 2020. The volunteer response and local community organisations supported the response, demonstrating a significant level of resilience within the Western Isles.

The Comhairle continues to monitor the Covid-19 pandemic and will continue to work with our resilience partnerships to respond as required and offer ongoing support for the recovery of our island communities. The Comhairle will work with partners to identify lessons learned in the preparation and response to the pandemic and modify existing emergency plans, risk assessments and business continuity plans as required, with a view to strengthening and improving future responses to such incidents.

### **Severe Weather**

Severe weather is commonly experienced in the Western Isles, usually taking the form of gale force winds, heavy rain, sub-zero temperatures, snow, and ice. Severe weather has the potential to cause significant damage and disruption in the islands, with possible consequences including damage to infrastructure and injury or harm to health. Other potential consequences range from disruption to utilities, including power and communications, to transport disruptions with the potential for knock-on impacts affecting local businesses, schools, and services. As the climate changes, the Western Isles could experience an increase in adverse weather events.

Due to the frequent nature of severe weather events in the Western Isles, the Comhairle and partners have robust multi-agency plans and procedures in place and are well-rehearsed in dealing with such events. When severe weather is forecast, the Comhairle immediately warns and informs the public, providing details of any weather warnings issued by the Met Office, and how the Comhairle's services will be affected, along with likely impacts for travel within the islands including ferries, bridges, and causeways. Community advice to mitigate the effects of the severe weather is also provided in the form of press releases and social media updates. By engaging with communities in this way, the Comhairle supports the development of community resilience to severe weather.

In the event of severe weather, the Comhairle works closely with partners to monitor any ongoing impacts such as flooding or power cuts and any further issues arising as a result. Comhairle services also take appropriate action such as road gritting, waste clearance duties including removal of debris and fallen trees, and the maintenance and protection of the Comhairle estate to restore normality.

Multi-agency winter training exercises are carried out annually to test the effectiveness of severe weather plans.

## **Flooding**

Flooding has been identified as a risk to the North of Scotland. Potential impacts of flooding include disruption to travel when rivers burst their banks, direct flooding from localised flood water, coastal flooding or even flooding caused by overflowing drains. In the Western Isles, the most significant flood threat comes from coastal flooding. Coastal causeways such as the Baleshare causeway and the Braighe sometimes have to be closed, causing transport disruption and potential knock-on effects for local businesses or services. Other potential impacts of flooding can include damage to property and infrastructure, injury or loss of life, or pollution and contamination of the local environment. Climate change could increase the risk of flooding.

The Comhairle published the [Local Flood Risk Management Plan for Cycle 2](#) in December 2022. The plan identifies locations at significant risk of flooding and presents actions to avoid and reduce the risk of flooding, and prepare and protect ourselves, and our communities. The Comhairle works with partners including the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), NatureScot, Scottish Water and landowners on the delivery of this plan, with actions ranging from flood protection schemes and strategic mapping and modelling to community flood action groups, flood warnings and awareness-raising.

SEPA's [Floodline \(sepa.org.uk\)](https://sepa.org.uk) flood warning service provides advance warning about when and where floods are likely to occur. There are 24 flood warning areas in the Western Isles from Stornoway to Vatersay, informed by modelling on potential coastal flood risk and impacts caused by storm surges, high tides and wave overtopping. Organisations and individuals have a responsibility to protect themselves from flooding and can sign-up to receive flood alerts or flood warnings when flooding is possible or expected, along with advice on how to prepare. The new three-day [Scottish Flood Forecast](#) developed by SEPA and the Met Office is a further tool which can be used to understand when flooding is likely, and plan and prepare accordingly. Being prepared can help reduce the damage and disruption associated with flooding. The Comhairle takes account of flood warnings and alerts, and issues press releases and social media updates to ensure the public is informed and can take timely action to prepare when flooding is expected.

