



London Communities
Emergencies Partnership



Extreme Hot Weather Exercise

Overview

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Background

In 2024/25, the Greater London Authority (GLA) funded a project to help community groups prepare for extreme heat.

This project was part of a larger exercise called Exercise Helios, led by the London Resilience Unit. The aim of the funding was to support more charities and community groups to take part in an extreme heat exercise and share learnings.

Exercise Helios

As the climate changes, London needs to be ready for more extreme hot weather events.

Exercise Helios was held in June 2024 to see how prepared London is for a heatwave. It found that while there are plans for short heatwaves, more protracted and extreme ones need better planning.

The report recommended five key areas for improvement:

- Strategic approach to extreme heat risk
- Evidence-based planning
- Regional and local heatwave response
- Strategic communication
- Addressing inequity in heat risk



Extreme Hot Weather Tabletop Exercise

Aims and Objectives

The main goal was to enhance community resilience by engaging local charities and community groups in discussions about their preparedness for a heatwave. The exercise provided valuable insights, practical strategies, and connections to help them navigate and mitigate the impacts of a heatwave.

Using expertise and connections that already exist, we used the sector-leading expertise from the British Red Cross in understanding and leading emergency response activity both in the UK and overseas as facilitators of the exercise with Local Infrastructure Organisations in a train-the-trainer type model. The model allows infrastructure organisations to work directly with their own networks of trust to pass knowledge and expertise on in a way that works best for their community.

Main Objective

To help charities and community groups understand theirs and others' roles and responsibilities during extreme heat events by practising their response in a safe environment. The main aim of the exercise was to improve coordination amongst local charities and community groups, ensuring community needs are met. Participants were given an opportunity to practice their individual roles, identify necessary connections, and address challenges. Together, charities and community groups were able to learn valuable lessons and enhance preparedness for future extreme heat events.

Sub-objectives:

- Equip charities and community groups with stronger knowledge and connections to better prepare for heatwaves.
- Understand local and city-wide vulnerabilities and resources.
- Promote collaboration and coordination among groups and agencies.
- Improve community response to heatwaves.
- Ensure community needs are met during extreme heat.
- Help groups address heatwave challenges, like finding cool spaces and distributing resources.

Extreme Hot Weather Tabletop Exercise

Exercise Scope

The exercise, designed by the British Red Cross, looked at how extreme heat affects local charities and community groups. It focused on engagement, collaboration, and practical planning to strengthen community resilience and improve the readiness, response and recovery skills of community groups.

Participants created strategies to address needs before, during, and after a heat emergency, focusing on communication, coordination, and asset management. The exercise also helped identify gaps and improve support from the London Resilience Partners.

Exercise Format

The exercise was a table-top discussion involving **110 participants** from various community groups across **8 separate events** in **8 London boroughs**. Most exercises were conducted in person, with a couple delivered online.

Attendees worked through scenarios about preparedness, response, and recovery. These scenarios helped them learn about emergency preparation and practice coordination of response strategies.

The Met Office provided the facilitators with a presentation (recorded and/or in person) about how our weather is changing and how it is likely to change further in the years to come.

“It brought home especially with the MET Office presentation the reality of climate change on our weather and how we will need to deal with and support moving forward. Even though some members are on our VCS Emergency Planning Group it highlighted again the importance of this work and their input.”

Facilitator

Scenario

In Summer 2030, the UK experiences an unprecedented heatwave.

By early July, temperatures soar to 35-36°C. A week later, London temperatures hit record-breaking highs of 41-43.6°C, triggering power outages, wildfires, and rising fatalities.

Two months on, displaced residents struggle with housing, financial loss, and daily disruptions.

Six months later, media attention fades, and community support dwindles, leaving many local people feeling abandoned.

Lessons from the disaster remain unaddressed, highlighting gaps in long-term recovery and climate resilience planning.

Participants were provided with mock alerts from relevant agencies. A range of questions and activities were then undertaken by participants designed to address cross-cutting themes at each relevant phase.

Scenario-based Workshop - Heatwave Preparedness, Response and Recovery in Action

Train the Trainer and Extreme Hot Weather Tabletop Exercise

3rd December 2024

Working with



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Impact Methodology and Key Findings

Data was collected through participant and facilitator feedback surveys designed by the London Communities Emergencies Partnership (LCEP) to assess the project's impact and effectiveness. Surveys were analysed to produce learning and recommendations.

Key Findings

The exercise resulted in an increased awareness, understanding and confidence about what to do, who else is doing what and how to better connect with each other.

It gave participants the opportunity to connect with others who would share the space should a heatwave occur and provided people with broader perspectives of who else might also be 'on the pitch' in terms of support.

Complete Findings

Of the 110 participants, 41 completed the feedback survey representing a 37% response rate and all 8 exercise facilitators (100% response) completed their survey from which we can derive a high degree of confidence in the data.

