

# Severe Weather Strategic Overview

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**Issued by the City of Edinburgh Council - Resilience**

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<b>Severe Weather Strategic Overview</b>	
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## Acronym List

Acronym	In Full
CEC	The City of Edinburgh Council
CIMT	Council Incident Management Team
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
EHSCP	Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership
EoS RRP	East of Scotland Regional Resilience Partnership
IRG	Incident Response Group
L&B LRP	Lothian & Borders Local Resilience Partnership
LACS	Local Authority Climate Service
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NSWWS	National Severe Weather Warning Service
RD	Resilience Direct
SEPA	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
SGoRR	Scottish Government Resilience Room
UKHSA	United Kingdom Health Security Agency

# 1. Introduction and Scope

Severe weather incidents can impact council activities throughout the year. How the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) responds and recovers from these incidents is covered by a range of agreed protocols. The aim of this document is to provide a strategic overview of the protocols available for a severe weather incident.

In addition, this document will raise awareness of the different types of weather hazards, various methods of warning and alerting, roles and responsibilities and the incident management priorities of the council and external partners.

## 2. Weather Hazard Information

There are 8 main weather types that have the potential to become severe and cause disruption across the Edinburgh area. The Met Office warns the public and responders of the risks of these weather types through the National Severe Weather Warning Service (NSWWS). The weather types are:

- Rain
- Wind
- Snow
- Ice
- Thunderstorm
- Lightning
- Fog
- Extreme Heat

The NSWWS issue warnings based on the potential for impacts from severe weather. Several factors go into the assessment of whether warnings are required including the following:

- Recent conditions
  - How wet/dry has it been recently?
  - How severe a change to the conditions has it been?
  - Are there any local sensitivities?
- Timing of the weather
  - Will it occur during rush hour?
  - Are there any events on?
  - Is it a holiday period?
- How unusual is the weather?
  - Is it unusual for the time of year?
  - Is it coming from an unusual direction?

### 2.1 Rain

Heavy rainfall can lead to a number of issues including flooding of properties, transport disruption and utilities disruption. The amount of rainfall required to cause this disruption varies on the factors mentioned above and the assessment of this risk comes from the Scottish Flood Forecast Service, a partnership between the Met Office and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA). The flooding risk is communicated via the Flood Guidance Statement ([Flood Forecasting](#)).

Flash flooding can occur rapidly, with little warning and in unexpected areas. Due to the nature of flash flooding in urban areas, it may not be possible to respond before impacts are witnessed. Preventative surface water management plans are being developed to better understand the areas at risk of flooding from these types of events.

## **2.2 Wind**

Strong winds can cause damage to properties, trees and utilities and bring disruption to transport through bridge closures, vehicle overturning and damage to infrastructure such as power lines on railways.

## **2.3 Snow**

The main impact from snow is on transport networks. The amount, duration and accumulation of snowfall will affect CEC operational capability to maintain network routes and identification of key priority routes may be required.

## **2.4 Ice**

Ice can lead to impacts on the transport network and local infrastructure. Impacts can be caused by slippery surfaces and the build up of ice weight that may damage infrastructure such as power lines.

## **2.5 Thunderstorms and Lightning**

Thunderstorms can cause a range of impacts from; damage caused by lightning strikes or strong gusty winds to flash flooding from intense downpours of rain. In severe cases thunderstorms can be accompanied by hail stones which can cause damage to property. Lightning strikes can result in interruptions to utilities and damage to property and trees.

## **2.6 Fog**

Fog may cause disruption to road and air transport. Poor visibility may cause increased number of road traffic collisions and create disruption to air travel schedules.

## **2.7 Extreme Heat**

In 2021 the Met Office added Extreme Heat to the NSWWS. This is an impact-based warning incorporating several factors. An Extreme Heat warning may be distinct from a Heatwave alert which is defined by the Met Office as at least 3 days of temperatures reaching above 25°C in Scotland. A warning would likely be issued for temperatures higher than this for a prolonged period.

Due to its relatively higher average temperatures, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) publishes information on heatwaves that are applicable to England only. The plan includes a Heat Health Watch System which provides information to Health Boards and Social Services (or equivalent). The document is available at the following link: [Adverse Weather and Health Plan - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/92222/Adverse_Weather_and_Health_Plan_-_GOV.UK.pdf)

There are no corresponding Scottish Government arrangements for heatwaves in Scotland. In the event of a prolonged heat wave affecting Edinburgh necessitating an

incident response, action would be co-ordinated through the Council Incident Management Team (CIMT), if required and as appropriate.

