

Response from the Communications Unit

What went well?

The multi agency silver group had regular teleconferences which provided a daily update on weather conditions and challenges faced by partners and emergency services. This informed regular communication updates and media statements.

Regular updates on schools, roads and services were forwarded to council and primary care trust employees and elected members by the communications team.

Highways personnel were available for media interviews in the early hours and in difficult conditions, and this helped to reassure public. Head of Communications available for early morning radio interviews or press briefings to update on progress

Flow of information from Amey on road conditions was good – although we needed more detail on actual roads and their exact location

BBC commended the council on its responsiveness and quality of information, and the BBC put extra resources in to keep residents informed – but there is an over reliance on the BBC to do this

The Hereford Times web site willingly accepted updates from the council and provided another source of information for residents

Emergency information line up and running and effective when needed – voluntary staff were dependable and there was good working between that unit and communications team

Regular Silver meetings with all agencies enabled the council and others to share and provide much more information and advice to residents

Great sense of community in some parts and the volunteer 4X4 drivers provided a vital service

Good relationships with local press helped to secure positive coverage for the council and primary care trust efforts in the main

What did not go well?

BBC Hereford & Worcester are understandably concerned with having to read out on air long lists of schools closed or open. The quantity of information, and

how it flows in from individual schools, is difficult to process and package quickly for media at the time it is most needed (between 6 and 8am each morning).

Advice changed from schools closed to schools open, and then back to schools closed which made it difficult to package information and avoid confusion

The sheer volume of public queries on refuse collection made life difficult for info line

Met Office forecasts were often inaccurate for Herefordshire, which made it a challenge to plan resources and predict the nature of media attention

Residents and media could not understand why some schools open but school bus services not running. The focus on primary routes by Amey was regularly explained but not always accepted by residents.

Although it was widely reported that we were experiencing the worst weather conditions for 30 years, it was difficult to get this across to residents who would compare winter conditions and response services this year with last

The Safer Roads Camera Safety Partnership sometimes put out their own advice that conflicted with ours (which was picked up by media on one occasion)

What improvements you think could be made?

The new web-based, self registration system for schools to contribute to directly, will present a single source of regularly updated information for residents, employees, the communications team and local media.

More resources could be made available to update quickly information of importance to residents on the council's web site (currently it happens but is overly dependent on communications team and their being available in the office from very early each morning to collect data, issue press releases, respond to media enquiries, communicate with staff and members and update the web site – usually there is one person doing all this from 6 to 9am throughout the period of extreme weather)

More information could be gleaned from other groups – such as the voluntary 4X4 drivers who had good experience of local conditions

What relevant policies are in place?

Communications protocols, principles and values governing how we work with media

Business continuity plans – but these did not specifically prepare for the severity of weather conditions experienced

Major incident response plans and the local resilience plan

Whether any reviews have already been undertaken at service level of policies or service delivery arrangements or are proposed and whether any action plans have already been put in place to generate improvement.

A new web-based, self registration system for schools will present a single source of regularly updated information and will be piloted in time for adverse weather later in the year.

Any other observations you consider the Committee needs to take into account

The protracted period of extreme weather resulted in sustained pressure on individuals, over a three week period including weekends, that perhaps needs to be managed for next time