Implementation and Evaluation of the Community Disaster Resilience Scorecard Toolkit and Practice Guidelines

Report prepared by the Torrens Resilience Institute, Flinders University

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Background
The Kentish Council is a local government area of Tasmania. It is located in the north-west of the state, slightly inland from the coast. The major town of the municipality is Sheffield, with a population of approximately 1500. The area is a high tourism region, with the natural attractions of Cradle Mountain and Lake Barrington. Kentish council area has Sheffield as its major town and eight smaller communities with a total population of approximately 6,500 people.

Process
Before implementing the Disaster Resilience Scorecard, Kentish Council participated in a teleconference organised by the Torrens Resilience Institute. The Institute provided information about the Scorecard’s implementation to a number of councils at this time. Following the teleconference the Kentish Council took actions to undertake the Scorecard with their community.

Gathering the group
As a first step the council team attempted to recruit working group members by advertising in the local media. This approach failed to attract the numbers needed for the group. The council team then used their local knowledge to identify and invite community members they thought would be well suited to the project. The direct request (see attachment) incorporated a written invitation and provided detail of the resilience scoring exercise. This approach proved successful with most invited community members agreeing to participate. The people identified by council were known to be well connected within the community and would broadly represent the make-up of the Kentish population. The working group consisted of 10 individuals from different communities and included some of the newly elected members, the school bus driver, business owners, emergency management officers and a religious leader.
Working group meetings

Three meetings were organised as per the Toolkit recommendations. A central governance approach was adopted whereby the council assumed a key role in facilitating the meetings and providing demographic and other relevant information. One of the council’s team had sufficient experience and credibility amongst the group to be accepted as the meeting chair. He was aware of strong personalities in the working group and facilitated the meetings to ensure all representatives had an equal opportunity to be heard in the discussions.

During the first meeting, council staff took time to explain what is meant by disaster. Group members were asked to think more broadly about what a disaster might be, identifying that it could be more than flood or fire events. The group responded to this broadened idea of disaster and contributed their own ideas and scenarios including dams breaking and pandemics, etc. Council officers also explained the meaning of ‘disaster resilience’ as detailed in the Toolkit drawing specific attention to community development and emergency management views on the topic.

At this first meeting, council staff read through the Scorecard with the group identifying the self-assessment questions. Working group members left the first meeting with an intention of going back to their communities and discussing the self-assessment questions with their wider networks. It was planned that they would come back to the second scheduled meeting with a nominated score to discuss and debate.

At the second meeting the Scorecard was completed. The discussion and debate revealed contrary perspectives on some scoring points. It was understood that this was due to the fact that group members came from different locations across the council area. Observing the discussion allowed council to appreciate where efforts might be focussed to improve the overall community rating in future.

Through the process of completing the Scorecard, council officers became aware that information about emergency management planning was not well known in the community. Discrepancies between the scores allocated by group members with emergency service connections and community members without this connection were common. For example Question 3.1 in the Scorecard “To what extent are households within the community engaged in planning for disaster response and recovery” had emergency service group members wanting to allocate a high score, whereas community members preferred to allocate a lower score. This unexpected finding was noted by council and prompted a review of its approach to distributing information.
Although a third meeting had been scheduled to plan a way forward, the working group elected to continue with this part of the exercise on the day of the second meeting. The group were keen to proceed to constructive discussions focussed on actions that could be taken to improve their overall score in future. Prior to commencing conversations on possible resilience building actions, council officers took some time to discuss with the group the role of council in the disaster space. Details about emergency management frameworks together with information about local government’s role when plans are activated were explained more fully to the group.

**Outcomes**

The most significant learning for council was that the assumption that the community was aware of council’s role in disaster planning was wrong. It was noted by council officers that the sharing of information about existing response plans offered some reassurance to the working group and helped shape discussions on future actions.

Council officers sought advice from working group members as to how information about disaster plans and assistance could be made more accessible to the local community. This discussion resulted in a number of practical solutions. The council subsequently prepared information to be incorporated into a ‘new residents’ information kit and distributed emergency focused flyers and fridge magnets with its rates notices. These included relevant telephone numbers and links to specific emergency management plans, as well as a list of items residents should have available in preparedness for emergencies. Community boards have been positioned in some of the smaller population centres and the voice (a local community publication) has been used to let residents know where they can get additional information relevant to emergency situations and disaster preparedness.
In its final discussions on how to improve resilience the working group suggested distributing a questionnaire to community groups. The questionnaire would ask two very deliberate questions.

1. If a severe disaster occurred what would stop your group functioning?, and
2. What assistance could you provide?

To the council this recommendation demonstrated acceptance of community responsibility and mutual aid as a key resilience marker within the community. At the meeting it was discussed in the context of catering services that could be offered by smaller groups like the Country Women’s Association and the local bowls club. Council understood the benefit of this attitude as laying a solid platform for social recovery in the event of a disaster. A data base of names and contact numbers of willing community group members and a list of the assistance they could provide was recommended. These people would then be invited to further consider what role they might be able to play in any required recovery efforts.

Since completing the Scorecard, council has identified additional value in their existing social network meetings. In these meetings representatives from small community groups are invited to join similar groups from across the three adjoining councils. The meetings have included activities relevant to resilience building and the development of mutual aid models of support. A previous meeting has included a desk top emergency scenario which prompted discussions around ‘where would we start’, ‘who would get involved’ and ‘what could each of the different groups do to assist’. These social network groups were first initiated at the beginning of the year and are seen, to have ongoing value in building community disaster resilience. The scenario activity was understood to focus people on considering the way they could contribute to recovery efforts and is something council will continue to support.

**Summary**

Engagement with the Scorecard process helped to establish ties between the local government, community leaders and other authorities. This, in turn, facilitated a better understanding of the roles that these groups could and to play in emergency planning, as well as the resources available for and within the community.

Kentish Council has plans to repeat the Scorecard annually.
Invitation to participate letter

Date

Address

Dear XXXX

Natural disasters cause widespread disruption, costing the Australian economy billions each year.

With more frequent natural disasters Australian communities need the ability to prepare and plan for them, absorb and recover from them, and adapt more successfully to their effects.

Should an emergency or disaster strike, Kentish Council is interested in assuring the highest possible level of community resilience. As an initial step, it is important to identify our current level of resilience, and those areas in which we should take action.

The Community Disaster Resilience Scorecard has been designed as a part of the Australian National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, and is a useful tool for those communities interested in self-assessment of their potential resilience and to develop a springboard for an action plan to strengthen resilience.

Council is writing to invite you to join a Working Group to work with Council to complete the Community Disaster Resilience Scorecard.

The Scorecard is not a report to anyone outside our community, nor will we be compared to other communities: it is a tool for our use as we work together towards resilience.

You are invited to an orientation meeting on Thursday 12 February 2015 commencing at 3.00pm. This would be followed by two additional meetings over the next 6 - 9 weeks. In addition you may be asked to help locate important information about our community between meetings.

Enhancing resilience will assist Council in planning to reduce losses, rather than just waiting for the next king hit and paying for it afterwards.

Carolyn Rimmer will contact you early in the New Year to answer any question and see if you would like to accept Council’s invitation.

Yours sincerely

Darrin Cunningham
ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT MANAGER