

Report To: Audit and Risk Committee



Meeting Date: 10 February 2026
Subject: Emergency Management Preparedness
Type: Information Only
Author(s):
Alex Bell
General Manager – Strategy and Environment and Local Controller

Helen Beever
General Manager – Community Services

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this business paper is to inform the Audit and Risk Committee of the Council's current emergency management systems and processes, and to identify the associated risks and opportunities.

2. Suggested Resolutions

2.1 The following are suggested resolutions only and do not represent Council policy until such time as they might be adopted by resolution.

- 1 The business paper on emergency management preparedness be received.
- 2 The Committee notes that:
 - (a) The Chief Executive has initiated discussions with the Western Waikato Councils around emergency management resourcing and that additional discussions will commence on a regional basis.
 - (b) The Chief Executive will report back with an update on these discussions in due course.

3. Background

3.1 HAZARD OVERVIEW

3.2 The Waitomo District is susceptible to natural and biological hazards. Flooding is the most common hazard experienced in the District. A broad overview of key hazards for the District is outlined below:

- **Severe Weather:** Fluvial and surface water flooding are the two primary sources of flooding in the District. The lower reaches of the Awakino, Mokau, Mangapu and Marokopa Rivers and the Mangaokewa Stream are vulnerable to flooding. However, ongoing river maintenance activities designed to increase the conveyance of floodwater and remove channel blockages has reduced the flooding risk. The district is also susceptible to high winds and tornado activity associated with severe weather events.
- **Landslide:** Due to the slope gradient, geology (Mahoenui Group mudstone) and land cover type, urban and rural parts of the district are susceptible to landslide activity. The primary trigger for landslides is prolonged or intense periods of rainfall.
- **Earthquake Shaking:** There are no active faults located in the district. However, faults outside of the district are capable of large earthquakes; for example, the Hikurangi Subduction Zone

may cause an earthquake shaking in the Waitomo District. There is a low percentage of unconsolidated sediments in the district, except in Te Kūti where the proportion is much higher at 53%. Overall, it is likely that liquefaction risk is low.

- **Volcanic Eruption:** Volcanic activity from nearby Mount Ruapehu could have impacts on our District from matters such as ashfall.
- **Animal Pest/Disease:** Agriculture is a key industry in the Waitomo District. Any animal pest/disease outbreak is likely to significantly impact the local economy.

3.3 ROLE OF THE WESTERN WAIKATO CIVIL DEFENCE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PREPAREDNESS

3.4 Waitomo District Council is part of the Western Waikato Civil Defence Emergency Management Group (WWCDEM), which is a shared services arrangement for emergency management resources with Waipa and Otorohanga District Councils. This shared services agreement is due to be reviewed and renewed on 30 June 2026. The WWCDEM employs two full time Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) staff. An Operations Manager (who is also a local controller) and an Emergency Management Co-ordinator. The rest of the staffing is provided by the three Councils. The table below sets out how many trained staff we have across the three Councils.

Council	Foundation	Intermediate / Co-ordinated Incident Management System	Function/ Incident Management Team
Waipa	175	63	61
Ōtorohanga	58	30	17
Waitomo	69	29	11
Western Waikato Total	302	112	89

3.5 At a high level, the below is a summary of our civil defence emergency management preparedness:

- Close liaison with the Waikato Regional Council (WRC) Hazards and Regional Flood Co-ordination teams. This includes:
 - Identify remedial work (removal of trees and debris) required along rivers and waterways which form part of the Waikato Regional Council work programme, to reduce the risk of flooding.
 - When a severe weather warning is issued, a flood room meeting is initiated by the WRC Flood Liaison Officer. We attend these meetings with all other partner agencies to understand the incoming risk and likely impact.
 - Registered and receive WRC river alerts as part of the high level river alert system, and accompanying actions at each respective alert level within the Waitomo District Council area.
- Internal communications, on receipt of severe weather warnings (orange or red) ahead of a potential event, we ensure that messaging is disseminated to relevant teams across the Council (i.e. customer services, waters, roading and property) this is to enable preparatory matters to be undertaken such as clearing of stormwater drains, culverts, swales and catchment areas. When we know an event is coming, we can also ensure that there is more heightened awareness amongst staff of the risks (i.e. to be more vigilant around reports of flooding and landslips).
- Public messaging of the weather warnings published on our website and Facebook. These messages also contain advice from the MetService of what to do based on the weather event.
- Council has a stock of 1000 sandbags, with arrangements in place to provide sand to requested locations for public/volunteer support to fill the bags.

