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**REPORT 5**  
(1215/52/IM)

## **REPORT BACK ON ATTENDANCE AT THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE – FEBRUARY 2012**

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### **1. Purpose of Report**

To report back to all Councillors on the Conference including the subjects covered and an opinion of the value of attendance by Elected Members.

### **2. Purpose of Report**

It is recommended that the Strategy and Policy Committee

- 1. Receive the information.*

### **3. Details of the Conference**

On February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011 I was attending an Emergency Management Conference. Guest speakers spoke of how lucky Christchurch was to have survived the previous September 4<sup>th</sup> quake with no loss of life. We broke for lunch and at 12.51pm Christchurch suffered another major earthquake. This time it was not so lucky and it became obvious, from the experts in the room that this would be serious. The conference was cancelled and I went home to watch the grim news unfold on television.

In February 2012 the conference reconvened. This time there was much to discuss. I was unfortunately not able to attend all sessions as a fellow councillor who was to also attend and do some of the sessions was not able to be there.

The first day started with keynote speakers: Clive Manley, head of Auckland Council Civil Defence, Hon Chris Tremain Minister of Civil Defence and Mayor Bob Parker. Bob told us 71,000 homes were affected, 40,000 chemical toilets were distributed, half a million tons of silt was moved and \$1billion of damage was done to the waste water system alone.

After morning tea we heard from Dr Richard Sharpe of BECA. He outlined that the most modern buildings did the best, ie 10-15 years old. He talked of modern building methods including strong columns and weak beams are better than strong beams and weak columns. (Incidentally much of this was discussed on "The Aftermath" last Sunday night). He talked about ductile/flexible buildings, base isolation and that compliance with the letter of the building code was not enough.

He added that cheap engineering advice will result in cheap buildings and that often people deliberately design to minimum standards which means a high level of risk. He also said that different buildings experienced the quake differently even if they were close together because of how the ground reacted. Much of this was interesting but very technical. However he went on to say that Property Management companies control most buildings in cities but were not included in CDEM groups and need to be as part of any response as they hold keys etc. Buildings do not stand alone, they are affected by the buildings around them. The building code is pretty much ok so shouldn't expect too much change.

John Hamilton Director of Civil Defence and Emergency Management was next. He talked of lessons from the response.

1. There was poor organisational structure.
2. Priorities however were good.
3. Welfare: needs to be up front and well planned in advance.
4. Need a clear picture of the impact quickly and the ability to share information.
5. The liaison of CDEMS was not planned for and as a result there were problems such as the distribution of portaloos where whole streets missed out. Also things like the tanks for emptying portaloos were too tall and needed to be dug into the ground. Very frustrating.
6. Media management – underestimated the amount of time and effort needed and the need to focus on social media as well. The importance of the need of resources for social media a traditional medias view was narrow and it needed to be as wide as possible. Media needs to be about getting importance info out.
7. Support for volunteers. Later we heard of the frustration experienced by those wanting to help. Often felt they were being told go away and leave it to the experts.

Readiness Lessons:

1. Business continuity. Need to be prepared and able to adapt. Took too many calls to get building owners into their buildings. Businesses need to have good continuity planning and many didn't.
2. Lifeline utilities. Generally worked well but could do better. Importance of leadership support critical to problem solving. Need to think out of the box. Roger Sutton a good example.
3. Involve the community in CDEM with practices etc. Fast response and good information flow.
4. Need good relationships beforehand – CDEM and fire, police etc. Need to build these relationships so mutual trust and understanding of each others roles and capability.

After lunch we heard from Sandra James, Community Team Leader, Waimakariri District Council.

Sandra talked of the importance of door knocking to ensure everyone was having their needs met. This ensured the elderly, those too proud to go for help, the frightened; those with disabilities, the deaf, blind etc were checked on. Many, especially older people felt they should not go for help as there were others in a perceived greater need than they were. There was a need to be

careful not just to deal with the squeaky wheels but also those suffering in silence.

A daily newsletter was vital for keeping everyone informed as people craved information and there were lots of rumours.

They needed to set up a project to manage donations, both financial and goods.

People often had complex needs and many had complicated needs before the disaster.

They needed better needs assessment processes and better co-ordination and integration with services that already exist. An example, a food truck was sent away.

The need for better communication with and through existing community networks.

Welfare. This term needs to be renamed as many felt they did not need welfare assistance. Perhaps should be called Disaster support. There was some abuse of systems but generally could be caught and most did not abuse the systems.

What would have helped?

1. Good data collection forms with useful and appropriated questions.
2. Skilled triage systems.

What came through very clearly was that the community want to be part of the doing, not just being done to. Since the disaster more community organisations have formed such as a MENZ Shed and community gardens.

They held fun events such as street BBQs, outdoor movies and so on.

Experts in the social field are just as important as engineers etc. Eg the issue of paedophiles and children in welfare centres, or families who have a protection order out against another person in the same facility. There is a need to ensure existing social services and CDEM combine, trusting and honouring what already exists in communities. It is important that local agencies deliver local services and local people help local people. It's important to involve and support local social service agencies and to work in manageable geographic areas. Vulnerable people such as the elderly trust and want to use existing relationships.

Professional social service agencies need to be involved in planning welfare centres and be there when they open. EG there needs to be people such as psychologists and mental health professionals on every shift.

As a result of the Christchurch quakes there is an opportunity to do things differently. Now there is lots of community action, people connecting and helping one another on a daily basis. Sandra said she hopes that this will continue to be incorporated into the community and will become the "new normal".

A Panel discussion followed.

The key points I noted from this were the value of cloud based information for community groups so anyone working from anywhere can access the information.

There were an initial 800 enquiries from families looking for loved ones immediately after the quake and many were from other cultures. The police and others need to develop good relationships with all ethnic and religious communities and to understand cultural differences eg around the practice of early burial after death.

The next session I attended was the following day and was about Lyttleton's response. Hon Ruth Dyson and Wendy Everingham Treasurer of Project Lyttleton spoke. Wendy spoke about the importance of the Time Bank. It had a computer database of skills which enabled them to contact elderly and vulnerable people and found people to remove chimneys, trades people to fix things, people who could provide rooms for emergency accommodation, distribute food, disseminate information and to collect information for CDEM. The hospitality industry cooked for the elderly. The database was a mine of valuable information that enabled a very fast response. Her message was, trust local initiatives, and respect the local community. Can co-ordinate volunteers from within communities. We should build community resilience all the time.

Ruth Dyson said recovery is not rebuilding what is lost, but looking at the gaps in communities. Response often overlooks local people who are often the most skilled and knowledgeable. It is important to build relationships with CDEM as they are also part of the community.

Regarding volunteers, she said you cannot say no to volunteers or you turn them from helpful people into angry people. Information is vital, people need the facts. They also need information on how decisions are made eg how and when people can return to their houses.

Finally she spoke about how Lyttleton already had a structure of organisations and these were not a response to the disaster. Areas that had no local structures struggled to recover and are at huge risk. Strong, healthy communities are important even if there is no emergency. We should invest in strong communities eg a National Time Bank co-ordinator.

Finally she talked about data; how to get it out to those who need it, what data is needed, how to get it, who will get it, what format, how to disseminate it and who to. This is needed within hours of the disaster.

Overall the message I took away from this conference is that while there are engineering solutions and we need to ensure the lifelines and utilities work, the role of local communities is paramount. Local people with local knowledge, local organisations with easily accessible skills and information and involving them with CDEM to ensure planning is robust.

Report prepared by: *Councillor Stephanie Cook*