Impact Statements we measured

- Capacity Building
- Opportunities for Collaboration and Coordination
- Coordinated VCS response to extreme heat
- Improving Future Responses

Capacity Building

Participant Feedback Survey data

- 100% of participants agreed (41% of them strongly) that as a result of participating in the workshop, they have a **better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of community members and volunteers** before, during and after an emergency.
- 93% of participants agreed (37% strongly) that as a result of participating in the workshop, they now have a **clearer understanding of their own role and their community's role** in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from an emergency. The remaining 7% gave a neutral response.
- 95% of participants agreed (29% strongly) that as a result of participating in the workshop, they are **more aware of the tools and resources available** to help individuals and communities prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies. The remaining 5% gave a neutral response.
- 85% of participants agreed (29% strongly) that as a result of participating in the workshop, they **feel more confident in accessing and using the tools and resources available** to support emergency preparedness and response in their community. The remaining 15% gave a neutral response.
- 100% of participants agreed (56% strongly) that as a result of participating in the workshop, they have a **better understanding of the risks, hazards, and emergency-related concerns in their community**.

Emerging Themes

The lowest area of confidence was in accessing and using tools and resources that are available, indicating a need to improve this area of delivery in future exercises and more broadly in community resilience work.

Capacity Building

Facilitator Feedback Survey data

100% of the facilitators agreed (38% strongly) that the exercise helped participants to: **“Understand the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in an emergency”**

Emerging Themes

Although all facilitators agreed that understanding of roles and responsibilities improved, there was a general sense from the feedback that it will take much more work for us to be able to say that we have a 'coordinated voluntary and community sector response' which ensures all community needs are met.

“It was sobering to understand the fact that High Heat is likely to be an annual occurrence - and for our clients - older and disabled people - this will be particularly challenging so it something to action now...”

Participant



Opportunities for Collaboration and Coordination

Participant Feedback Survey data:

- 88% of participants agreed (27% strongly) that as a result of participating in the workshop, they now feel **more connected to emergency planners, volunteers, and others in their community** and beyond. 10% gave a neutral response and one respondent disagreed this was the case.
- 100% of participants agreed (56% strongly) that as a result of participating in the workshop, they **recognise the importance of community involvement** in emergency preparedness.
- 85% reported that they **made new connections** during their workshop.

Emerging Themes

We are really pleased that a significant number of new connections resulted from these exercises. We are also pleased but hardly surprised that the importance of community involvement in emergency preparedness is so universally recognised following these sessions. There is a definite indication that more work is needed to help build trusted and lasting connections between emergency planners, volunteering organisations and other community specialists.

Again, this is unsurprising as it is a known ongoing challenge unlikely to be sufficiently improved by a single exercise. There was a significant theme in the qualitative feedback recognising the “importance of joined up local plans” and collaborative “work between the charity sector, community groups, and the council to prepare for extreme weather events”.

Opportunities for Collaboration and Coordination

Facilitator Feedback Survey data

- 100% of the facilitators agree (63% strongly) that the exercise helped participants to: **Recognise opportunities for collaboration and coordination** during an emergency.
- 100% of the facilitators agree that the exercise **supported their relationship with the emergency planning team** at their Local Authority.

Emerging themes

By creating opportunities such as this heatwave exercise and encouraging the recipients of the fund to deliver such events alongside their emergency planning teams, it will create opportunities for them to further develop their relationships together as well as their relationship and understanding with wider voluntary and community organisations.

“The EP team at Hackney were fully involved in the session, taking part in leading each groups discussion, and also bringing in Public Health - so as a crossteam exercise it worked really well. The team were pleased to be able to meet and work with more VCS groups and made some good connections and it felt like there was a lot of learning in the room.”

Facilitator

Coordinated VCS response to extreme heat

Participant Feedback Survey data:

- 100% of participants agree (32% strongly) that as a result of participating in the workshop, they feel **more confident in their ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies**.
- 90% of participants agree (49% strongly) that if an extreme weather event or other emergency occurred in the next three months and they were asked to help, they would be **more likely to support their community**. 10% gave a neutral response indicating they would be just as likely as before to respond.
- 90% of participants also agree (44% strongly) that as a result of participating in the workshop, they are **now more willing to take action before, during, and after an emergency**. Again 10% gave a neutral response indicating they would be just as likely as before to take action.

“There needs to be work between the charity sector, community groups and the council to prepare for extreme weather events such as a heatwave.”

Participant

Emerging Themes

When asked what the most important thing participants learned from the exercise, 20 out of the 43 referenced connections/importance of coordination both within the sector and with other agencies. This highlights the importance of sector and multi-agency exercises to make connections before an emergency event.

Coordinated VCS response to extreme heat

Facilitator Feedback Survey data:

- 87% of facilitators agree (38% strongly) that the exercise helped participants to: **“Support a coordinated VCS response to ensure community needs are met”** 1 facilitator gave a neutral response to this question.