- Community Response Plans in place for all towns in the District. These plans include phone trees, communication plans, and community lead welfare centres for evacuations during severe weather i.e. flooding.
- A WDC Operational Response Plan, which includes identified hazards, Emergency Operating Centre (EOC) activation levels (i.e. trigger points for setting up an EOC) public alerting and communications plan.
- Civil Defence Centres including Marae, located strategically throughout the District, which are capable of providing welfare assistance to those affected by flooding.
- Active Welfare Committees, including Government Agencies, NGO's, Iwi representation that meet regularly to discuss the welfare needs and readiness to respond to affected communities if called upon.
- Regular training of EOC staff, including an annual external assessment of EOC Capability (LTP measure) to ensure readiness and competent to respond.

3.6 ROLE OF CUSTOMER SERVICES IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PREPAREDNESS

3.7 The Customer Services Team has an important role in supporting Council's emergency management preparedness as a key point of contact for the community during emerging or unexpected events. Through routine interactions with the public, the Customer Services Team are well placed to recognise early indicators of potential risk, increased service demand, or matters that may require escalation.

3.8 The Customer Services Team operates under existing business rules and established escalation practices that guide how incidents, service disruptions, or matters with potential health, safety, or welfare implications are assessed and responded to during normal working hours. These practices support timely internal notification and escalation to relevant operational teams when required.

3.9 Council maintains afterhours customer contact coverage through an external service provider to ensure urgent or high-risk matters can be received at all times. The afterhours service operates under agreed escalation processes that identify matters involving potential risk to people, livestock, property, or critical services, and escalate these to on-call Council staff and, where appropriate, Emergency Services for assessment and response.

3.10 Customer Services retains oversight of the afterhours service arrangements and ensures escalation pathways and responsibilities remain aligned with Council expectations and emergency management arrangements, supporting continuity between normal working hours and afterhours response.

3.11 Contact by customers received by phone during working hours or the afterhours service are managed through a consistent service request process. Information received through a call is recorded as a service request and forwarded to the relevant operational area, ensuring a single, auditable record of the issue and actions taken.

3.12 Where a service request relates to an urgent or potentially high-risk matter, Customer Services escalate the matter by contacting the relevant staff member or contractor in line with established responsibility arrangements. Escalation activity and outcomes are recorded within the service request, providing transparency and accountability for actions taken.

3.13 Customer Services does not make response decisions but supports situational awareness by sharing information internally where emerging issues may be developing. This supports coordination across teams while maintaining clear decision-making accountability within operational and emergency management functions.

3.14 Customer Services does not make response decisions. Where emerging issues appear to be developing or escalating, Customer Services shares information internally so potential risks are identified and can be monitored and responded to through appropriate operational or emergency management arrangements.

3.15 DECLARING VS NOT DECLARING – WHAT COSTS CAN COUNCIL RECOVER

3.16 The threshold for declaring a local state of emergency is met when an emergency has occurred or is imminent and the situation cannot be adequately managed using normal statutory powers, such that special emergency powers are required to protect life, property, or the environment. The

decision is based on the necessity of emergency powers and coordinated command arrangements, rather than the scale of damage or cost alone.

- 3.17 In a state of local emergency, a Council can claim for reasonable, necessary costs directly associated with emergency response and immediate life-safety activities, including EOC operations, staff deployment, welfare support, and emergency protective works. Claims do not extend to business as usual functions or long term recovery and reinstatement, which are addressed through separate recovery and insurance mechanisms (i.e. the process for repairing roads etc is covered by a separate process administered by the NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi and housing damage is covered by insurance).
- 3.18 In a non-declared event, which is an event that does not meet the threshold for a declaration, we can still claim for welfare assistance costs (i.e. temporary accommodation up to 14 days and basic needs (food, clothing and transport, reimbursements for marae if they have been used as a civil defence centre, or the costs associated with setting up a civil defence centre). However, we may be able to recover additional costs in a non-declared event, but these will be at the discretion of central government, or specific government departments depending on what we are trying to claim (i.e. waste disposal).

