

3. PROPOSAL TO IMPLEMENT AN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT GROUP (EMG) IN CANTERBURY

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Corporate Plan Output: Civil Defence	

The purpose of this report is to advise the Council as to discussions among local authorities within Canterbury about putting in place a new framework for emergency management in the region. Legislation is expected later this year but it is recommended that in advance of this legislation we work with other local authorities to put in place an “Emergency Management Group” of the type which legislation is likely to require. This is recommended, as it is the view of the Chief Executives and Mayors across the region that it will provide for more effective mitigation, preparedness and response to any emergency situation.

BACKGROUND

In October 1998 the office of Emergency Management and Civil Defence issued a discussion document proposing reforms. It is understood that the main thrust of the document has all parties support in Parliament and legislation is finally expected towards the end of the current calendar year.

The legislation will put in place a new framework for emergency management across New Zealand. The framework will widen the scope of emergency management to embrace public risk management and the concept of community resilience; in doing so it will formally encompass “the four Rs” - Reduction, Readiness, Response and Recovery.

At the local level the main structural change will be the establishment of emergency management groups as joint committees of local authorities in a region. These will be charged with overseeing and co-ordinating emergency management (in all of its aspects). A decision is yet to be made as to whether there will be one or two EMGs for Canterbury. Discussions have been under way for some two years between local authorities in Canterbury, including preparation of submissions on the proposed changes. Much of this work has been led by John Lamb, a former employee of this Council who is our Regional Civil Defence Controller.

MOVING IN ADVANCE OF LEGISLATION

In a number of regions in the North Island, Councils have co-operated to put in place EMG structures in advance of the pending legislation. It is now proposed that we move towards putting in place what may become a trial EMG here in Canterbury. The benefits of this are likely to be two fold.

1. By taking this step officers will begin to work on the detail of putting a new structure in place and this will enable ourselves and other Councils to have much more effective input into the detail of draft legislation later this year.

2. There is wide spread agreement that the new approach including a new structure will improve the quality of emergency management and its planning in the region; given the unpredictability of any emergency event it therefore seems prudent to begin to act now to put in place what we believe will be a superior structure.

HOW WOULD AN EMG WORK?

There are at least four ways in which it is considered that the EMG proposal will be superior to current Civil Defence arrangements which are generally organised at the local level on a Council by Council basis. (Note: In our own case, however, Civil Defence services are provided for ourselves and Banks Peninsula by the Regional Council, but this is not generally the pattern in Canterbury.)

The scale of emergencies may well vary but it is highly likely that a major event such as an earthquake will affect all or large parts of the region rather than simply the city or a single district. The EMG structure would provide for the regional co-ordination of response and resources.

The framework will provide for effective input from emergency services, the health sector, welfare agencies and utility operators. While there is some input from these different groups into Civil Defence planning it is considered that EMG arrangements will be more effective.

The philosophy of the “four Rs” will be implemented. We are already well advanced in terms of reduction of risk (principally through the lifelines work), readiness and response have been the traditional focus of Civil Defence activity, but less effort to date has been put into the recovery phase - that is contingency plans for the re-establishment of services, and the city, and getting “life back to normal” after a significant natural disaster.

Establishing an EMG will set up a political joint-committee (made up of Mayors or nominees of Councils), serviced by a co-ordination and advisers group of local authorities and other managers. These arrangements will provide greater focus on emergency management across Canterbury than current arrangements.

BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS

At this stage no change in funding is requested although following the establishment of the EMG by legislation it may well be that costs to Councils will increase because the scope of the activity will be wider than traditional Civil Defence work.

Submissions have already been made by Canterbury Councils to Central Government aiming to protect the funding already committed by Central Government through agencies such as the Police and Fire Service into Civil Defence/Emergency Management. This is an issue which will continue to be contested during the passage of a Bill through Parliament.

- Recommendation:**
1. That Christchurch City Council support a joint initiative with other Canterbury Councils in preparing a detailed proposal for the establishment of an EMG in Canterbury, in advance of legislation.
 2. That upon completion of detailed work a report be brought back to the City Council for final decision on whether or not to proceed with a regional EMG.