It should be noted that periods of Extreme Heat and Heat Waves can increase the risk of wildfires and potential instances of legionella in water systems.

### **3. Generic Severe Weather Key Risks to CEC**

Severe weather may result in:

- transport disruption (including road, rail, sea and air travel)
- damage to power supplies, buildings, infrastructure and communications
- general danger to the public and threats to vulnerable communities
- loss of staff through transport and access difficulties if employees are unable to attend their regular place of employment and cannot work from an alternative location
- school closures, which may result in parents/guardians/carers having to make alternative childcare arrangements
- the Council being unable to provide normal levels of service
- the ability of suppliers, partners and businesses to continue to deliver their key services, with resulting wider impact on the City economy
- loss of suppliers required to deliver winter maintenance operations

### **4. Linked Documents**

This document is part of a suite of severe weather documentation.

- Road Services Winter Maintenance Readiness Briefing Note
- Place Silver Severe Winter Weather Tactical Coordinators Plan
- Flood Packs (Not including Flash Flooding (available on request from Flood Management Team))
- Storm Action Plan
- Children, Education and Justice Services Severe Weather Contingency Plan
- Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership Severe Weather Resilience Plan
- Forestry Storm Action Plan

All documentation referred to above is available on the [MS Team Resilience Hub](#) within 'Shared (Files)' under the Severe Weather channel (unless otherwise stated above). The plans listed and held within the Severe Weather Channel belong to individual service areas and the review, maintenance and update of each document is detailed within the document itself. The documents held within the file section of the Severe Weather Channel are agreed as the most up to date version of each plan unless otherwise notified to the Corporate Resilience Team.

In addition to the key Severe Weather Protocols above, the Council maintains a number of generic protocols / supporting information relevant to any type of incident, including severe weather.

- Notification and Escalation
- Warning and Alerting
- Incident Management
- Declaration of a Major Incident
- Council Emergency Plan (under review)

- Key Principles Document (Note: this includes generic Communications protocols)
- Military Aid Protocol
- CEC Postcode Quick Ref

The Generic Response Protocol documents are available on the [MS Team Resilience Hub](#) within 'Files' under the relevant channel. In addition, the generic protocols and supporting information are available on our CEC Resilience Direct (RD) page and are an alternative store if the CEC network is not available for any reason. RD Users should make sure that the CEC Document page is saved as a favourite to allow for quick access. [RD CEC Documents Access](#)

This suite of documentation will assist the Council to:

- effectively and efficiently respond to a severe weather emergency at strategic, tactical and operational levels, ensuring consistency of approach.
- continue to deliver its essential activities to pre-determined levels, following disruption caused by severe weather.

Resilience will also work with relevant colleagues in respect to climate adaptation and endeavour to add any information relevant to the Severe Weather Strategic Overview.

## 5. Types of Alert and Warnings

### 5.1 Met Office Severe Weather Warnings

The Council aligns to the Met Office NSWWS that uses a coded alert status (with GREEN being no alert in force) which escalates from YELLOW to AMBER to RED (take action). Warning levels are determined based on likelihood and level of impact and all warnings are sent by the Met Office to Council Resilience, Roads Services, the Contact Centre and Directorates. Figure 1 is an example of a Met Office Warning Impact Matrix.

