



Response to the Wales Audit Office report 'Civil Emergencies in Wales'

Introduction

St John Cymru Wales (St John) is a national charity in Wales and part of the International Order of St John. It has its Headquarters in Cardiff but relies heavily on its 4,700 volunteers across Wales who in 2011 completed 189,746 duty hours.

In 2011 it treated 6,411 patients, supplied 387 ambulance shifts to the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust and transferred over 15,000 patients. It has an extensive fleet of 112 vehicles including a large number of emergency ambulances in addition to 4x4 and other specialised vehicles.

As an organisation it is always prepared to come to the aid of those in need of first aid care. It is an essential part of Wales's emergency response system, working alongside statutory services to support communities when the NHS ambulance service is overstretched – be it during extreme weather conditions, times of flooding or following major accidents.

St John welcomes the opportunity to comment on this report although we were surprised not to be interviewed ahead of the document being produced, especially as we are mentioned in it.

Relationships

We have a very good working relationship with the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust and local authority emergency planning officers in certain areas although this seems to vary across Wales. We are perceived by many as the 'Ambulance Reserve'.

As an organisation we have very limited involvement with the Local Resilience Forums and only in some cases are we involved with some of the sub groups.

We believe that as a national organisation there should be a suitable forum for us to plan and coordinate approaches. We are not currently part of the Wales Community Resilience Group.

We think that our capabilities are well known to the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust but this capability needs to be highlighted to other Category One Responders.

Track record

During the recent snow (January 2013) St John Wales provided over 1,100 hours of support to the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust with Silver officers deployed to two of the Emergency Control Centres.

Assisted Emergency Services during the Aberystwyth floods of 2012 deploying a senior officer to the Silver Incident Room and first aid team/ambulance for the Penglais School Rest Centre.

Created an online map of St John resources that were utilised on the Olympic Torch relay (2012). This information showed St John involvement as a graphical representation and was made available to Emergency Control Centres and Silver cells should they wish to contact local resources.

During the Chevron fire of 2011 and within 30 minutes of the request from the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trusts Emergency Control Centre St John had six ambulances available had the incident required it.

Provided extensive support to the NHS during the snow of 2009/10 over 23 days resulting in excess of 1,000 duty hours. As a result the organisation now has a 4x4 strategy in place working towards at least one 4x4 resource in each local authority area.

St John has taken an active part in several exercises over the last few years including Oystercatcher (2006), USAR Cymru (2009) and Pen y Clip tunnels (2010). We also supplied several resources to Liverpool as part of Operation Constant Care in 2006.

We previously in conjunction with the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust and other NHS organisations trained our volunteers to the internationally recognised Major Incident Medical Management and Support (MIMMS) standard. St John has recently become a recognised MIMMS Training Centre and will be running its own courses in future.

Report recommendations

Only two of the recommendations relate to us as part of the voluntary sector.

Recommendation 7 *We recommend that Category One responders, through the Wales Resilience Partnership Team, ensure sufficient representation from, and communication with, all organisations with a substantive role in resilience or in emergency response.*

St John agrees with this recommendation and would be keen to be part of a national forum. Any forum needs to have clear terms of reference, a well defined membership and should not be isolated. We are not sure however what is to be gained if the forum only contains other national voluntary groups. It is also worth considering what role if any this forum would have during a pan Wales incident.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that the organisations developing resilience and managing emergencies should formally recognise the potential contribution of the voluntary sector, and that the voluntary sector should become an integrated part of the emergency plans produced by Category One Responders

Our track record along with other voluntary sector organisations should be formally recognised and emergency plans reviewed annually to ensure that they are up to date and clearly define what is expected of the voluntary sector.

Finances

As a charity St John receives no direct funding for participating in Civil Contingency exercises or meetings and relies on charitable donations to facilitate this. It has however received limited funding for a number of Airwave terminals that can be utilised during major incidents but this is limited to vehicles along the M4 corridor.

James Shaughnessy
Director of Operations
12th Feb 2013