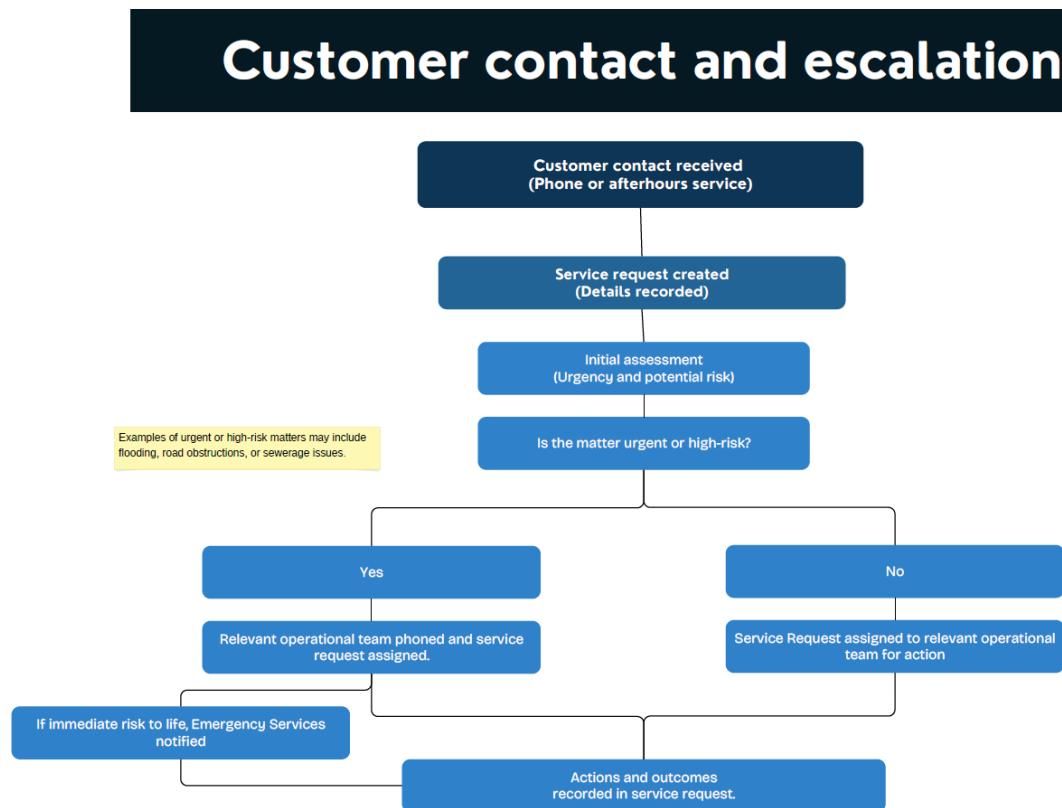
3.19 PROPOSED CHANGES UNDER THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT BILL

- 3.20 Under the current Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002, local authorities' preparedness obligations are largely framed around participation in regional CDEM Groups, high level planning requirements, and coordination roles, with limited prescription about minimum capability or performance. The proposed Emergency Management Bill goes further by making preparedness expectations more explicit and enforceable. It strengthens accountability for preparedness outcomes, enables the setting of national minimum standards through regulation, and places greater emphasis on demonstrable capability, continuous improvement, and integration with wider council functions such as infrastructure planning and community resilience. In contrast to the current Act's more permissive and process-focused approach, the new legislation shifts councils toward clearer responsibility for preparedness performance, with increased oversight and compliance expectations.
- 3.21 In practical terms, these changes mean that councils will be expected not just to have emergency management plans in place, but to be able to demonstrate that they are genuinely prepared. "Preparedness outcomes" refers to tangible results such as having trained staff, tested response arrangements, functioning emergency operations centres, and clear arrangements with partners and communities that would work in a real event. Strengthened accountability means councils may be required to show evidence that these arrangements are effective, rather than simply confirming that plans exist. The ability to set national minimum standards through regulation allows central government to prescribe baseline requirements for preparedness, such as capability, planning, training, and exercising. The emphasis on demonstrable capability and continuous improvement reflects an expectation that councils regularly test, review, and improve their preparedness over time. Integration with wider council functions means emergency preparedness must be embedded into everyday council activities, particularly infrastructure planning, asset management, land-use decisions, and community resilience initiatives, rather than being treated as a standalone or purely emergency management function.