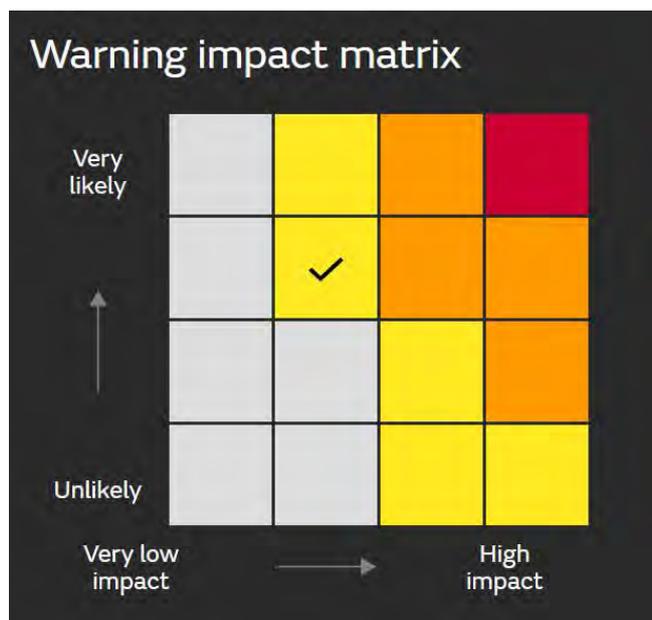


Figure 1 – Met Office Warning Impact Matrix

The Met Office issue warnings of severe weather by text message and email. These alerts are sent when warnings are for medium and high impacts. Further information is available on the [Met Office Severe Weather Warning](#) information page. Colleagues may also sign up to the Met Office [Hazard Manager](#) platform. This is an online platform with a variety of weather information in map form and provides access to both model and observed weather data which can help with situational awareness.

## 5.2 Flood Forecasting

SEPA and the Met Office together provide the Scottish Flood Forecasting Service. The Scottish Flood Forecasting Service produces a daily overview, the Flood Guidance Statement, of the flood risk to Scotland for the next five days with an assessment of the Coastal/Tide Flood Risk, River Flood Risk and Surface Water Flood Risk. The assessment considers existing and forecast ground, river and weather conditions. An example of the flood risk matrix used by SEPA is shown in Figure 2. This assessment is monitored by the Council Flood Management Team. The flood guidance statement can be accessed from [Hazard Manager](#). In addition SEPA publish Flood Alert, Flood Warning and Severe Flood Warning information on their website and this can be accessed with the following link. [SEPA website](#)

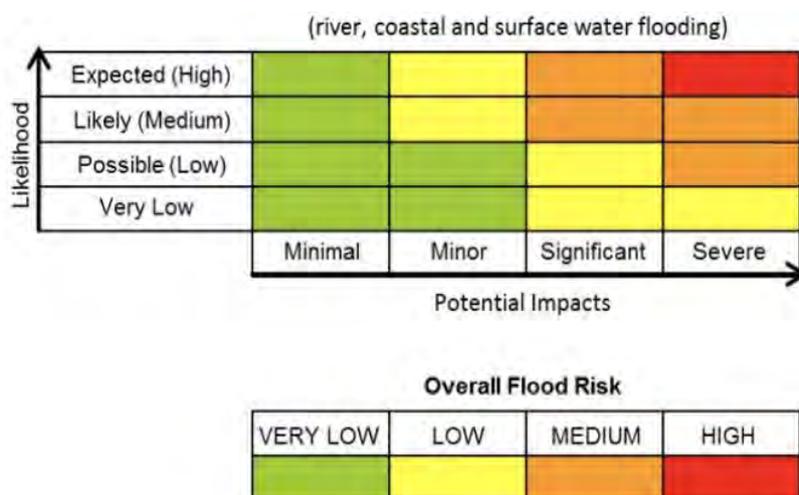


Figure 2 – SEPA Flood Risk Matrix Definitions

## 5.3 Daily Hazard Assessment

The Daily Hazard Assessment (DHA) is generated by the Natural Hazards Partnership and issued daily at 1400. The DHA is intended to provide an ‘at a glance’ top level overview only. The document contains links to relevant Partner Organisations where further information can be obtained. The Natural Hazard Partnership includes an extensive list of Partner Organisations such as the Met Office, SEPA, British Geological Survey (BGS) and government departments for example the Cabinet Office and UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

The DHA reports on all of the weather types indicated in Section 2 and additionally captures information on hazards such as volcanic ash, space weather, wildfire and air quality/aero allergens. Users of Hazard Manager can sign up for the DHA in the Hazard tab section.

## 6. Council Weather Warning and Alerting Protocol

Resilience provides the Council Contact Centre with a standalone document detailing specific kinds of [Warning and Alerts](#) that may be received by the Council from certain agencies on a 24/7 basis, including those issued by the Met Office.

