WINTER PREPAREDNESS – GENERATOR PROPOSAL

Report by Acting Chief Executive

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

15 December 2022

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 **This report seeks approval for the purchase and maintenance of a stock of small portable generators for use in communities during power outages.**

1.2 During Storm Arwen, which struck large parts of the UK between 25 and 29 November 2021, a series of large scale and prolonged power outage situations were created in the Scottish Borders. After Storm Arwen, a number of post incident de-briefs were commissioned to harvest learning outcomes and build resilience for any future events. One of the issues identified was that many of the village halls in the Borders that were used as general areas for communities to pull together and support each other, did not have any backup generators and were vulnerable should the hall become subject to a power outage.

1.3 The Emergency Planning team have been carrying out a series of work, both internally and externally with partner agencies to ensure that a robust and cohesive response to winter incidents can be delivered in the Scottish Borders. Scottish Power Energy Networks (SPEN) is responsible for delivering electricity to c.2million consumers across central and southern Scotland but have made it clear that when communities are subject to a planned power outage situation, they would not supply any generators.

1.4 While it is not possible to provide every hall in the Borders with a generator, it is proposed that a small stock of 15 of the largest output KWH (Kilowatt Hour) small portable generators are purchased. These could then be taken to a village hall or other building being used by a community during power outages. Extension cables can be run from the generator to power small electric appliances, such as electric 1KW/2KW heaters, table lights, kettles, etc. which would give enough power to heat and light a smaller room as opposed to the main hall area of a building.

1.5 Allocation of the generators to communities needs to be on a needs/risk assessed basis. In the event of power outages, it is proposed that an Allocation team be established, comprising officers from Social Work, Emergency Planning, the Communities and Partnership team, and any other staff who could assist in the assessment of the needs and risks posed to the

community. The generators would be stored in Roads depots and delivery of generators would be undertaken by the Roads team or any other Service with access to a suitable vehicle large enough to transport the equipment. It is further proposed that when each generator was deployed, it would be sent out with enough spare fuel for one refill. To prevent the wrong fuel being added to the generators (which can be costly), it is proposed that SBC staff would refuel the fuel containers and ensure these were topped up when the generators are deployed. Maintenance of the generators would be carried out by engineers in the Roads depots.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 **It is recommended that the Council agrees:**

(a) to purchase 15 small portable generators and associated extension leads for deployment to local communities during power outages;

(b) that the deployment of the generators be managed through an Allocation team comprising officers from Social Work, Emergency Planning, the Communities & Partnerships team, and any other relevant staff who could assist in the assessment of the needs and risks posed to the community; and

(c) that the cost of the generators and extension leads be funded from Council Reserves.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 During Storm Arwen, which struck large parts of the UK between 25 and 29 November 2021, a series of large scale and prolonged power outage situations were created in the Scottish Borders. This was in the main owing to significant damage caused to the power distribution infrastructure by fallen trees. These power outages lasted up to 7 days in some areas, resulting in many homes being without heat, facilities to cook or lights for the majority of that time.

3.2 After Storm Arwen, a number of post incident de-briefs were commissioned to harvest learning outcomes and build resilience for any future events. One of the issues identified was that many of the village halls in the Borders that were used as general areas for communities to pull together and support each other, did not have any backup generators and were vulnerable should the hall become subject to a power outage. The cost of supplying every hall in the Borders with a fixed generator was massively prohibitive at just over £1million, which was too resource intensive and not sustainable.

4 WINTER PREPARATORY WORK 2022

4.1 The Emergency Planning team have been carrying out a series of work, both internally and externally with partner agencies to ensure that a robust and cohesive response to winter incidents can be delivered in the Scottish Borders. In general, this work has gone well but some of this engagement has identified a few areas of concern with regards to energy supply.

4.2 The war in Ukraine has highlighted European-wide energy shortages and potential energy supply issues for the coming winter months, with both gas and electricity supplies potentially being severely impacted. This, along with the ongoing closure of many older fossil fuelled power stations in the UK, is creating pressure on our energy supply network. The UK Government is developing a recovery plan to bring the country back from a massive power outage to a state or normality. Working Groups are being established to move the project forward and the Emergency Planning team is involved in this.

4.3 Scottish Power Energy Networks (SPEN) is responsible for delivering electricity to c.2million consumers across central and southern Scotland. During Storm Arwen there were well documented issues with SPEN's response and the way they engaged with other Category 1 and 2 responders in terms of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. Following this, SPEN did start to engage in a much more positive and proactive manner with local authorities and a briefing for local authority Emergency Planners for Scotland and Wales was held on 2 November 2022. While reference at the briefing centred on "hypothetical" situations of planned power outages, it is known that in the event of energy shortage issues, SPEN will cut the power to areas on a planned and rotational basis for 3-hour durations. SPEN was clear that when communities were subject to a planned power outage situations, they would NOT supply any generators.

