

Response and recommendations from the task & finish groups looking at: The role of the DASS and social workers in disaster recovery

Background

Every Local Authority has a legal duty to have policies and procedures in place to respond to disaster including critical incidents, serious injuries, explosion, flood, poisoning, electrocution, fire, release of radioactivity and chemical spills. The impact of globalisation, terrorism, displacement of people and humanitarian disasters has directly impacted on the delivery of planned emergency responses in England and in delivering long term support responses for individuals and communities.

Both the Director of Adult Social Services (DASS) and Social Workers play an integral role in disaster responses.

The DASS role

In London the London Resilience Plan clearly sets out the 'Humanitarian Assistance Lead Officer' (HALO) role. This is not the case across other areas and the resilience procedures are also different in Manchester.

In the event of a disaster the London Resilience Partnership 'Humanitarian Assistance Plan' (June 2013) refers to the duties of the Local Authority in setting up a Humanitarian Assistance Centre (HAC) and the role of the HALO. The DASS is identified as the most appropriate role to take on the responsibilities of the HALO which include:

- Conferring with the London Local Authority Gold (LLAG) if an HAC is recommended.
- Appointing an HAC Build Manager. The HAC Build Manager will be responsible for converting the identified building into an HAC.
- Appointing an HAC Manager. The HAC Manager will be responsible for delivery of the service within the HAC.
- Ensure the HAC Manager is appropriately briefed and consider:
 - Latest information about the incident
 - The HAC role, and the Community Assistance Centre (CAC) Manager's responsibilities
 - What other support is available to affected people
 - Routes for accessing logistical support
 - Which other agencies should be asked to attend.
 - Establish the hours of operation. Initially these may need to be extended hours (e.g. 6am to 10pm). As the recovery progresses these can be reviewed.
- Request / agree a level of support from other agencies

However, the experience of the DASSs involved in post disaster management following the Manchester Arena bombing and the Grenfell Tower fire, suggests there should be greater clarity on the HALO role in all Local Authorities so that any DASS stepping into the space would know what their responsibilities would be. It was also felt that clarity is needed on the HALO role in these situations so that other key partners understood the role and how it links with the Emergency Planning Response in a wider disaster.

Given the size of the HALO responsibilities (and the number of Local Authorities who have one individual responsible for the DASS and Director of Children's Services (DCS) statutory roles) it is considered important for the HALO to be appropriately resourced.

The Social Worker role

Social Workers play an integral role in disaster responses. Their skills, knowledge and expertise are essential requisites in an emergency. Their professional responsibilities and expertise includes supporting survivors, the bereaved and those, directly and indirectly affected by an emergency. Social workers are central to the key stages of disaster management and support: prevention, immediate relief and recovery, reconstruction and prompting self-care. Social workers are integral to facilitating and co-ordinating an integrated strategic and operational disaster delivery service including: - sharing difficult news, assessing need, co-ordinating services, signposting and enabling and supporting individuals, families and communities in coping with difficult traumatic circumstances – they can be the key workers in disaster responses.

A cohesive disaster response must consider the role of social workers as key workers, working in partnership with community groups, voluntary and independent sector, central and local government departments, health agencies and emergency response organisations at a local, regional, and national level. Identified strategic leads for social work emergency out of hours response teams should be included in all emergency planning procedures with clearly identified functions and responsibilities including pre, during and post disaster emergency recovery phases.

A key worker role in post disaster also supports community recovery and by 'standing side by side with' communities supports the development of a sustainable cohesive future.

It is important to share and develop knowledge, skills, best practice and learning from disasters nationally and internationally and from social workers who have been directly involved in emergency responses as well as from the communities they have served. The impact of disasters not only affect those directly affected but also individuals, families, groups and local communities locally, nationally and internationally. The importance of evidence and community-led recovery and involving local communities is critical to effective social work in disaster responses and post recovery.

The 'Key worker' role (a snapshot)

Learning from both an international and domestic context the role of the social worker as a key worker provides a critical key contact for individuals or families and is underpinned by a rights and strength-based approach to meeting people's need.

The key worker role incorporates many functions and skills, at any given time the key worker will be a facilitator, co-ordinator, community and resource mobiliser, negotiator, advocate and will: -

- act as the primary contact for an individual or family ensuring they have all contact details of the key worker
- work with individuals/families to agree how they wish to engage and the level of contact they would like
- work in partnership with Family Liaison Officer (FLO) or equivalent role to ensure bereaved relatives are supported to access emotional and practical support (including finances, accommodation, flights, visas, immigration documentation) and to work closely with Coroner's office with all aspects of recovery and investigation process
- ensure that individuals/families are supported in the way that they wish to access health, housing and educational support (which may include practical visits, arranging transport and financial support.)
- work in partnership with the identified housing link worker to take a joint lead on housing and temporary accommodation
- be the main contact for an individual and family 24/7 providing access to emotional and practical support as required and signpost to specialist support

- ensure individuals and families are connected to community groups, reconnect to friendship and family contacts as they request
- identify any safeguarding or areas of risk and ensure these matters are managed through agreed processes

All above will be dependent on each individual and/ or family member – the pace of engagement and role responsibilities will need to be explored in a sensitive and professional manner.

Recommendations for consideration regarding the DASS role:

1. There should be one nationally agreed resilience framework (which sets out the responsibilities of the HALO) but with flexibility for locally agreed resilience procedures.
2. Each local authority Civil Contingency/disaster recovery plan should include the HALO responsibilities and which statutory role/s will take these on in disaster recovery.
3. Local Authority induction of a new DASS/DCS should include meeting with the emergency planning team, to develop an understanding of each of their roles and how they will work together in disaster recovery.
4. That Local Authorities develop a protocol with key partners for the HALO to call upon/delegate to internal or external resources

Recommendations for consideration regarding the Social Worker role:

1. Local Authority Emergency /Civil Contingency Plans to incorporate the role of social workers as key workers in disaster response (including immediate relief, recovery and re-construction). (Resources may need to be sought from Government to support this).
2. The designated HALO to promote and implement the role of social workers as 'Key Workers' in disaster responses.
3. Local Authorities to be clear on the expectations of staff, specific disaster roles, training and support that will be required to staff pre, during and post disaster event
4. Integrated training is developed for communities and organisations involved in emergency planning, incorporating curricula about the role of the social worker as a key worker
5. A pilot training course is developed and rolled out in collaboration with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and partner organisations. Funding for a research bid is developed by a consortium of HEIs
6. A fringe event on the role of social workers in emergencies, hosted by BASW in collaboration with partners, is to be held in Manchester during the NCAS conference.
7. A national conference is held to share and learn from good practice 'disaster response - the role of social workers' (with the aim of developing national good practice guidance for statutory, voluntary, community and independent organisations)
8. ADASS, ADCS, LGA, Chief Social Workers for England work in collaboration to promote and embed the social worker role as a key worker in all emergency/disaster response planning and implementation.