

EMERGENCY PLANNING AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY REVIEW

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is in response to specific questions raised by Members at a meeting of the Review Committee on 7 January 2020 and was initially prepared for April 2020. Subsequently this meeting was cancelled due to the response to the Coronavirus pandemic and this report has been rescheduled for the meeting of Review Committee of 2 February 2021. This report does not address other aspects of Emergency Planning or Business Continuity, including the response to the Coronavirus pandemic, as this has been the subject of a previous report to this Committee.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 At a meeting of the Review Committee on 7 January 2020 Members requested further information on the following items referenced within the report:
- The provision of training for Members as Emergency Rest Centre Volunteers.
 - Information about the Communications Protocol.
 - A relaunch of the Communications Protocol for Members.
 - More prominent placing of the out of hours number on the Council's website.
 - Introduction of a testing regime for the Out of Hours service.
 - A flow chart showing how Members are informed during an emergency.

3 TRAINING FOR MEMBERS AS EMERGENCY REST CENTRE VOLUNTEERS

- 3.1 Training has been prepared and submitted to the Standards Committee Working Group for inclusion in the programme of Member Training for the 2021/22 municipal year.
- 3.2 The Rest Centre Training will cover the following areas:

Aim

To train Members in Rest Centre operations.

Objectives

- To explain the role of a Rest Centre and other Assistance Centres that the Council may open.
- To train Members to assist in Rest Centre operations.
- To look at the locations for Rest Centres in Rochford District.
- To explain changes to ensure Covid-19 safety.

- To discuss the skills and local knowledge that Members can bring to a Rest Centre.

4 COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOL

- 4.1 The Protocol for Member Communications in an Emergency was reported to the Review Committee on 12 June 2018 and is attached (Appendix A).
- 4.2 Training of both Members and Officers in techniques for dealing with media enquiries and interviews was held to launch and embed the protocol.
- 4.3 In order to relaunch the Communications Protocol to Members, the following training has been prepared and submitted to the Standards Committee Working Group for inclusion in the programme of Member Training. It incorporates the Protocol into a wider context of the response to an emergency. The focus is on the immediate response to a major incident rather than the ongoing response to Covid-19.
- 4.4 The training on Member Communications in an Emergency will cover the following areas:

Aim

To explain how Members will be informed about an emergency.

Objectives

- To explain the Communications Protocol and how information on an emergency is shared with Members.
 - To provide an overview of the Council's response to an emergency and how this links to the Communications Protocol.
 - To understand the role of the Emergency Information Centre in supporting the Communications Protocol.
 - To understand how information is shared with Members out of hours, including the role of the On Call Officer.
- 4.5 This course is recommended for all Members to understand how the Council responds to an Emergency. Sharing information is fundamental to an effective response to an incident but must take place in a controlled and coordinated manner to be effective.

5 PROMINENCE OF THE OUT OF HOURS NUMBER ON THE COUNCIL'S WEBSITE

- 5.1 The out of hours number is displayed on the 'Contact Us' page of the Council's website, below the main switchboard number. There is a need to

consider that users of the website are directed to the main number first before using the emergency out of hours number.

- 5.2 In addition to the 'Contact Us' page the search facility can also be used to direct residents to the emergency out of hours number. The Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Officer has worked with the Web Team to refine this function.

6 OUT OF HOURS SERVICE MONITORING

- 6.1 Out of Hours emergency calls are taken by our partners, Tendring Careline. The operators introduce themselves as Rochford District Council to reassure the caller; the information and support they provide is based on a detailed guide written by the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Officer using information provided by the relevant Council service. This is regularly updated and reviewed as a result of any feedback received.
- 6.2 As part of the contract monitoring process the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Officer makes monthly calls to the out of hours numbers and records the outcomes. To date all calls have been answered satisfactorily in line with the requirements of the service. This is in addition to the practice of following up any calls where necessary to capture any learning and provide feedback.

7 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Corporate Risk Register recognises that a failure to respond adequately to an emergency represents a risk to the Council's reputation. As such, policies and procedures are drafted, tested and reviewed in order that they are fit for purpose should they be needed in the event of an emergency.

8 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Some activities do have links and there is liaison with the Community Safety Officer when required.

9 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Inevitably, some larger emergencies carry environmental implications, for example tyre fires or costal pollution. By working with partners in advance, to prepare and plan our joint response, we are able to mitigate the worst impacts to the environment.

10 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no direct resource implications arising as a result of 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 relevant legislation is the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. This places responsibilities on us as a “Category 1 Responder”. This is the same category as the Emergency Services and recognises that District Councils have a valuable role to play in the response to an emergency and in the recovery process afterwards. The Act also places a responsibility on the Council to cooperate with other responding organisations and to ensure what we do is coordinated with their response.
- 11.2 There is a requirement 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.
- 11.3 Emergency Planning and Business Continuity have been the subject of internal audits and the recommendations completed.

12 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 Parish Councils play a valuable role in the response to an emergency and they have benefitted from support from the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Officer in the drafting of their own local plans.

13 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has not been completed as no decision is being made.

14 RECOMMENDATION

- 14.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

That the contents of the report be noted.



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Background Papers:-

None.

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PROTOCOL FOR MEMBER COMMUNICATIONS IN AN EMERGENCY

1 Introduction

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.

2 Role of Members

2.1 Leader and Deputy Leader, Chairman and Vice Chairman

The Leader of the Council, or the Deputy Leader if they are available, 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.

2.2 All Members

All other members will be provided with access to the briefings provided to the Leader and Deputy and with copies of their statements. It is requested that they support these messages in any dealings they have with the media. Whilst assistance will be provided by the Communications Team if there is capacity, such activity will not be a priority for support.

It is appreciated that Members will want to reflect the views of their Group or their Ward in their dealings with the media.

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.

3 Briefing of Members

To ensure all Members are fully informed when addressing the public or media, briefings will be provided.

The information for the briefings will come primarily from the work of the Emergency Information Centre. This function is set up during an emergency for staff to gather information and prepare briefings for the Leadership Team and Communications Team.

The priority for briefing is: (also shown below in flow chart format for ease)

1. The Leader and Deputy Leader and Chairman and Vice Chairman, in their capacity as 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.

Further information can be provided on request through the normal contact numbers. Additional staff will be allocated to dealing with enquiries to try to match increased demand.

4 Training

4.1 Leader and Deputy

Specialist training will be provided to the Leader and Deputy to help them deal with media interviews. The Assistant Directors will also take part in this training so that they can support when specialist input is required.

4.2 All Members

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

ACTIVATION OF THE PROTOCOL FOR MEMBER
COMMUNICATIONS IN AN EMERGENCY