A summary of the key actions for severe weather alerts / warnings received by the Council is provided below:

Warning Level		Contact Centre	Resilience Service				
Likelihood	H	x	x		Business as Usual		
	M	x	x				
	L	x	x				
	VL	x	x	x			
		VL	L	M	H		
		Minimal	Minor	Significant	Severe	Impact	
Likelihood	H					Out with office hours - Alert appropriate staff if warning impacts are within the next 24 hours (i.e Resilience Service)	Within office hours - Circulate as appropriate to council service areas - Consider the need for early situational awareness brief based on specialist advice.
	M						
	L			x			
	VL				x		
		VL	L	M	H		
		Minimal	Minor	Significant	Severe	Impact	
Likelihood	H			x		Out with office hours - Alert appropriate staff (i.e. Resilience Service)	Within office hours - As above - Convene early situational awareness brief based on specialist advice - Consider standing up CIMT
	M			x			
	L				x		
	VL						
		VL	L	M	H		
		Minimal	Minor	Significant	Severe	Impact	
Likelihood	H				x	Within and out with office hours - Stand up CIMT	
	M				x		
	L						
	VL						
		VL	L	M	H		
		Minimal	Minor	Significant	Severe	Impact	

(Table originates from the Lothian and Borders Local Resilience Partnership Severe Weather Framework with relevant amendments to align with CEC Generic Response Protocols).

## 7. Roles and Responsibilities - Council

The table below details the key teams and services that are responsible for Severe Weather response and operations, along with links to their plans and protocols.

Severe Weather Type	Key Team(s) or Service(s) *denotes 24/7 On Call and Standby Arrangements	Roles and Responsibilities	Plan / Protocol
Ice Snow	Road Services* Parks and Greenspace Waste and Cleansing Facilities Management	Monitor forecast and conditions  Coordinate and carry out carriageway, footway and cycleway treatment on pre-determined priority routes and locations	Winter Maintenance Readiness Briefing Note  Severe Weather Tactical Plan (available on request from Roads and Infrastructure)
Flooding (Note this does not include Flash Flooding)	Flood Management Team* Road Services Gully Team*	Monitor reports and forecasts  Responding to incidents  To provide advice and guidance to CIMT	Flood Pack (available on request from Flood Management Team)
Strong Winds	Parks and Greenspace Forestry Team*	Monitor forecasts and conditions when weather warning issued  Coordination and Response to incidents	High Wind and Storm Action Plan
Any	Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership (EHSCP)	In co-ordination with CIMT, review need and facilitate opening of emergency rest centre	Final Rest Centre Plan

## **8. Incident Management – Council**

### **8.1 Council Incident Management Structures**

The Council's Generic Response Protocols provide for the establishment of a Council Incident Management Team (CIMT), chaired by the Chief Executive, or his nominated representative, and including senior representatives from all appropriate Council Service areas and key specialist functions. A representative from the Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership (EHSCP) will also attend CIMT meetings. (Relevant contact details for all Council colleagues with a potential resilience role are contained in the [Council Incident Contact Directory](#), updated and published every two months by the Resilience service.)

The role of the CIMT is to coordinate the Council's response to the consequences of any emergency or disruptive event whilst endeavouring to maintain normal services as far as circumstances allow. Not all aspects of the structure may be required, and additional elements may need to be established or adapted to meet the requirements of the situation. The CIMT will operate in tandem with any multi-agency response forums such as those highlighted in Section 9 to ensure a interoperable and cohesive response.

### **8.2 Council Incident Management Communication Tools**

#### **8.2.1 E-sendex**

The e-Sendex system is a web-based tool that enables text messages to be sent to a large number of mobile phones. It is hosted and managed by the Contact Centre, there is a charge for using the service.

Full details of the system and how the system is used is detailed in the document "E-sendex Protocol and Process" available in the [Resilience Hub](#).

#### **8.2.2 ScotXed**

During a period of severe weather the Scottish Government may activate the emergency school closures data collection system. Education are responsible for the submission of any school closures through the ScotXed system.

#### **8.2.3 Emergency Alert Text Service**

Emergency Alerts is a UK government system that provides warning and advice in a life-threatening emergency. This system has previously been used to warn and advise the public during severe weather events such as Storm Eowyn in January 2025. The system is able to broadcast a message to a defined geographical area. Thresholds for use and message contents can be co-ordinated by Resilience team members but all requests must be authorised by Scottish and UK Government.

## 9. Incident Management - National, Regional and Local

### 9.1 National

In the event of severe weather affecting all, or large areas of Scotland, the Scottish Government may open its Resilience Room (SGoRR) to provide co-ordination of the response on a Scotland wide basis; this may include operational meetings by SGoRR (Officials) (Severe Weather) to discuss what action is needed nationally on the basis of information supplied by partner organizations.

The Scottish Government role may include liaison with the UK Government, shaping the overall media and public information strategy, coordinating the deployment of national assets and arranging for the sourcing of additional resources not readily available in Scotland.