Emerging Themes

Whilst this exercise provided a starting point, more investment and opportunities are needed for charities and community groups to be able to put their new knowledge and connections into practice.

“From the feedback it felt like the VCS organisations felt they'd increased their knowledge and had a better understanding but wanted to come up with a more concrete plan of how it could work...”

Facilitator

Learning from the Exercise

Themes

We asked participants, what are most important things you have learned from this exercise. The responses to this question highlighted a number of key themes:

- The importance of weather awareness and robust communication networks, community capacity and engagement, and the development of heatwave preparedness action plans.
- There was some emphasis on the need for mapping vulnerable community groups' needs, effective partnerships, and collaboration between voluntary and public sectors.
- Respondents stressed the necessity of joined-up local plans, practical strategies for supporting vulnerable residents, and the value of connections and networks for emergency response.
- The responses underscore the critical role of practising preparedness through exercising, resource allocation, and ongoing relationship building.

We also asked what aspects of the exercise could be improved. The most consistent response to this question was the need and desire for more time to be allowed for the exercise. 25% of respondents indicated they would have liked a longer session. A few people from the sessions with lower attendance levels unsurprisingly mentioned better uptake. Another notable suggestion was better oversight of the statutory response so participants knew where their input would add most value.

Facilitator Feedback Survey data:

7 out of the 8 facilitators fed back that the Heatwave Scenario Exercise met their expectations (three of these felt their expectations were very well met). One respondent facilitator reported that the exercise did not meet their expectations. This was due to lower-than-expected interest despite a lot of promotion. The facilitators commented that discussions during the exercise were valuable but could have had more time allocated.

This aligns with participant feedback. While the detailed scenarios were helpful, simplifying them could have allowed more time for discussion. There was a feeling that these exercises marked the beginning of a collaborative journey, helping the local authority emergency planning teams understand the voluntary and community sector and fostering partnership and teamwork.

The scenario case studies were particularly beneficial, highlighting the importance of collaboration. The information provided was clear and concise, stimulating productive discussion without causing distress or overwhelm.

Conclusion

We feel that the project has made a big impact with the £10,000 investment. The 'Extreme Hot Weather Exercises' were highly effective in training and engaging participants, providing them with the opportunity to practice a cohesive and coordinated response.

These exercises significantly enhanced participants' understanding, confidence, and preparedness for dealing with extreme heat events. Participants valued the chance to connect with others in a safe environment, where they could learn about their roles and responsibilities.

This interaction not only built their knowledge but also fostered a sense of community and mutual support. The high level of interest, with 110 participants, indicates a strong desire to be involved. The fact that at least 35 participants reported making valuable new connections underscores the importance of these events in fostering collaboration and building a stronger, more resilient community network.

This enthusiasm and engagement highlight the community's commitment to improving their preparedness and response capabilities for extreme heat events.

Furthermore, the exercise emphasised the added value and critical need for ongoing collaboration and coordination among voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations and other stakeholders in emergencies of all kinds. Participants recognised that continuous communication and partnership are essential for effectively managing extreme heat events.

It is vital we build and maintain strong networks to ensure a person centred, cohesive and efficient response to future emergencies.

Ultimately these exercises were effective because they were run locally. The local infrastructure organisations delivering these sessions know their communities and their audiences best and therefore were best placed to amend the training and signpost effectively to other local support and resources.

Recommendations

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the London Resilience Unit for funding the Extreme Hot Weather Exercises. Based on feedback we can say with certainty that these exercises were successful in achieving short term lesson learning, networking, confidence/awareness building and generating enthusiasm for local resilience issues. We're really keen to ensure this success is acted on, embedded and sustained long term.

These exercises have proven invaluable in enhancing the understanding, confidence, and preparedness of charities and community groups for extreme heat events. The high level of participation and the formation of new connections underscores the importance of such initiatives in fostering the skill development and relationships needed to build resilient community networks. It is now essential to keep the voluntary and community sector exercising.

Based on the successes and learnings from these exercises, we strongly recommend:

- Continued support and funding for similar charity and community focussed exercises in the future, delivered by organisations who have a strong knowledge and relationship with the intended audience.
- These exercises should be delivered in partnership with Local Authority Emergency Planning teams and other multi-agency organisations where appropriate. To support awareness raising of what the voluntary and community sector can deliver during emergencies and also to build relationships and connections.
- Training in the future should allow more time for discussion and a better understanding of the statutory response.
- The inclusion of voluntary and community sector organisations in the planning and participation of multi-agency exercising, given the importance of making better connections to support coordination during an emergency, highlighted in the participant and facilitator feedback.

Leveraging these findings, we advocate for further investment to ensure that our communities remain well-prepared and resilient in the face of increasing climate challenges and rising uncertainty in the geo-political landscape. Your support has been instrumental in driving this progress, and we look forward to continued partnership in strengthening London's resilience.

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