

## REPORT TO ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL – 13 JANUARY 2022

### STORM ARWEN

#### 1 Executive Summary/Recommendations

1.1 This paper sets out a brief position in terms of the impact of Storm Arwen across Aberdeenshire, the nature of our response and the ongoing steps towards recovery and identifying learning.

#### 1.2 The Council is recommended to:

##### 1.2.1 Note the contents of the report.

#### 2 Decision Making Route

2.1 The purpose of this paper is to give members an overview of the impact of Storm Arwen across Aberdeenshire, the nature of our response and the ongoing steps towards recovery and identifying learning.

#### 3 Discussion

3.1 On Friday 26 November 2021, there were a series of Met Office Yellow, Amber and Red Weather warnings across the United Kingdom, Scotland and Aberdeenshire respectively for significantly high winds. The Red Warning forecast winds of up to 90 mph posing a risk to life.

3.2 A Red Weather warning is a relatively rare occurrence. In the last decade there have been four warnings in Scotland;

- February 2018 – Snow. ‘The Beast from the East’
- January 2016 – Wind. ‘Storm Gertrude’
- January 2012 – Wind. ‘Prior to Met Office naming conventions’
- December 2011 – Wind.

3.3 In preparation for the impact of the Storm, Aberdeenshire Council convened an Incident Management Team on Thursday 25 November 2021 prior to the Red Warning being issued. The purpose of the Incident Management Team was:

- Ensure awareness across Aberdeenshire Council of the weather alerts
- Ensure appropriate services across the Council have an appropriate level of preparedness to response
- Warn and inform the public

3.4 Throughout Friday 26 November 2021, Aberdeenshire Council participated in three meetings of the Grampian Local Resilience Partnership (as well as meetings of the Care for People and Transport Sub Groups), and three Incident Management Team meetings were held. The immediate focus of the Local

Resilience Partnership (LRP) was on checking on our most vulnerable residents and providing emergency generation to those residents in sheltered housing and care homes.

- 3.5 The most impactful period of weather was felt between 1500 hours and 2200 hours that day. The winds were so strong that SSEN had to withdraw engineers from immediate repairs and likewise Council Roads Teams clearing fallen trees had to be withdrawn during that period. Many roads were closed due to fallen trees and debris with estimates suggesting well over 100 trees down on our road networks, and hundreds of thousands more across country parks and forestry areas.
- 3.6 Winter gritting was halted on our roads network as the situation was too dangerous for us to put vehicles out. The council significantly reduced the crews deployed to tree clearing in the hours of darkness due to safety concerns. Banff Bridge was closed for a period of time on 26 November due to concerns about the potential for vehicles to be blown over.
- 3.7 In addition to the high winds, Aberdeenshire was also dealing with heavy snowfall in parts of the region, requiring the closure of all the snow gates. Considerable efforts were made to remove drifts, particularly on the A939 towards the Lecht. This added to the issues of isolation in some communities. Additional support was provided to SSEN and Scottish Water to ensure routes to their infrastructure were gritted as required.
- 3.8 The loss of mobile connectivity hampered the work of SSEN and responders and communities for a number of days, as the mobile operators worked to restore service with temporary generator power.
- 3.9 By 9.30am on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> November, Scottish and Southern Energy Network (SSEN) reported 8,000 customers without power and indicated they would not be reconnected until 2200 hours that night. The number of properties without power rose throughout the day to over 60,000 by 3pm, with a reported 193 separate faults. Given the scale of the disruption and damage to the power network, SSEN were unable to accurately predict when power would be restored to all properties. Aberdeenshire Council, in common with our partners, were working to the assessment that power would be restored within 24 – 48 hours but as the incident progressed it became clear that full power restoration to all properties could take a considerable amount of time.
- 3.10 By Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> November, SSEN reported on progress and advised that over 35,000 properties remained without power. Welfare vans were deployed to Cruden Bay, Aboyne and Strichen and water provision was reported as a concern.
- 3.11 The Humanitarian Assistance Centre helpline was established and operational by Sunday evening which provided support to people needing help or advice.
- 3.12 Council officers began liaising with community resilience groups across Aberdeenshire to support them with local resilience arrangements and put in

place local provision and support for communities, as welfare checks began for our most vulnerable residents.