The Council will report as required to the SGoRR on issues such as school closures, transport and infrastructure, salt stocks and consequence management. These reports, or appropriate elements, may be called for directly, or may form part of wider area submissions co-ordinated through the Regional or Local Resilience Partnerships.

### 9.2 Regional and Local

During the emergency phase of any serious incident, including severe weather emergencies, the multi-agency response will normally be coordinated by Police Scotland at the appropriate area level. This level may involve the Edinburgh area Incident Response Group (IRG), the Lothian and Borders LRP or the East of Scotland RRP. The Police will seek attendance at the appropriate level of coordination meetings (Strategic, Tactical and Operational) of all stakeholder organisations including Lothian and other local Transport Providers. This may also be referred to as a Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG) and operate from a Multi-agency Co-ordination Centre (MACC) in person or virtually.

## 10. Voluntary organisation assistance

### 10.1 Lothian 4x4 Response

The Council, if required, can request support from Lothian 4x4 Response ([lothian4x4response.org](http://lothian4x4response.org)). If further 4x4 vehicles are required for Council essential activities in response to a severe weather event, then Lothian 4x4 may be able to supply additional vehicles and drivers. Such requests are typically made through any Resilience Partnership structure that has been established in response.

### 10.2 Raynet

During Severe Weather events, there is an increased risk of loss of communications networks. CEC may, if required, request assistance from the Radio Amateurs Emergency Network (Raynet) to provide communications between the CICC and other locations. More detail can be found in the [CICC Ops Guide](#). Request for assistance from Raynet can also be made through resilience partnership structures.

# 11. Warning and Informing - Council

## 11.1 Media Considerations

In any serious emergency there will inevitably be a considerable amount of media interest. The media are often the most comprehensive channel for issuing public information. Arrangements for the provision of coordinated and accurate information on an incident and the roles being performed by the various responding organisations has been mutually agreed by the communications representatives on the East of Scotland Regional Resilience Partnership (RRP) Emergency Public Communications Group. A copy of the Response Plan prepared by the Emergency Public Communications Group is available from the Council Resilience service.

In serious emergencies or Major Incidents the Police will normally take the lead in coordination of the output of media and public information. The Communications Service has primary responsibility for advising on the Council's corporate media strategy and emergency media liaison arrangements. Media liaison officers from the Communications Service will attend as required at Council Incident Management Team meetings virtually or in person (e.g. the Council Incident Co-ordination Centre) to assist with the formulation and dissemination of the Councils information output.

Representatives from other organisations may be co-opted into this group depending on the circumstances of the incident, for example, from The Scottish Government or an operating company or organisation affected by the incident.

## 11.2 Examples of CEC Comms release

For yellow and amber weather warnings the Communications service will post updates to social media urging people to plan ahead and keep track of the forecast. For wind warnings when gated parks such as Princes Street Gardens are closed, we also communicate this on social media. Any relevant partner messaging during weather events will also be shared. Examples of these are in the screenshots below.

The image displays three screenshots of social media posts from The City of Edinburgh Council (@Edinburgh\_CC) on X.com. The first screenshot shows an amber weather warning for wind in place covering Edinburgh from 10am until 10pm on Monday (4 August). The second screenshot shows a yellow weather warning for ice in place covering Edinburgh tomorrow morning (18 November). The third screenshot shows a post about forecasted wind speeds of over 40mph tomorrow (Friday 21 February) and Sunday (23 February) leading to the closure of Princes Street Gardens. Below the first screenshot is a screenshot of a tweet with 14K views, and below the second is a screenshot of a tweet with 8K views. The third screenshot shows a physical sign for Princes Street Gardens with a weather warning notice attached.

When extreme weather events occur and pose significant disruption to Council services, city infrastructure and or a danger to life we would issue a news release directly to media and update the Council homepage accordingly with guidance for residents. The most recent example of this was [Storm Eowyn in January 2025](#) when all non-essential services were suspended amidst a red weather warning.

For colleagues, there was advice and guidance on NewsBeat, through all colleagues email and cascaded where necessary through line managers.

The Communications service were also in regular contact with media to make sure accurate information was being conveyed and portrayed throughout.



2:33 PM · Jan 23, 2025 · 38.6K Views

Ultimately, each severe weather event will be approached differently according to its individual circumstances, but the communications focus is to ensure that colleagues and residents are able to stay safe, plan ahead and avoid disruption.

---- End of Severe Weather Strategic Overview ----