

County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum Strategy



Preparing for Emergencies in
County Durham and Darlington

Date: April 2026 - March 2027



**County Durham
and Darlington**
Local Resilience Forum

Foreword by the Chair of County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum, Chief Fire Officer Steve Helps



The last few years have been unprecedented in terms of the work the Local Resilience Forum (LRF), has undertaken in response to planning for and responding to severe weather, civil disturbances, and interruptions to essential services. All the while, learning lessons and improving our collective response following major incidents, which have occurred across the country.

On average one major incident occurs within England every week and over recent years the LRF have held Strategic Coordinating Groups (SCG) and have been under a major incident declaration on a number of occasions. The response arrangements have involved an enormous effort from a great deal of the category one and two responders as well as other key partners. I'm extremely proud of the way the LRF plan, test and exercise and respond to major incidents.

The resilience landscape is changing and with the National Resilience Strategy outlining the future of resilience across the UK, we look forward to strengthening our partnership across County Durham and Darlington in support. The expectation and role of the LRF continues to increase and we look forward to central government's plans to strengthen and provide sustainable funding to ensure the LRF has the resources and capacity it needs to meet the expectations of our communities, partners, and central government.

This strategy outlines the strategic aims and objectives of the LRF along with the business priorities. As we know, the LRF will only be successful in serving its communities if there is a shared vision, a shared understanding of risk and a willingness to work together to improve the quality of service to the communities of County Durham and Darlington.

This plan ensures we are focussed on being as well prepared as possible to meet the risks facing our communities and developing the LRF to meet future requirements. The business priorities are guided by the current national threats and the risks identified by the local Community Risk Register (CRR) along with considering the changing landscape to enable the LRF to respond effectively to the challenges it may face.

Steve Helps, Chair of the Local Resilience Forum and Chief Fire Officer, County Durham, and Darlington Fire & Rescue Service.

Contents

Foreword by the Chair of County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum, Chief Fire Officer Steve Helps	1
Our Area	3
Some of the Risks we Face	4
Strategic Aim and Objectives	7
Civil Contingencies Act Responsibilities	9
County Durham and Darlington LRF Working Group Structure	10

SECTION 1



Our Area **County Durham**

Situated in the North East of England, County Durham stretches from Peterlee and Seaham in the east, to Harwood and Killhope in the west and Burnopfield in the north to Barningham in the south. County Durham is a large and diverse area. It is home to over half a million people, making it in terms of population size the largest local authority in the Northeast and the sixth largest in England. It covers an area of 2,226 km squared (859 square miles).

Commonly regarded as a predominantly rural area, the county varies in character from remote and sparsely populated areas in the west to former coalfield communities in the centre and east, where villages tend to accommodate thousands rather than hundreds. Around 93% of the population lives east of the A68 road, in approximately half of the county by area. County Durham has 12 major centres of population, each acting as a service centre for surrounding communities which provides employment, shopping, and other services.

County Durham, along with other areas across the country, is experiencing an ever-ageing population which is predicted to increase significantly over the next ten to twenty years.

Darlington

Darlington is a large market town in the North East of England and lies on the River Skerne, a tributary of the River Tees.

Darlington is a key economic asset, with a sphere of influence that reaches into the Tees Valley, the wider Northeast region and beyond. Strengths include the business and professional service sector, manufacturing, advanced engineering, and construction, with emerging strengths in digital and media, subsea, telehealth and telecare.

As well as the large engineering sites based in the town, Darlington is also home to many businesses within the modern and developing industries including Information Technology. The Government have now set up a Darlington Economic Campus, with Darlington now hosting offices for the Treasury, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Department for International Trade.

SECTION 2

Some of the Risks we Face

The County Durham and Darlington CRR is a multi-agency publication that highlights risks with the highest likelihood and potential to cause significant impact and disruption to County Durham and Darlington, and its communities. It is derived from two sources:

The National Risk Register (NRR): The National Risk Register is the public-facing version of the National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA). The 2025 edition sets out the range of risks and challenges facing the UK, outlines their potential to cause significant disruption, and explains what the government and its partners are doing to mitigate them, along with how we can all prepare for and respond to these risks.

