

EMERGENCY PLANNING & BUSINESS CONTINUITY REVIEW

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide further information regarding Emergency Planning and Business Continuity sought by the Committee at its meeting on 9 January 2018.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 At the Review Committee meeting on 9 January Members sought further information on the following areas:

Rest Centre training for Members

Training for Members on the purpose of Emergency Assistance Centres.

Protocol for Member communications in an emergency

Clarification of the existing arrangements and information regarding training.

Chain of command and responsibility

An explanation of this process in relation to the Council.

Categorisation of an emergency depending on severity

Nationally agreed definitions for categorisation of an emergency.

3 REST CENTRE TRAINING FOR MEMBERS

- 3.1 Rest Centres are one of a number of Emergency Assistance Centres that may be established to help those affected by an incident. Training will be offered to Members to explain the purpose and operation of these different centres. Members will then be able to offer their assistance based on this knowledge.

4 PROTOCOL FOR MEMBER COMMUNICATIONS IN AN EMERGENCY

Introduction

- 4.1 Following an emergency there will be substantial public and media interest in the way in which the Council responds. Keeping everyone informed is the role of the Communication Team, but they will need assistance in what will be a very busy time for them. In part, that assistance will come from the Elected Members and this protocol sets out how that assistance will be delivered.
- 4.2 Members have expressed concern over the potential political implications that can develop following an emergency. These are normally the result of poor communications, and this protocol has been developed to ensure that the process is clear and the Council can respond in a timely manner

Role of Members**4.3 Leader and Deputy Leader, Chairman and Vice Chairman**

The Leader, or the Deputy Leader if they are unavailable, will be the official spokesperson for the Council. They will be briefed on the situation and supported in making press statements, dealing with media enquiries and interviews by the Communications Team.

- 4.4 It is recognised that the Chairman of the Council or the Vice Chairman are also likely to be asked to comment on behalf of the Council and they will be supported in the same way.

All Members

- 4.5 All other Members will be provided with access to the briefings provided to the spokespersons and with copies of their statements. Members would be expected to support these messages in any dealings they have with the media. The Communications Team will assist all Members in working with the media if there is capacity, but their priority will be with the spokesperson.
- 4.6 It is appreciated that Members may want to reflect the views of their Party or their Ward in their dealings with the media.
- 4.7 For the avoidance of doubt the Council's Constitution, including the codes of conduct and the Social Media Policy, continues to apply during an emergency.

Briefing of Members

- 4.8 To ensure all Members are fully informed when addressing the public or media, briefings will be provided.
- 4.9 The information for the briefings will come primarily from the work of the Emergency Information Centre. The Centre is set up during an emergency for staff to gather information and prepare briefings for the Leadership Team and Communications Team. The plan for the operation of the Centre is published on the Council Website.
- 4.10 The priority for briefing is:
- 1) The Leader and Deputy Leader and Chairman Vice Chairman, in their capacity as the Council spokespersons
 - 2) The Ward Councillors directly affected by the emergency. This contact is also likely to be part of the information gathering.
 - 3) Group Leaders to enable them to brief their Group Members.

- 4) All Members. This is likely to happen in the first instance by email circulation.
- 4.11 Further information can be provided on request through the normal contact numbers (01702 546366 during working hours and through the Careline out of hours service on 01268 527317). Additional staff will be allocated to dealing with enquiries, but Members should be conscious of the increased demand on Council services.

Training

4.12 Leader and Deputy Leader, Chairman and Vice Chairman

Specialist training will be provided to the Leader, Deputy Leader, Chairman and Vice Chairman, to help them deal with media interviews. The Leadership Team will also make nominations to take part in this training so that they can support when specialist input is required.

All Members

- 4.13 All Member training will cover the response by the Council to an emergency, the role of the Communications Team, the operation of this protocol, the use of social media and advice on dealing with the media.

5 CHAIN OF COMMAND AND RESPONSIBILITY

- 5.1 Decisions on how the Council will respond to an emergency and how it will commit its resources are made by the Leadership Team, in the same way as other operational decisions, maintaining established processes as far as possible.
- 5.2 It is recognised that the urgent nature of an emergency may require modification in order to deliver an effective and timely response. This is particularly the case out of normal office hours.
- 5.3 The Managing Director will chair the meeting of the Leadership Team. If unavailable the lead will pass to the Strategic Director, then to the Duty Assistant Director and if necessary to an Assistant Director available and best placed to lead in the circumstances of the incident.
- 5.4 Meetings may take place in the offices, another agreed location or by telephone conference.
- 5.5 Minutes of the meeting will be taken. For speed of response these may be in the form of a record of the actions agreed.
- 5.6 Resources will be allocated to establish an Emergency Information Centre. This will vary in its format depending on the circumstances, but its aim will always be to provide the best information possible to support the decision making of the Leadership Team.

- 5.7 The Communications Team will be fully involved to ensure that they are able to answer media enquiries and keep the public, Members and staff informed of our response.
- 5.8 Where other organisations are involved in the emergency response, a Multi Agency Strategic Command Group will be formed. The Council will ensure that they are represented at the meetings of this group in order to contribute to the setting of overall strategic aims and to feed information back to its Emergency Information Centre.