3.22 EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO UNEXPECTED EVENTS

- 3.23 Building on Council's emergency management preparedness arrangements, this section outlines how unexpected events are identified and responded to, including customer contact, escalation, and continuity of response during normal working hours and afterhours.
- 3.24 During normal working hours, calls relating to unexpected or potentially high risk events are received and managed through the Customer Services Team, in line with existing business rules and escalation practices. The Customer Services Team assess the nature and urgency of calls and escalate matters that indicate potential risk to relevant operational teams, contractors, or emergency management personnel as appropriate.
- 3.25 Outside normal working hours, calls are received through Council's afterhours service provider, which operates 24/7 under agreed escalation processes. The afterhours service identifies urgent or high risk matters and escalates these to on call Council staff and, where appropriate, Emergency Services for assessment and response.

3.26 Across both normal working hours and afterhours periods, these arrangements support early identification of emerging issues, timely escalation, and coordinated response, with continuity between Customer Services, operational teams, and emergency management functions.



3.27 **INCIDENT RESPONSE TRAINING**

3.28 As not all events that impact Council are related to weather events, we are also exploring having specific staff trained for incident response management in some of our key areas.

4. **Commentary**

4.1 **WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES?**

4.2 Currently, we have five trained local controllers across the three Western Waikato councils. Only one of those local controllers is a full time CDEM staff member. The other four have existing specialised roles within their respective Councils. Each Council has a recovery manager, none of the recovery managers are full time CDEM staff and each Council has a welfare manager, once again these are not full time CDEM staff, but are supported by the Emergency Management Co-ordinator.

4.3 The rest of the staff who would support the Emergency Operations Centre are staff who have been trained in those functions, but once again these are not their full time roles, and they are required to often perform these roles alongside their normal roles in the event of a civil defence emergency unless staffing cover can be provided internally.

4.4 Given the renewal date of the shared services contract, the current level of resourcing and frequency of severe events, it is considered that now is an appropriate time to consider resourcing for response and recovery in an emergency. We consider that there are some risks with our ability to respond to a severe event (i.e. the number of full time CDEM staff is low and our statutory roles (local controller, recovery manager and welfare manager) are all performed by people with existing full time roles) and a prolonged event (i.e. where there is a long period of recovery, which would necessitate taking some staff away from the business as usual roles for an extended period of time).

5. Analysis of Options

5.1 STATUS QUO

5.2 One option is to continue with the status quo and have two full time staff servicing the Western Waikato area to be supported by CDEM trained staff. However, it is considered that this model may not be sufficient given the increasing number and severity of weather events that have been occurring.

5.3 DISCUSS LEVEL OF RESOURCING WITH OUR WESTERN WAIKATO PARTNER COUNCILS

5.4 One potential option is to have a discussion with our Western Waikato partner councils about increasing the level of full time equivalent specialist staff. This would allow for more staff who are specifically trained and focused on civil defence to be employed and have a greater emphasis on our emergency management planning and delivery. The Chief Executive has begun discussions with the other Western Waikato Council Chief Executives on a more formal service delivery and will also discuss this with the other Waikato Council Chief Executives.

6. Considerations

6.1 RISK

6.2 Staff have noted that we have received an increase in weather watches and warnings, and nationally there has been an increase in severe weather events causing widespread damage (for example Nelson in 2025 and Thames Coromandel, Northland and Gisborne this year). At the time of drafting this paper, we have requested specific statistics for the Waitomo District for weather watches and warnings, but have not yet received them. We will share this data once we have received it.

6.3 It is considered that given these events are becoming more frequent and severe there is a need to investigate whether existing staffing levels are sufficient to manage these events, and also whether the organisation can manage business as usual activity alongside response and recovery to an emergency.

6.4 From a Customer Services perspective, prolonged or severe emergency events can place additional pressure on frontline staff due to increased call volumes, heightened public concern, and the need for timely escalation. While the Customer Services Team supports early identification and escalation of emerging risks, its ability to manage business as usual activity alongside sustained emergency response is influenced by the scale and duration of events and the availability of operational support.