The National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA): The National Security Risk Assessment is an **Official-Sensitive** document that informs the national and regional considerations for malicious and non-malicious risks facing the UK or its interests overseas. Each risk is presented as a Reasonable Worst-Case Scenario (RWCS), detailing the likelihood of the risk manifesting and its consequences across a range of areas.

While certain risks are described, this does not mean that they will occur in the region. Rather, it indicates that they are possible and therefore all agencies within the LRF have plans in place to respond should such incidents arise.

The CRR is informed by professional judgement, historical evidence, scientific input, and expert analysis from a range of contributors, evaluating the key risks facing County Durham and Darlington. The risks outlined reflect the local risk landscape and the likelihood and impact of relevant scenarios occurring within the area. These risks include:

- Human disease
- Animal disease
- Flooding
- Utility failure
- Cyber-attacks
- Malicious attacks
- Wildfire
- Adverse weather

The LRF works towards mitigating the impact of, and to respond effectively to the highest risks facing County Durham and Darlington, supporting the resilience of local communities.

In 2024, the government adopted a dynamic risk assessment methodology, meaning that risk assessments are reviewed on a rolling programme. As a result, LRF risk profiles can—and do—change regularly.

To address the evolving risk landscape, CDDLRF invite partners to present on risks and organisational capabilities at various working groups in a bid to share knowledge and experience.

Diagram 1 highlights some of the key risks facing County Durham and Darlington (March 2026).

RISK MATRIX						
I M P A C T	5		Nuclear Attacks	National electricity transmission system	Pandemic Cyber Attack	
	4		Heatwave	Malicious Attack Animal Disease	Cold and Snow Storms Emerging Infectious Disease	
	3			Avian Influenza	Fluvial Flooding	
	2		Lithium-Ion Batteries	Wildfire		
	1				Synthetic Opioids	
		1	2	3	4	5
LIKELIHOOD						

Risk	Description
Pandemic	A new virus, to which people have no immunity emerges and starts spreading as easily as an existing virus e.g. influenza. As well as the potential to cause serious harm to human health, viruses threaten wider social and economic damage and disruption.
Emerging Infectious Diseases	The emergence of disease results from interactions between microbes and humans. This can be complex and multi-factorial. For example, population movement can facilitate the spread of an infection previously confined to a local area into a densely populated city with limited public-health infrastructure, enabling the disease to establish more widely. Emerging transmissible disease can spread via humans and animals with recent examples being Ebola, Avian Influenza, COVID, and Malaria.
Animal Disease	Many diseases may be passed from animal to animal; in some cases, they can be passed to humans. The impacts include risk to animal and human health, disruption to the food industry, and damage to the economy, tourism, and recreation sectors.
Severe Weather (cold and snow, heatwave)	This risk covers extreme weather conditions, including: prolonged periods (at least one week) in which multiple regions of the UK experience low temperatures and snow (both falling and lying) with a daily mean temperature below -3°C ; and periods of high temperatures, with daily maximum temperatures exceeding 28°C and minimum temperatures above 15°C across most of a region for at least five consecutive days.
Adverse weather	The weather in County Durham and Darlington is highly variable and can change rapidly across the region. In West Durham, the Pennine uplands frequently give rise to torrential rain, heavy snowfall, and severe icing, especially along the A66 TransPennine route at Bowes Moor—the highest road in the County. Meanwhile, Teesdale and Weardale may experience calm, settled conditions even as the coastline is struck by severe coastal weather.
Fluvial Flooding	A significant river flood event or series of concurrent events across multiple regions following a sustained period of heavy rainfall extending over two weeks, possibly combined with snow melt and surface water flooding.
Wildfire	A wildfire is an uncontrolled fire that burns vegetation, such as grass, heather, woodland, crops, and scrubland. Climate change is likely to lead to changes in the weather patterns that affect the UK, with longer drier summers anticipated. This could lead to drier vegetation and more frequent, larger wildfires.
National Electricity Transmission	Total blackout for up to 5 days due to loss of the National Electricity Transmission System with the potential for wide area power disruptions for up to 14 days.
Cyber attacks	Cyberspace has become central to our economy and society. While increased reliance on digital systems brings valuable opportunities, it also introduces new threats. The openness that enables innovation, connectivity, and free exchange of information can also expose us to criminals, hackers, and hostile state actors seeking to compromise or damage critical data and systems. The social and economic impacts of a significant cyber-attack are far-reaching, with the potential to disrupt services, businesses, and daily life across the UK. This risk accounts for a substantial proportion of the NSRA.
Malicious attacks	This risk covers the broad range of malicious attacks that have been experienced in other parts of the United Kingdom, from a lone actor carrying out a specific targeted attack to a wider incident involving multiple persons with various attack methodologies.