5 GENERATORS PROPOSAL

5.1 While it is not possible to provide every hall in the Borders with a generator, it is proposed that a small stock of 15 of the largest output KWH (Kilowatt Hour) small portable generators are purchased. These could then be taken to a village hall or other building being used by a community during power outages. Extension cables can be run from the generator to power small electric appliances, such as electric 1KW/2KW heaters, table lights, kettles, etc. which would give enough power to heat and light a smaller room as opposed to the main hall area of a building – a 5KWH generator could power one 2KH heater, a kettle/urn, some lights, and a few other small electric appliances such as phone chargers, which is considered ample for a short term situation in a small room. These generators cannot – and are not intended to - totally replace the existing power supply to a village hall.

5.2 It is proposed that the generators will be pooled at roads depots in the Borders, with 3 being left at each of the following locations:

- Duns
- Hawick
- Kelso
- Newtown St Boswells
- Peebles

Owing to their portability, these could be moved if required or pooled in one location, depending on the situation.

5.3 Allocation of the generators to communities needs to be on a needs/risk assessed basis. In the event of power outages, it is proposed that an Allocation team be established, comprising officers from Social Work, Emergency Planning, the Communities and Partnership team, and any other staff who could assist in the assessment of the needs and risks posed to the community. There is also a strong likelihood that these services will already be together in the Emergency Planning Control Centre responding to the incident that has caused the power outage. The Allocation team would record where each generator was deployed, when it was deployed, for how long and how much fuel was used on each deployment, which would allow the ongoing cost to be monitored. The delivery of generators would be undertaken by the Roads team or any other Service with access to a suitable vehicle large enough to transport the equipment.

5.4 It is further proposed that when each generator was deployed, it would be sent out with enough spare fuel for one refill. To prevent the wrong fuel being added to the generators (which can be costly), it is proposed that SBC staff will refuel the fuel containers and ensure these are topped up when the generators are deployed. Maintenance of the generators will also need to be factored in, but it is anticipated that as the generators will be stored in local roads depots, the on-site engineers will be able to service the engines on the generators, with the electrical parts replaced as they failed. No cost will initially be passed on to a community if they find themselves needing a generator in an emergency.

5.5 Work is also ongoing to identify the most vulnerable in our communities who rely on power to survive e.g. oxygen pumps, etc. Some of these generators could also be used to assist a limited number of such households in crisis.

6 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial

The general cost of a 5-7KWH portable generator ranges from £835 to £1,670, excluding VAT. A generator with an electric start is the preferred option to prevent users having to use pull chord starts which can be temperamental, as well as physically demanding to use. Extension leads of a suitable length would also have to be purchased/made to allow the generators to remain outside and the power to be run into and through a hall. Fuel costs are c.£32 per generator per fill. Should the proposal be approved, the generators and leads will be purchased through the Council's procurement framework, funded from Reserves.

6.2 Risk and Mitigations

This proposal helps the Council demonstrate a commitment to support communities in times of need which should have a positive impact on the Council's reputation. Conversely, the Council may be accused of not doing enough as the generators are small and not intended to completely heat, light and have full cooking facilities available in a village hall. However, at least some support will be available to communities. It also gives the Council some resilience in providing electricity/power support to some parts of care homes (not the whole building), care at home (vulnerable customers reliant on oxygen for life support) and any other situation that requires the provision of emergency generators.

6.3 Integrated Impact Assessment

An IIA checklist has been completed – it is not anticipated that the deployment of generators will eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity between people who share a characteristic (age, disability, gender re-assignment, trans/transgender identity, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race groups, religion or belief, sex-gender identity, and sexual orientation) and those who do not; and foster good relations between people who share a characteristic and those who do not. However, having a safe place to go to locally during a power outage should help vulnerable people, those who are older or younger or have a disability. A debrief will be held following any incident requiring the deployment of the generators and the IIA will be updated at that point.

6.4 Sustainable Development Goals

The deployment of portable generators to local communities during a power outage should help with UN Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages) by encouraging community involvement, and providing a local resource for members of the community at a difficult time.

6.5 Climate Change

This proposal will help ensure minimum energy use in a local hall during a power outage to provide basic support to communities. This could potentially mean than people will stay locally rather than try to travel out-with their community to family/friends during a power outage. This could also help ensure the resilience of a community would be enhanced.

6.6 **Rural Proofing**
This proposal will have a positive effect on the more isolated rural communities in the Scottish Borders which are more likely to be impacted by a power outage.

6.7 **Data Protection Impact Statement**
There are no personal data implications arising from the proposals contained in this report.

6.8 **Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation**
No changes are required to either the Scheme of Administration or the Scheme of Delegation as a result of the proposals in this report.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 The Acting Chief Financial Officer, the Acting Chief Corporate Governance Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Director (People Performance & Change), the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into the final report.

Approved by

David Robertson **Acting Chief Executive**

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Background Papers: Nil
Previous Minute Reference: Nil

Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Andy McLean can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

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