



## **Brief guide on engaging the Faith Communities in civil protection**

The Voluntary Sector Civil Protection Forum (VSCPF), in collaboration with voluntary sector partners and the Department for Communities and Local Government's Resilience and Emergencies Division, has produced this booklet as a guide for faith communities and Local Resilience Forum partners engaged in civil protection work.

Faith communities are increasingly recognised as significant partners in working for the common good in their localities and research has shown that they have a long tradition of responding to the needs of their local communities in times of crisis. The case for engaging faith communities in resilience is strong. They can make particular contributions to the work of Local Resilience Forums and provide important capacities and capabilities in supporting Category 1 and 2 Responders in planning, response and recovery phases of their duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

This will serve as an "umbrella" document, signposting to additional significant information relevant to those faith communities involved in civil protection and the LRF partners supporting them.

## **Introduction**

In times of crises and large scale incidents, faith communities have a role to play in supporting victims, their families and their communities. Strong leadership from faith communities can help to manage concerns about social cohesion. Incidents resulting in mass fatalities raise specific issues for faith communities who may have specific requirements in relation to medical treatment and death practices (see page 3) and these need to be addressed early in the planning phase.

The possibility of a potential flu pandemic would challenge the services provided by the statutory agencies. It is imperative therefore that partnership working takes place to increase preparedness amongst faith communities, ensuring that casualties, survivors and those who may be bereaved are dealt with in a sensitive and appropriate manner, honouring the requirements of a person's faith.

This short guide is a collation of key points from the two existing documents:

- **Key Communities, Key Resources  
Engaging the capacity and capabilities of faith communities in civil resilience –LGA 2008**

**The Needs of Faith Communities in Major Emergencies:  
Some Guidelines– Home Office and Cabinet Office 2005**

## **Competencies and Capabilities**

There are several reasons why faith communities should be regarded as “key communities” and a crucial resource for emergency planners:

- Their size and distribution across the UK;
- Existing networks of people; resources; equipment and competencies;
- Networks of employed staff and volunteers - many of them with specialist skills.
- Networks which already have Safeguarding Schemes operating
- Networks used to dealing with people in crisis

- Networks which will be there for the long term and have the religious motivation to aid recovery from crisis

**Faith Community Leaders** offer a mix of skills and competencies that can add value to civil emergency planning and response:

- They are embedded in the local community and know the people that statutory emergency planners may find difficult to reach;
- They are established leaders within their community, with local knowledge and networks;
- They can have an important role in promoting social cohesion and preventing unrest and disorder in the aftermath of a major incident;
- They have a trusted position of guidance and reassurance;
- They have access to a range of voluntary social care agencies
- They are an accepted provider of counselling and advice during a crisis, particularly in the areas of emotional and spiritual care of the sick and dying; carer support and bereavement counselling;
- They have networks of trained and accredited counsellors and therapists;
- They can have a long-term, sustaining presence during recovery from incidents;
- They have networks of personal contacts across faith community boundaries

This demonstrates that faith communities - through their leaders, can help reach vulnerable communities that emergency planners may be unable to.

## **Specific Features and Requirements of Faith Groups and Beliefs**

To understand the needs of the different faith and belief communities in the event of a major incident, it is important to take into consideration specific features and requirements of the main faith groups and beliefs in relation to:

- Language
- Diet including fasting
- Dress
- Physical contact, medical treatment, hospital stays, rest centres
- Daily acts of faith and major annual events
- Dying and death customs
- Names of victims

Fact sheets have been compiled on 17 faith groups represented in the UK, including those with non-religious humanist beliefs. These details have all been agreed with the respective groups, and can be found in Annex A of ***The Needs of Faith Communities in Major Emergencies: Some Guidelines– Home Office and Cabinet Office 2005***

## **Consideration for Emergency Planners**

- Each local authority should develop its own emergency plan and point of contact with the faith communities in their area. This plan should embrace the likely needs of survivors, casualties, deceased victims and bereaved families, workers, responders and the wider community. Such plans may include faith communities integrated into multi-disciplinary teams
- It must be remembered that it will not only be survivors, casualties, deceased victims and bereaved families who may be affected by a major incident: the needs of workers, responders and affected communities should also be

considered. It is likely that a major incident will involve people from differing faith, religious and cultural backgrounds. Responsible agencies must ensure, wherever it is possible to do so, that due consideration be given to specific faith needs at the time.