- 3.13 Over the next 13 days, Aberdeenshire Council participated in 32 Local Resilience Partnership meetings. The focus of which was to:
- Open the road network and clear access to blocked communities
  - Develop Care for People arrangements for those impacted
  - Warning and Informing the Public
- 3.14 On Monday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2021, when it was clear that restoration to power for approximately 8,000 customers may not be for a further five days, Aberdeenshire Council established a network of 17 Welfare Centres where hot food, water and access to power was available. In addition two Rest Centres operated where overnight accommodation was available. This was in addition to hotel accommodation and catering supplied from SSEN. School catering services were also made available to provide hot food to communities and volunteers.
- 3.15 Teams from a range of partner agencies came together to co-ordinate and deliver 'door knocking' of all 8,000 homes still without power to check on those customers identified as 'Priority Service Request' by SSEN. This ensured that those most adversely affected were safe and aware of the service provision in place.
- 3.16 This contact was in addition to the proactive steps taken by Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Partnership to contact service users which had begun with personal visits from Sunday.
- 3.17 Given the increasing concern for the extended nature of the incident and lack of clear timescales for power restoration the LRP made a request for assistance to the UK Government. Around 120 military personnel were deployed to support the resilience efforts, focusing on the welfare checks on the ground within those communities impacted by loss of power, supplementing the teams from across the wider partnership agencies.
- 3.18 By Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> November, access to Live Life Aberdeenshire facilities was made available free of charge to impacted communities offering hot showers and access to power free of charge.
- 3.19 On Wednesday 8 December 2021, the response to Storm Arwen moved to Recovery and chair of the Local Resilience Partnership passed to Aberdeenshire Council. Similarly, our Incident Management Team stood down and a Recovery Management Team took its place. Both groups are now focused on:
- Identifying the learning from Storm Arwen
  - Assessing the physical and economic damage to our communities
  - Ensuring that no one is financially vulnerable as a result of the loss of power
  - Looking to the future and building Community Resilience

- 3.20 Hot de-briefs have taken place and a more detailed de-brief will take place early in the New Year with all partner agencies. To support the development of a recovery strategy, there will be engagement with communities, groups, forums and a range of stakeholders in January 2022 to identify what worked well and what needed to be better. In February 2022, work will progress on the mapping and assessment of community resilience capacity across Aberdeenshire’s communities. Further reports will be provided to full council setting out the lessons learned and steps required to build greater community resilience in the future.
- 3.21 The response in our communities was excellent and in many case went above and beyond the call of duty. Likewise, Aberdeenshire Council staff worked long and hard to deliver a response in trying conditions with many staff (often volunteers) diverting from their normal duties to assist in the response. Individual and community resilience is a part of the plans we have in place and add to our response.

#### 4 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

- 4.1 This report sets out the basic circumstances of Storm Arwen and the lessons and work stemming from it help deliver the Strategic Priorities “Resilient Communities, Infrastructure and Economy & Enterprise”.
- 4.2 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is (are) agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial			X
Staffing			X
Equalities and Fairer Duty Scotland			X
Children and Young People’s Rights and Wellbeing			X
Climate Change and Sustainability			X
Health and Wellbeing			X
Town Centre First			X

- 4.3 There are no staffing implications arising directly from this report but it is important to recognise the hard work and commitment of council officers and teams in supporting our communities during this period.
- 4.4 On 29<sup>th</sup> November 2021 the Council was notified by Scottish Government that Bellwin had been activated for Storm Arwen. Teams are monitoring the financial impact of the storm which will be reported to full council at a later date.

## **5 Scheme of Governance**

- 5.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments are incorporated within the report and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.
- 5.2 The Council is able to consider and debate the response to and recovery from Storm Arwen.

### **Ritchie Johnson, Director, Business Services**

Report prepared by Neil Cameron, Emergency Planning Officer.  
Date: Monday 20 December 2021