By working closely with partners such as Police Scotland, who monitor road safety and take the decision to close roads and causeways, the Comhairle is informed promptly of road closures or other disruption caused by flooding events allowing services to take appropriate action, such as closing affected schools to ensure that pupils can get home safely. The Comhairle also communicates this information widely, allowing individuals, businesses, and other organisations to make alternative arrangements as required.

In the event of severe flooding requiring people to be evacuated from their homes, the Comhairle has multi-agency plans in place to work with partners and coordinate shelter for those affected, taking particular care to meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

## **Interruption to Utilities**

Interruptions to utilities including electricity, gas, water, and communications can occur as a result of severe weather or other major incidents and can lead to further knock-on impacts on people, businesses and other organisations. Possible effects may include people being unable to attend work or school, and businesses and organisations being unable to operate or provide services. In the islands, power cuts tend to cause the most disruption, leaving many homes without heating or cooking facilities, and creating increased risk and challenges for the most vulnerable.

In the event of utility disruptions, the Comhairle works with utilities and communities to respond and ensure appropriate arrangements are in place, depending on the cause and expected duration of the output, and considering those affected. The Comhairle and partners have multi-agency plans in place for dealing with longer interruptions and ensuring care for people in these circumstances. Being cut off from utilities can exacerbate the vulnerabilities of certain groups in our communities, including the elderly and those with disabilities, and the Comhairle works with partners to identify and target support to these individuals as a priority. Interruption to utilities is also included as a consideration in all Business Continuity Plans, with services responsible for making plans to minimise disruption to the Comhairle's delivery of critical public services delivery during such an event.

The Comhairle also provides advice and guidance to individuals, households, businesses, and other organisations on how to be prepared and what to do when utilities are interrupted. Advice issued by the Comhairle during these incidents includes checking on vulnerable neighbours, as these small actions by individuals play an invaluable role in community resilience. Taking action to prepare in advance, can also help to reduce negative impacts in the event of an interruption to utilities. This is demonstrated by several communities in the Western Isles which have taken advantage of the SSE Resilient Communities Fund to secure generators for community-use when affected by power cuts.

## **Industrial Accidents**

Industrial accidents can include explosions or the release of harmful materials or substances into the environment. Such incidents have the potential to cause danger to life, health issues and injuries, damage to property and infrastructure, pollution and contamination of the environment and disruption to utilities, businesses, and other services.

The Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) Regulations 2015 requires emergency plans to be prepared for some industrial activities involving potential hazardous substances. The SGN Liquefied Petroleum Gas Plant at Sandwick Road, Stornoway is the only top tier COMAH site in the Western Isles. In line with COMAH Regulations, the Comhairle has produced an off-site emergency plan which considers a range of scenarios, including those that are extremely unlikely, and outlines initial response and subsequent actions that would be taken by the Comhairle and partners in the event of such an incident occurring, complementing the SGN on-site emergency plan.

Distilleries, fuel depots and other industrial sites in the islands also carry out activities with potentially hazardous substances, and the Comhairle collaborates and communicates with the Western Isles Emergency Planning Coordinating Group to monitor these risks, carry out risk assessments and prepare site-specific multi-agency emergency plans as required, on an ongoing basis.

## **Transport Disruptions**

In the Western Isles, transport disruptions are frequent and can range from closures to roads and causeways to ferry cancellations or delays. These transport disruptions can result from several causes including flooding, severe weather, and technical issues, and can result in further disruptions to people, businesses, services and communities as a whole.

PoliceScotland makes the decision to close roads when these are deemed unsafe to travel. The Comhairle will support through sharing road closure advice issued by the police to try and reach as wide an audience as possible.

In the event of major transport disruptions, the Comhairle will work to coordinate shelter for people stranded without alternative accommodation arrangements. For longer term disruptions or disruptions affecting lifeline routes and services, the Comhairle engages with supermarkets to determine impact on interruptions to supplies and monitor the ongoing situation.

## **Pollution and Contamination**

The release of chemical or harmful substances can lead to pollution and contamination of the environment. Possible consequences of pollution and contamination incidents can include health issues for people and animals, and potential significant disruption if an area is deemed unsafe for people, with potential knock-on effects on services and economic activities. Pollution and contamination can occur from many causes for example, industrial accidents such as leakage of hazardous substances or explosions, or transport or maritime accidents.

In the Western Isles, coastal oil spill pollution is a particular risk, with an international deep water shipping route to the west of the Islands and the Minch being another busy shipping lane. Ferries, cruises, and fishing fleet, as well as vessels serving the aquaculture industry, wildlife sightseeing vessels and pleasure craft operate around our coastline. There is also an oil storage facility in Stornoway, while bunkering operations take place at numerous harbours. These are all potential sources of coastal oil pollution, which can arise from maritime accidents such as collision, fire, explosion, or grounding resulting in the release of oil. Other potential causes of oil spill pollution include the intentional discharge of oil or accidental spillages, including during oil distribution by road tanker.

The Comhairle has worked with partners to develop and maintain a multi-agency Oil Pollution Contingency Plan for the Western Isles, detailing management arrangements for contingencies to enable a timely, measured, rapid and effective response in the event of an oil pollution incident or other hazardous discharge along the coast.

The Comhairle leads multi-agency training on oil spill exercises and arranges and facilitates oil spill exercise every three years, utilising oil spill response companies to ensure plans are effective and can be implemented locally.

## Cyber Attack

The North of Scotland Community Risk Register describes a Significant Cyber Attack affecting a public sector organisation as a potential risk. Significant cyber incidents could include viruses or malware spreading to an organisation's connected IT devices, potentially preventing use of these devices and communication with other organisations. Critical or sensitive data could also be stolen, destroyed, or held for ransom. The impacts of a cyber-attack could be long lasting and have a significant effect on a public sector organisation and their ability to deliver services.

Data security is heavily prioritised by the Comhairle, with a sophisticated security setup in place to provide protection to the Comhairle's data and computer systems. The Comhairle closely follows guidance issued by the National Cyber Security Centre. All areas of the network are regularly tested, and security devices reviewed, to ensure our security is kept fully up to date. The Comhairle's Digitalisation Strategy commits to creating a Strong and Resilient Digital Council, and to developing a Cyber Recovery Plan to ensure the integrity of the organisation's data in the event of a cyber-attack.

The Comhairle also works with the Scottish Government Public Sector Cyber Resilience Unit to provide advice and information to public on improving cyber security and resilience to cyber-attacks. Further guidance on [Cyber Security Advice and Measures \(cpni.gov.uk\)](https://cpni.gov.uk) is available online on the Comhairle's Resilience Webpage.

## Outcomes

Risks to Comhairle services are systematically assessed and minimised.	Potential risks and implications specific to our island communities are identified and understood.
The risks most likely to cause disruption or develop into a major incident or emergency locally are identified and assessed.	Communities, businesses, and individuals throughout our islands are aware of potential risks.



## PREPARING FOR RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

### Emergency Plans

The preparation and maintenance of effective, up-to-date emergency plans is vital to guide the response and recovery in the event of an emergency or major incidents. The Comhairle follows the Integrated Emergency Management principle of 'Consequences not Causes'. Many types of emergencies have very similar effects on people and organisations in terms of their needs for shelter and support, despite having been caused by very different types of emergencies. Emergency plans therefore focus on these consequences rather than the causes of emergencies, enabling flexible plans to be put in place which are suitable for the response to and recovery from many different types of incidents. The Comhairle has a Corporate Business Continuity Plan and Generic Emergency Plan in place, in line with this principle.

The Corporate Business Continuity Plan is an overarching plan which sets out the Comhairle's processes and procedures for maintaining critical services during disruptive incidents or emergencies. Service Level Business Continuity Plans and recovery plans are also in place, providing further detail on the specific actions which services will take, and are reviewed annually. These Service Level plans aim to cover all critical aspects of service delivery, to ensure that the Comhairle can continue to deliver functions and services in the event of an emergency.

The Generic Emergency Plan provides a framework for the Comhairle's internal coordination of the immediate response and ongoing incident management of any emergency or major incident occurring within or affecting the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar area. The Plan is linked with, and will be used alongside, the WIEPCG Initial Response Plan and Highlands & Island LRP Initial Recovery Plan, which guide the multi-agency response. Specific emergency plans have also been prepared for those risks considered most likely to take place. An example of this is the Comhairle's Severe Weather Plan which provides a more detailed template for the Comhairle's response to extreme weather events, including procedures and protocols for closing schools and templates for communicating with the public via press release. Each of the Comhairle's emergency plans give special consideration to vulnerable people, how they can be identified and how support can be targeted to them. The Comhairle also works with partners to develop, test, and revise multi-agency plans, which detail how partners will work together during incidents.

The Comhairle aims to develop and maintain emergency plans which are concise, unambiguous, and easy to use, with ownership for key tasks allocated and references to supporting information provided where required. The Comhairle will review all Emergency Plans systematically and continuously as part of a rolling review of policies, with plans updated to reflect changes in risks and risk assessments, lessons learned and any restructuring or changes in responsibilities within the Comhairle, as required. A strict version control procedure will be implemented to make certain that all responders, including multi-agency partners, are using the latest version, and working from the same plan.

Electronic copies of all emergency plans will be saved to the Comhairle's file servers. Plans will also be uploaded to Resilience Direct, a third-party platform widely used by emergency planning communities for storing and sharing information, with hard copies of plans kept securely within the Comhairle. Maintaining plans in this way increases resilience to potential cyber-attacks, loss of internet services and power outages, enabling continued access to Emergency Plans during disruptive events of this nature.

## **Exercises**

To ensure the Comhairle and partners are well prepared for response and recovery in the event of an emergency, emergency plans must be tested, and exercises carried out to ascertain the effectiveness of the plans, processes and procedures which have been put in place. The Comhairle leads on organising multi-agency exercises within the Western Isles for emergency scenarios where the Comhairle would lead the response. Exercises on a range of scenarios including oil spill pollution and interruption to lifeline routes have recently been carried out with partners. These exercises demonstrate the effectiveness of existing plans and highlight any capacity gaps which remain within, allowing plans to be updated to incorporate any lessons learned. The Comhairle will continue to plan and deliver these multi-agency exercises to enable improved preparation for the response and recovery of a wide range of emergency scenarios.

## **Training**

Training is vital to ensure our Resilience Team and the wider network of employees who may be involved in resilience or emergency planning activities are informed, skilled and capable of responding competently and appropriately in the event of an emergency. Emergency preparation, planning, response, and recovery training activities for staff includes attendance at the Emergency Planning College, Scottish Resilience Development Service training, WIECPG and H&I LRP training, and training organised by external partner agencies. The Resilience Team has completed major incident training and all operational employees with a role in Integrated Emergency Management receive relevant training. A refresher training programme will be developed and delivered as part of an ongoing commitment to ensuring resilience staff are prepared to respond and equipped with the knowledge and skills required to carry their role effectively. Additional training updates required will be identified either through regular of the Resilience Network review and through self-assessment and performance appraisal processes.

## **Care for People**

Care for People lies at the heart of any emergency response. Care for People is a broad term which encompasses all activities providing support to meet people's needs and help those affected in the event of an emergency, including practical and emotional support. Support will be required by people affected by emergencies in the immediate aftermath of an incident but may also be required in the long term.

People affected by emergencies can include the people directly involved or injured in the emergency, families, and friends of those involved, vulnerable people, those indirectly involved and those involved in providing support. The Comhairle is working with partners to identify those who are most vulnerable through creation of a Persons at Risk database. This will enable support to be effectively targeted to those who need it most as an integral part of the response to incidents.

The needs of those affected by emergencies can be varied and wide-ranging. Care for People activities reflect these varied needs and may include providing:

- Administrative processes and recording and tracking those affected and their needs
- Shelter and physical wellbeing
- Practical support and advice
- Emotional and psychological support
- Community wellbeing, regeneration, and recovery

- Wellbeing and support for response staff
- Effective communication with those affected and the public

The Comhairle’s Care for People response follows the principle of “Consequences not Causes”, as many incidents can lead to similar needs for support. In the event of an emergency, a multi-agency Care for People Team made up of local responders will work together to coordinate the Care for People response.

**Outcomes**

The Comhairle has robust, up-to-date emergency plans in place.	Our response to emergency scenarios has been tried and tested.
Our Resilience Network responds effectively in the event of an emergency.	The needs of all, including the most vulnerable, are met in the event of an emergency.

## COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

### Warning and Informing

Communication is a vital component of effective emergency management. As a Category 1 responder, the Comhairle has a duty to warn the public and provide information and advice if an emergency is likely to occur or has occurred.

Crisis communication is critical across planning, response, and recovery. Communication should have clear objectives, providing direction and informing on next steps. For example, objectives could include raising awareness, providing information on how to receive assistance, or advising on action which is being taken by responders. This includes information on other sources of help and support the Comhairle or other responders will not provide.

To ensure the Comhairle's communication is effective, crisis communication will be included as an integral component of each of the Comhairle's emergency plans and exercises, with training provided to all staff involved in crisis communication.

### Public Communication

Consistent messaging is critical during such incidents and the Comhairle will work with multi-agency partners to agree on a message which is relevant and easy to understand, and to ensure a clear, unambiguous, and consistent message is delivered. The lead agency during an incident has overall responsibility to ensure other responders are contacted, urgent warnings are delivered to the public and communication is coordinated. The Comhairle will echo the response of the lead organisation, for example, by ensuring that messages from emergency services are retweeted on the Comhairle's own Twitter account

A range of communication formats will be used to ensure that the Comhairle is successfully and efficiently meeting its requirement to communicate effectively with employees, partners, and the wider community and to ensure communication quickly reaches the right audience depending on the incident. Forms of communication used by the Comhairle include press releases, the use of social media such as the [Comhairle nan Eilean \(@cne\\_siar\) Twitter](#) and [Comhairle nan Eilean Siar | Stornoway | Facebook](#) page, media announcements on local radio such as BBC Radio nan Gaidheal and Isles FM, and updates on the Comhairle's webpage. The Comhairle will continue to explore new methods of communication, such as using videos on social media to deliver messages in an engaging and efficient manner and will endeavour to ensure messages are circulated as quickly as possible and kept as up to date as possible.

The Comhairle also provides Community Safety advice online for individuals and households on a wide range of topics year-round to allow the public to take action to stay safe including the [Keep Safe, Keep Well this Winter! | Comhairle nan Eilean Siar](#) winter safety initiative. The Comhairle's Resilience webpage will be updated to provide all resources required to build resilience and find further information on resilience including key contact information, community advice and useful links including social media accounts. The website will be reviewed regularly to ensure all information is up-to-date, relevant, and easy to find.

## **Out of Hours Communication**

The Comhairle publishes contact information on the [CnES Website \(cne-siar.gov.uk\)](http://cne-siar.gov.uk) to allow partners, residents, local businesses, and other members of the public to contact the Comhairle in an emergency for advice or to activate an immediate local authority response. As emergencies can take place at any time of the day, Category 1 responders are required to have processes in place to enable communication at all times, including out of hours. The Comhairle can be contacted out of hours via [Faire | Comhairle nan Eilean Siar](#) which operates as an out of hours contact point for Comhairle services including Resilience. Arrangements to contact specific officers out of hours are also made via Faire.

The Comhairle also has weather cameras on the Clisham, at the Barvas weather station and on the Braighe. Feed from these cameras are available 24/7 on the Comhairle's website at [Road Monitoring Cameras](#). These cameras help to inform and empower the community to make decisions about travelling based on the tide and the weather. Following the success of these cameras, it is hoped to roll out further cameras at targeted locations across the islands, with funding bids submitted for further cameras in Uist. Police Scotland and HM Coastguard continue to have decision-making powers on closing roads as and when required, however, it is anticipated that this will help the local community to check on the status of the road round the clock.

## **Communicating with Employees**

In addition to public communication, the Comhairle must also ensure effective communication with employees and multi-agency resilience partners, to enable and support resilience and effective emergency management. In the event of an emergency, the Comhairle will activate the Generic Emergency Plan and follow the alerting procedure to ensure information is swiftly shared with all those who have a role to play in the response. Contact details for all key officers, including out of hours contact details are maintained by the Resilience Team.

Ongoing communication with employees is essential when moving from the initial response to incident management over the longer term. Email is routinely used to communicate with employees and can be used to send staff targeted information regarding disruption via mailing lists. Email was used to communicate latest advice and updates during the Covid-19 pandemic and will continue to be used as a reliable means of communication for employees who work in main office locations. Microsoft Teams is also used to communicate with employees, for example by IT, who use Teams to effectively provide real-time updates of IT risks and raise awareness of threats posed by scam emails sent to Comhairle email addresses. Microsoft Teams meetings for employees were also organised during the pandemic, providing an opportunity for staff to ask questions and ensure a clear message was delivered and received. Groupcall is used by some services to contact employees, with managers responsible for ensuring that all employees gain access to the communication circulated.

## **Communicating with Resilience Partners**

The Comhairle communicates with Resilience partners regularly using a dedicated Microsoft Teams group, in addition to email, phone calls, and meetings on Teams, or in person where this is most appropriate.

The Comhairle’s Resilience Team also maintains an up-to-date Emergency Contact Directory with contact details, including out of hours contact details, for Resilience Partners. This includes Category 1 and 2 responders, and other local organisations which are likely to be involved in the response to an emergency or a major incident. The Comhairle will also add the contact details of Community Resilience Groups and volunteers throughout the islands to this directory, enabling rapid communication in the event of emerging risks or the occurrence of an emergency.

### Outcomes

Crisis communication is integral to the Comhairle’s emergency management processes and procedures.	The Comhairle has regular and reliable means of communication with employees.
The public is warned and informed in the event of emerging risks and emergencies.	The Comhairle has means of rapidly communicating with Resilience Partners, including community groups and volunteers.

## ACTION PLAN

Strategic Priority	Outcome	Action	Responsibility
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Working Together</b> <i>Working together across the Comhairle, with Resilience Partners and our communities</i></p>	Integrated Emergency Management is embedded within the Comhairle.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal Risk Assessment Process is carried out annually</li> <li>- Business Continuity Plans for all services updated annually</li> <li>- Business continuity plans exercised</li> </ul>	Finance and Risk Management Officer
	We communicate and collaborate regularly with our resilience partners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attend all Resilience Partnership Meetings</li> <li>- Maintain ongoing communication with Resilience partners</li> <li>- Participate in and lead Resilience Partnership training and exercises</li> </ul>	Resilience and Training Manager
	Individuals, households, and communities are informed and empowered to enhance resilience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide updated community advice on emergency planning and resilience on Comhairle website</li> <li>- Work with Resilience Groups to build resilience locally</li> </ul>	Resilience and Training Manager
	Commercial enterprises and service providers are supported to build resilience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Update Resilience website with latest business resilience advice and training resources</li> </ul>	Resilience and Training Manager
	Risks to Comhairle services are systematically assessed and minimised.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue to implement Internal Risk Assessment process and put controls in place as required</li> <li>- Maintain up-to-date Strategic Risk Register</li> </ul>	Heads of Service/ Finance and Risk Management Officer

<p><b>Anticipating Risk</b> <i>Assessing potential risks and our ability to respond</i></p>	<p>The risks most likely to cause disruption or develop into a major incident or emergency locally are identified and assessed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work with the North of Scotland RRP to develop and update the Community Risk Register</li> <li>- Continue to work with resilience partners to identify and monitor new or emerging risks locally</li> </ul>	<p>Resilience and Training Manager</p>
	<p>Potential risks and implications specific to our island communities are identified and understood.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work with the Highlands and Islands LRP to identify and address risks and implications specific to the local area</li> <li>- Work with WIEPCG to identify and address local risks and implications specific to Western Isles</li> </ul>	<p>Resilience and Training Manager</p>
	<p>Communities, businesses, and individuals throughout our islands are aware of potential risks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Publish North of Scotland RRP community risk register on Resilience website annually</li> <li>- Continue to work with partners to communicate new or emerging risks where it is in the public interest</li> </ul>	<p>Resilience and Training Manager</p>
	<p>The Comhairle has robust, up-to-date emergency plans in place.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review and update Generic Emergency Plan</li> <li>- Generic Emergency Plan reviewed annually and contacts, contact details, venues etc updated</li> <li>- Develop and implement review schedule for all Emergency Plans to review and update plans on a 3-year cycle</li> <li>- Work with partners to develop, review and update multi-agency plans as required.</li> <li>- Review, update and maintain hard copies and electronic copies (Resilience Direct and Comhairle) of all emergency plans</li> </ul>	<p>Resilience and Training Manager</p>



<b>Preparing for Response and Recovery</b> <i>Planning, training, and carrying out exercises to prepare for emergencies</i>	<p>Our Resilience Network responds effectively in the event of an emergency.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review training needs of Resilience Team and Wider Resilience Network</li> <li>- Develop training schedule for all members of Resilience Team including major incident training and refresher training</li> </ul>	<p>Resilience and Training Manager</p>
	<p>Our response to emergency scenarios has been tried and tested.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop and deliver schedule to exercise Comhairle emergency plans</li> <li>- Exercise Business Continuity Plans</li> <li>- Plan and deliver multi-agency exercises for the Western Isles</li> <li>- Review lessons learned from all exercises and update plans accordingly</li> </ul>	<p>Resilience and Training Manager</p>
	<p>The needs of all, including the most vulnerable, are met in the event of an emergency.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review and update Care for People Plans</li> <li>- Work with partners to identify the most vulnerable people and develop local Persons at Risk Database</li> <li>- Include consideration of vulnerable people and how they will be provided with support in all emergency plans</li> </ul>	<p>Resilience and Training Manager</p>
	<p>Crisis communication is integral to the Comhairle's emergency management processes and procedures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Update all Emergency Plans and Business Continuity Plans to include Communication as an integral element, considering all potential forms of communication and detailing persons responsible.</li> <li>- Provide training to all staff with a role in crisis communication</li> </ul>	<p>Resilience and Training Manager</p>

<b>Communicating Effectively</b> <i>Fast and effective communication with partners, employees, and the public</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Include crisis communication as integral element of all exercises</li> </ul>	
	The public is warned and informed in the event of emerging risks and emergencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide information using a range of communication methods including press releases, mass media and social media</li> <li>- Explore and consider new methods of communication</li> <li>- Update Comhairle Resilience Website ensuring all relevant information is available, up-to-date and easy to find</li> </ul>	Media Coordinator/ Communications Officer  Resilience and Training Manager
	The Comhairle has regular and reliable means of communication with employees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Maintain contact details of employees</li> <li>- Ensure employees have access to Comhairle email and Microsoft Teams</li> </ul>	HR Manager  IT Manager/Line Managers
	The Comhairle has means of rapidly communicating with Resilience Partners, including community groups and volunteers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Maintain Emergency Contact Directory with annual review of all contact details.</li> <li>- Add contact details of Community Resilience groups and volunteers to Emergency Contact Directory.</li> </ul>	Resilience and Training Manager