- Emergency Planners and responders should avoid making assumptions about religion and ethnicity.
- Consideration must also be given to the possibility that any major incident may involve fatalities. Every care should be given to cater for the needs of bereaved families at the time when they will be seeking to come to terms with their loss. The use of an interpreter should be considered where language difficulties may exist.
- Wherever possible, attention should be given to concerns of those individuals for whom post mortem investigations are unwelcome and when there is a requirement for prompt burial. However, it needs to be acknowledged that there will be some incidents where such considerations will not be assisted by the conditions of the bodies of deceased victims. Background material on beliefs and practices of faith communities is available in ***Annex A: The Needs of Faith Communities in Major Emergencies: Some Guidelines–Home Office and Cabinet Office 2005***
- Each Local Resilience Forum (LRF) will have its own point of contact who is the representative of the faith communities and who will pass information on to others. Different arrangements may apply in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is important that each plan has clear contact details which are regularly updated.
- Regular training and liaison should take place to ensure that responsibilities are mutually understood.
- Faith Communities could be encouraged to use their networks to increase awareness of the need for personal/family resilience planning.

## Summary of the Capabilities and Roles of Faith Communities

Faith communities have a range of capabilities but may need some training and co-ordination in understanding how these capabilities can support the different phases of an incident:

Capability	Role	Phase
<p><b>Faith leaders coordinating their faith networks; training and exercising; raising awareness within those networks to source logistics, warning and informing their communities.</b></p>	<p>Sourcing logistics / buildings and practical support that can be used</p> <p>Reaching members of their community to warn and inform</p>	<p><b>Planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning for an emergency</li> <li>• Consulting communities</li> <li>• Identifying vulnerable</li> <li>• Compiling Community Risk Register</li> </ul>
<p><b>Crisis Support</b></p> <p><b>Plant and equipment</b></p> <p><b>Logistics</b></p> <p><b>Networks of volunteers</b></p> <p><b>Buildings</b></p> <p><b>Reassuring public and maintaining confidence</b></p> <p><b>Social Cohesion</b></p> <p><b>Warning and Information</b></p>	<p>Providing chaplains and emotional support</p> <p>Helping people contact relatives;</p> <p>Assisting with provision of rest centres;</p> <p>Providing volunteers;</p> <p>Identifying and reaching vulnerable people;</p> <p>Shelter, food and practical assistance;</p> <p>Transport of non-injured people;</p> <p>Monitoring of people in their homes and alerting welfare services as necessary;</p> <p>Providing surge support</p>	<p><b>Response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immediate and short term response to an incident</li> </ul>

<p><b>On-going emotional and practical support</b></p> <p><b>Monitoring people &amp; providing practical assistance through volunteer networks</b></p>	<p>Providing emotional support;          Providing practical support and volunteers to help recovery;</p> <p>Befriending; Helping people to make sense of what has happened;</p> <p>On-going monitoring of people’s welfare;          Hosting public services or other functions, memorial services.</p>	<p><b>Response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short to medium term response to an incident</li> </ul> <p><b>Recovery</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Returning to business as usual and dealing with the aftermath</li> </ul>
<p><b>Organising networks of volunteers to provide practical support and care</b></p>	<p>Volunteers and social networks;          Informal care, monitoring people in their homes (good neighbour roles in major incidents);          Providing carers (eg) during a flu pandemic</p>	<p><b>Business Continuity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Back up of premises and venues</li> <li>• Supplies of volunteers</li> <li>• Logistics networks</li> <li>• Premises &amp; equipment</li> </ul>

## Faith Communities Supporting Civil Protection

Responders from faith communities should not attend the site of a major incident unless requested to do so. It is recognised however that exceptional circumstances may mean that they find themselves involved at the incident site at an early stage. If this is the case, the following advice should be given from Category 1 responders before deployment

- The overriding concern must be for the personal safety and that of others around them;
- Their first priority is to ensure that the emergency services are aware that they are there;
- Make sure that their Area Faith Chaplain/Liaison is also informed as they will be able to give the appropriate support for them;
- They should be informed that the first priority of the incident is preservation of life;
- The second consideration is the need to preserve evidence to support any criminal investigation.
- The Police or Fire Incident Commander will probably have overall responsibility for the scene and they should report to him/her at the earliest opportunity.
- All communication protocols should be adhered to.
- Responders from faith communities may not be given access without appropriate training and PPE [Personal Protective Equipment]