SECTION 3

Strategic Aim and Objectives

Aim

County Durham and Darlington LRF (CDDLRF) sit at the apex of County Durham and Darlington's local civil protection arrangements. Its overall purpose is to ensure that there is an appropriate level of preparedness, within available resources, to enable an effective multi-agency response to emergencies which may have a significant impact on the communities of County Durham and Darlington.



Objectives

1. Governance

Maintain a strong and responsive LRF governance structure to meet Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) duties, including producing core documents such as the Multi Agency Incident Procedure (MAIP), Specialist Capabilities, and the LRF Handbook.

2. Funding and Capability

Use government and partner funding to sustain and develop LRF capacity so it can meet expectations set out in the CCA and National Resilience Strategy.

3. Risk Monitoring and Planning

Monitor national risks and threats, assess local impacts, and ensure appropriate risk assessments are in place. Identify and highlight capability gaps across the LRF.

4. Community Risk Register

To lead on, approve and maintain the CRR, promoting awareness of new and emerging risks, and ensuring that the risk assessment process provides a robust evidence base for future emergency planning, capability development and assurance.

5. Community Engagement

Engage communities to strengthen local resilience, ensuring the public is informed and prepared while enabling responders to focus support on the most vulnerable.

6. Training and Exercising

Provide a structured programme of training and exercising to strengthen LRF member capabilities and embed continuous improvement across multi agency emergency management.

7. Warning and Informing

Maintain a robust communications strategy, coordinated by the Warning and Informing Group, to deliver clear and timely information to LRF members and the public before, during, and after emergencies.

8. Voluntary Sector Coordination

To provide a forum for voluntary sector partners to coordinate planning, share information, and support multi-agency preparedness, response, and recovery arrangements during emergencies.

9. Death Management

Continue to support, coordinate and enhance multi-agency Death Management arrangements across the CDDLRF.

10. Cross-Border Working

Ensure effective and resilient cross border arrangements with neighbouring LRFs.

11. National Inquiry Recommendations

Address LRF related recommendations from the Manchester Arena and Grenfell Tower Inquiries, progressing actions through local and regional LRF groups.



SECTION 4

Civil Contingencies Act Responsibilities



How will County Durham and Darlington LRF achieve its responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act?

This strategy brings together the LRF resilience priorities into one key strategic document. It both directs and underpins the planning process and enables the LRF to focus its delivery of civil protection activities, directing and prioritising its work based on the risks and threats to the area and communities of County Durham and Darlington.

The document is reviewed annually by the Strategic Board. Whilst providing guidance on short term objectives, the plan will also look forward to providing longer term strategic direction. The objectives set out in this document are used to set the business priorities for the individual working groups of the LRF, key deliverables are set on a 1-3 year basis and reviewed regularly by each group. Start, milestone and finish dates are agreed as part of the business planning process and monitored through the Tactical Business Group. Section 5 shows the structure of these working groups in CDDLRF.

SECTION 5

County Durham and Darlington LRF Working Group Structure