6 CATEGORISATION OF AN EMERGENCY DEPENDING ON SEVERITY

Introduction

- 6.1 There is a nationally adopted approach to the categorisation of emergencies. It is based on the amount of resource required to provide an effective response. A fundamental of the approach to dealing with emergencies is subsidiarity; that is that the response should be made at the most local level. However, support should be sought from County, Cross Border and National resources as required.

Categories

- 6.2 Consequently the following categories have been developed:
- 6.3 **Local** - For example, the flash flooding that occurred in 2013 was an event that required a response from local Emergency Services and the assistance of the Council, but the Council did not need to seek additional resources in relation to the initial response.
- 6.4 **County** - For example, the fire at Michelin's Farm when this required a larger response by the Fire Service, bringing appliances from around the County. The Council also worked with the Environment Agency on air quality and County representatives in respect of the rail and road disruptions.
- 6.5 **Cross Border** - For example, east coast flooding. Here the incident was more widespread and required the coordination of resources across several counties.
- 6.6 **National** - This would be an incident where national government is involved. Within the guidance relating to the Civil Contingencies Act, the Government defines three categories of emergencies.
- 6.7 **Significant emergency (Level 1)** has a wider focus and requires central government involvement or support, primarily from a lead government department (LGD) or a devolved administration, alongside the work of the emergency services, local authorities and other organisations. There is however no actual or potential requirement for a collective central government response;

-
- 6.8 **Serious emergency (Level 2)** is one which has, or threatens, a wide and/or prolonged impact requiring sustained central government coordination and support from a number of departments and agencies, usually including the regional tier in England and, where appropriate, the devolved administrations. The central government response to such an emergency would be coordinated from the Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms (COBR), under the leadership of the lead government department; (Please note this was published before the closure of the Regional Government Offices and Cross Border is now used in such circumstances.)
- 6.9 **Catastrophic emergency (Level 3)** is one that has an exceptionally high and potentially widespread impact and requires immediate central government direction and support. Characteristics might include a top down response in circumstances where the local response has been overwhelmed, or the use of emergency powers was required.
- 6.10 Whilst these categories provide a way of understanding the severity of an emergency, they are not definitive and the requirements to deliver an effective response will be dictated by the nature of the incident and the resource requirements. That is why part of the Rochford Emergency Plan is to establish an Emergency Information Centre to work on gaining a full understanding of the incident and ensuring that everyone locally is briefed on the nature and severity of the event.
- 6.11 **Gold, Silver and Bronze**
- 6.12 Mention was made of the above system used to categorise emergencies. This terminology relates to the levels of command and control used in managing the response to an emergency, regardless of the size or severity of the incident. To make their meaning clearer they have largely been replaced by the terminology “Strategic, Tactical and Operational”.
- 6.13 **Strategic** - This is the senior level of decision making to set the overall strategy. It is normally agreed at a multi agency Strategic Coordination Group meeting. This was formerly referred to as the Gold Command.
- 6.14 **Tactical** - Taking the agreed strategy, the Tactical groups will deliver the strategic objectives by enabling the necessary actions. There may be a multi agency Tactical Group coordinating this work, but otherwise individual agencies will have their own Tactical Groups. For example, the Tactical Group for Council will be the Leadership Team. These groups were formerly referred to as Silver Commands.
- 6.15 **Operational** - Having been tasked by the Tactical groups, these are the staff who will deliver the required actions on the ground. The managers for this service delivery as sometimes called Operational Commanders in the Emergency Services, but from the Council's point of view this is the Assistant Directors tasking their staff. Previously these have been called Bronze Commanders.

7 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Council's Corporate Risk Register recognises that a failure to respond adequately represents a risk to its staff, Members, residents and visitors as well as the Council's reputation.

8 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 None identified directly in this report. In extreme circumstances an inadequate response to an emergency may lead to instances of crime and disorder.

9 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 None identified directly in this report. Inevitably, some larger emergencies carry environmental implications.

10 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 None identified directly in this report. The Council employs an Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Officer to ensure the Council meets its legislative requirements; in addition, six officers are paid an allowance to act as Out of Hours contacts in the event of an emergency. The costs associated with this are already assumed in the budget.
- 10.2 In the event of a major emergency there may be unavoidable costs that have to be met quickly by the Council; in this case monies would be drawn from the General Fund in the first instance and a claim then made back to Central Government, via the Bellwin Scheme, to recover these costs. Therefore, the operational revenue budget is not expected to cover these costs.

11 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 places responsibilities on the Council as a "Category 1 Responder". This is the same category as the Emergency Services and recognises that the District Councils have a valuable role to play in the response to an emergency and in the recovery process afterwards. The Council is required to cooperate with other responding organisations and ensure what we do is coordinated with their response. There is also the need to maintain a Business Continuity plan, recognising that the Council needs to maintain services whilst also making resources available to deal with the effects of an Emergency.

12 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 None identified directly in this report. Parish Councils have been offered and have benefitted from the support of the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Officer.

13 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

14 None identified directly in this report.

15 RECOMMENDATION

15.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES** to note the contents of the report.



Matt Harwood White – Assistant Director Commercial Services

Background Papers:-

None.

For further information please contact Jeff Stacey on:-

Phone: 01702 318312

Email: Jeff.stacey@rochford.gov.uk

If you would like this report in large print, Braille or another language please contact 01702 318111.