**The following emergency support locations may benefit from the involvement of Faith communities:**

<b>Incident Scene</b>	<p>In some circumstances, responders from faith communities may be requested to attend an incident scene to minister to the sick or dying. The Area Faith Chaplain / Co-ordinator will be required to give a clear brief to responders to ensure that everyone understands the importance of complying with the emergency service procedures and their own accountability.</p> <p>The briefing will need to include where to report to and what personal protective equipment / dress to wear. If faith responders wish to send reports back from the scene, this should be done via the Local Authority Incident Liaison Officer.</p>
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<p><b>Rest Centres</b></p>	<p>A local authority may establish a rest centre to provide temporary accommodation and welfare to members of the public displaced from their homes. The presence of faith responders can be beneficial, especially if the evacuation has been caused by a traumatic incident involving loss of life or severe destruction to property. Consideration should be given to requesting faith responders from the area the evacuees have come from so that a familiar, friendly face is present.</p> <p>The faith responder's role within the rest centre is to offer pastoral care and ensure that all faiths are considered. Confidentiality must be observed in all types of Centre. This includes the identity of evacuees, survivors, etc even where this challenges the ethics and practices of respective faiths. Emergency Planners should also give consideration to utilising church halls and buildings that can be made available to supplement their existing facilities if appropriate.</p>
<p><b>Survivor Reception Centres</b></p>	<p>A survivor reception centre is an immediate place of safety for uninjured people involved in an emergency incident. Survivors are initially likely to need support, food, water and perhaps some first aid. Other considerations may include spare clothing, changing and washing facilities. Assistance may be required in contacting family and friends. Appropriate pastoral support is a key role of faith responders in supporting survivors.</p> <p>Faith responders may also be asked to assist with gathering names and addresses that will contribute to evidence gathering by the police but also aid the provision of longer term support. Confidentiality must be observed. Emergency Planners should also give consideration to utilising church halls and other faith buildings that can be made available to supplement their existing facilities if appropriate.</p>
<p><b>Emergency Mortuaries</b></p>	<p>In the event of a major incident involving significant fatalities, the Local Resilience Forum will consult with the HM Coroner to decide whether an emergency mortuary should be established. Responders from faith communities may be asked to support relatives as they view bodies held at the mortuary.</p>

<p><b>Family and Friends Reception Centres</b></p>	<p>Reception centres are established for any friends or relatives who wish to travel to an incident site to seek information about survivors and casualties. It enables those affected to gain as much information as is currently available about missing family members and friends. They may be feeling intense anxiety, shock or grief. Pastoral care and befriending are the key roles of responders from faith communities. Emergency Planners should also give consideration to utilising church halls and other faith buildings that can be made available to supplement their existing facilities if appropriate</p>
<p><b>Hospitals</b></p>	<p>A faith representative may be asked to support the hospital chaplaincy or be requested to attend by a casualty / family of a casualty to provide pastoral care</p>
<p><b>Humanitarian Assistance Centres</b></p>	<p>The purpose of the Humanitarian Assistance Centre (HAC) is to act as the focal point for humanitarian assistance to bereaved families, friends and survivors and anybody else who has been affected by the incident. It offers access to a range of facilities that will allow families, friends and survivors to make informed choices according to their needs. The HAC has a longer term role and could require the support of the faith communities for many different roles.</p>
<p><b>Memorial Services</b></p>	<p>There may be an expectation that faith communities will organise a formal, large-scale memorial service. Services of this kind can provide a focus for grief and anger of the wider community, not just those affected by the incident. The purpose of the memorial service needs to be clearly defined. There may be difficulties between reconciling the needs of survivors, relatives and those involved in the response along with visiting dignitaries. The presence of VIPs may also require high security arrangements.</p> <p>Faith communities will need to consider the timing and content of their public statements; issuing details of preachers and contents of sermons, distributing embargoed copies of public statements and arranging facilities for the press, television and radio. Where an incident has affected more than one area, efforts should be made to invite all people involved. Affected communities may evolve their own rituals of remembrance. These can take place at the incident site or other significant locations. Members of faith communities may consider organising a presence at such sites in order to be available to comfort, talk and to pray with anyone who welcomes this.</p>

## **How should LRF Partners be engaging with Faith communities?**

Each LRF may adopt a different approach in how they engage with faith communities. A recent national survey amongst LRF partners indicated that it is mainly the local authorities (top tier and Unitary Councils) that have taken responsibility for liaison with faith communities, ensuring that contacts are well established and kept up to date. It is often the local authorities that will also activate members of the faith communities to support an emergency and facilitate their training.

Engagement may be through:

- LRF Liaison Groups such as a LRF Voluntary Sector Group
- Existing community groups where faith representatives are already engaged (e.g. Good Neighbours Scheme, inter faith forums etc)
- Community plans that include members of faith communities
- Via faith representation on Tactical Co-ordination and Strategic Co-ordination Groups in the event of response and recovery
- Integration into multi-disciplinary welfare teams

Whichever mechanism is in place, it should be effective in ensuring that the capabilities of Faith communities detailed in this document are able to support *all* LRF partners and not just the local authorities.

## **Further Help**

The Voluntary Sector Civil Protection Forum Working Party has developed additional useful information to assist both LRFs and faith communities in developing plans and response arrangements. As the author of this brief guidance, the VSCPF Working Party will ensure that this material is updated regularly – enabling all partners the ease of access to the most up to date guidance and information. It should be noted that this list is not exhaustive and will not include any locally produced documents by individual LRFs and faith communities

Please access the following link to obtain this information:

[VSCPF Web Page](#)

This document has been produced by the Voluntary Sector Civil Protection Forum Working party. Its content reflects good practice drawn from existing national guidance.