
EMERGENCY PLANNING AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY REVIEW

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Members with information regarding Emergency Planning and Business Continuity to enable Members to understand the way in which the Council would respond to an emergency and how the work taking place will prepare the Council to meet future risks.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report is an update to the report provided for the Review Committee 9 January 2018 and the subsequent report containing further information requested by the Committee for 12 June 2018. For ease of reference the same headings have been used to set out the continued development of the service and to highlight future work as part of the Service Delivery Plan process.
- 2.2 The Council employs an Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Officer to lead on ensuring the Council meets its legislative requirements under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. This requires the Council to coordinate and cooperate with other responding agencies in planning for emergencies and to ensure it can maintain its own services through Business Continuity Plans,

3 THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO EMERGENCIES

- 3.1 The Leadership Team continue with exercises to reinforce the way in which they respond to emergencies. The most recent was 22 October 2019, which asked the Leadership Team to set a strategy to deal with a pollution incident in the Crouch River.
- 3.2 The service continues to develop its approach to specific potential issues. The last report detailed the ongoing work in considering the challenge of rehoming large numbers of residents displaced as a result of an emergency. As this capability does not exist within the District, a proposal was put forward to the Essex Resilience Forum to make mutual aid agreements in the county to provide increased capacity. This was agreed and a project was developed, led by the Council's Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Officer working with the Essex Housing Officers Group and linking into a European initiative (www.masproject.eu). A number of working groups have been agreed and will be tasked by the Essex Housing Officers Group on different aspects of the project. The aim will be for any local authority, should it be faced with more homeless people than it can accommodate, to have a clear process to access accommodation and staffing assistance to aid its residents.
- 3.3 For the Leadership Team to make informed decisions on the Council's response to an emergency they need to be well informed. This is achieved through the Emergency Information Centre which will compile and collate

information on an incident into a report for the Leadership Team. Work has continued to develop the capability of staff volunteers to deliver an Emergency Information Centre and new members of staff have been recruited and trained. The operation of the Emergency Information Centre has been aligned to the Essex Resilience Forum Multi Agency Information Centre (MAIC) operations. The MAIC concept was developed to collate information and provide decision support during a wide area incident and relies on all partners to support the function through mutual aid. We consequently have staff able to provide support, for example in the MAIC that will be established to monitor developments following EU Exit.

COMMUNICATIONS

- 3.4 Communications are a vital part of the Council's response to an emergency, as previously recognised by this Committee, and at the time of the report in January 2018 work had started to provide support to the Council's Communications Team.
- 3.5 The role of Members relating to communications following an emergency is a key consideration. A protocol has been developed to set out and clarify this role. To support the protocol training has previously been provided for the Leader, Deputy Leader, Chairman and Vice Chairman. Training has also been rolled out to Assistant Directors, recognising the importance of shared key messages in times of emergencies.
- 3.6 In order to provide further resilience in this key area during an emergency an existing member of staff took the opportunity to take on a voluntary role as a member of the Communications Team during an emergency. They undertook training and gained experience with the Communications Team and have been able to assist in times of service pressure.

EMERGENCY VOLUNTEERS AND REST CENTRES

- 3.7 Activities continue to recruit and train members of staff to act as Emergency Volunteers. A feature has been updated training for the operation of Rest Centres. The Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Officer for Rochford led an Essex Resilience Forum project to establish a common system for the operation of Rest Centres, to be used by all the Local Authorities in Essex. This was aimed to make mutual aid much easier and thus increase our capacity in the county to deal with large numbers of people displaced from their homes. Part of the project was the production of a joint training package and this was used for staff training at the Council in late 2018 and early 2019.

BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND ICT

- 3.8 During 2019 there has been a fundamental review of the Council's Business Continuity plans. Assistant Directors and key staff from their service worked with the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Officer to consider how

to prioritise aspects of their service delivery. This was assessed against the major likely disruptions (IT failure, loss of offices, loss of key staff and failure of a major contractor) and mitigating actions discussed. The plan has been updated and the issues raised during discussions will be followed up in 2020 as part of the ongoing process.

- 3.9 The Business Continuity plan is the basis of the Council's response to a failure of our ICT systems. It enables the Leadership Team to prioritise tasks and allocate resource as required to maintain key services. The developments in the Council's IT have meant that maintaining services has become easier due to increased flexibility. ICT staff and the Emergency Planning Officer have looked closely at cyber threats and engage with the organisations who can assist, in particular, the Essex Online Partnership.

OUT OF HOURS RESPONSE

- 3.10 Development work has continued with Tendring Careline, the Council's contractor for taking out of hours calls. The online guide provided for the operators has proved very successful and enables changes to be made quickly when it becomes evident that there is any uncertainty about the response to an out of hours enquiry. Most out of office hours enquiries are dealt with by Careline operators using the guide.
- 3.11 For a major incident out of hours our On-Call Officer is contacted, and they will take action to initiate the response of the Council. Officers have been flexible and resourceful in dealing with a wide variety of out of hours issues on behalf of the Council; they undertake training and briefing to develop their understanding of emergency response to ensure residents and businesses benefit from a quality out of hours service.

3.12 ESSEX RESILIENCE FORUM

The Essex Resilience Forum is the key way in which the Council discharges its duty under the Civil Contingencies Act to cooperate and coordinate with other responding agencies. Where it is more effective to do so, the Forum will initiate joint working groups to develop procedure, guidance, plans or training for use by all responding agencies in Essex. The primary way in which this is achieved is through work groups involving Emergency Planning Officers from different agencies.

- 3.13 Focus in 2019 has been on planning for a no deal EU Exit. There has been a comprehensive review of the risks and consideration of how Emergency Planning arrangements may be used or modified to respond to the emergencies that could result. This work is known under the name of Operation Yellow Hammer and contributes to the national operation of that name.
- 3.14 Emerging projects that are likely to be of particular interest for the Council are our role in managing spontaneous volunteers following an emergency and a

project to manage flood related data more effectively by using Geographic Information Systems.

LOCAL LIAISON

- 3.15 We continue to work closely with local partners including neighbouring authorities and the Parish Councils. