

Devon Community Resilience Forum

Guidance sheet 1: Vulnerable people and data protection

Introduction

‘Vulnerable’ people are defined by the government, in advice to Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) as:

People who are less able to help themselves in the circumstances of an emergency, who must be given special consideration in plans.

Anyone can become vulnerable during an emergency, but those defined as vulnerable outside of such a situation are likely to need special assistance during an incident. Vulnerability will vary according to the nature of the incident: for example evacuation might result in greater vulnerability than invacuation.

While there is no statutory duty, emergency/flood response teams or parish and town councils, may need to support vulnerable people in situations that do not bring a response from Category 1 responders, or for a period of time before Cat 1 responders can attend.

Identifying vulnerable people

Our district and county council partners advise that parish and town councils and emergency response teams do not try to systematically collect data on vulnerable people.

Instead they advise that you promote the [Priority Service Register](#), a free UK wide service which provides extra advice and support, including when there’s an interruption to a electricity, gas or water supply.

In the event of an emergency, use community knowledge. So for example, if an area is flooded, ask people in the area if they know who might be at greater risk.

There is no simple way of identifying who might be most vulnerable during an emergency. Some people will not want to be identified as vulnerable, not consider themselves vulnerable or not be aware of emergency preparedness.

It may be useful to incorporate into the emergency planning process any organisations who are in touch with potentially vulnerable people. These might be schools, care homes, food banks, day care providers, meals on wheels, campsites etc. so that in the event of an emergency they know what measures are in place and can advise or take part in the response.

You can ask people to register, subject to GDPR regulations, but it is likely that you will be relying on informal awareness and community connections for at least part of the picture.

Information gathering and sharing

It is legitimate for appropriate bodies to hold relevant data on vulnerable people. Government guidance identifies community emergency response teams, flood wardens and parish and ward councils as organisations who might hold such information. (As discussed above, this may be informal, community awareness rather than a database.)

In an emergency you may need to rely on local/community knowledge, for example from resident's knowledge of their neighbours.

Category 1 responders often hold lists of 'lists of vulnerable people'. That is, they know which agencies have data and have sharing agreements in place. In the event of a major incident they will use these to identify and locate vulnerable people to deliver appropriate support. This may be incomplete, and local knowledge could be vital in filling gaps.

Agencies who hold data include NHS, utilities, voluntary sector organisations, social care services, children's services, faith organisations.

If you do hold data, the Information Commissioner's Office sets out four steps to deciding if and what data to collect/hold. 1. Make a list of what you need 2. Identify why you need it, 3. Make sure data is secure, 4. Be transparent about the data you ask for/hold. There is a [Lawful Basis Interactive Guidance Tool](#) to check.

The Information Commissioner's [guidance on data sharing](#) makes clear that personal data can be shared in an emergency:

"In an emergency you should go ahead and share data as is necessary and proportionate."

Supporting vulnerable people

1. Include realistic plans for vulnerable people in your CEP. That may be as simple as recognising that some people will need help getting to an emergency hub or a plan to share information with the emergency services.
2. Share your emergency plan with the community, including vulnerable people and those who may have a particular role in supporting them.
3. Provide information about how people can support themselves or others in an emergency. This might include general information from the Government's [Prepare](#) website, or local arrangements such as the location of a warm/cool hub.
4. Remind people about [Priority Service Register](#), a free UK wide service which provides extra advice and support, including when there's an interruption to a electricity, gas or water supply.

Glossary

Category 1 responders: Emergency services (fire, police, ambulance, coastguard); local authorities (metropolitan, county, district, unitary); Health Bodies (Primary Care Trusts, Health Protection Agency); Environment Agency

Category 2 responders: Utilities; Transport (Network Rail, train, airport and harbour operators, Highways Agency); Health and Safety Executive.

Priority Services Register (PSR): a centrally coordinated database for people who might need additional support if their gas, water or electricity are cut off. <https://www.thepsr.co.uk/>

Local Resilience Forum: strategic regional bodies made up of members of category 1 and 2 responders who ensure effective delivery of the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. [DCIS LRF - Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Local Resilience Forum](#)

Civil Contingencies Act, 2004: provides a legislative framework for civil protection.

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR): European Union regulation which gives guidelines for the collection and processing of personal data.

Community Emergency Plan (CEP): a document which sets out how a community will respond in the event of an emergency. Usually held by parish or town councils, sometimes by voluntary flood or emergency response groups.

Links/sources:

Information Commissioner's Office: [Your beginner's guide to data protection | ICO](#)

UK Government: [Identifying and supporting persons who are vulnerable in an emergency.pdf](#)

Civil Contingencies Act 2004 – a short guide: [Microsoft Word - 06 05 15 Short guide_final_.doc](#)

Prepare website: [Prepare - Prepare](#)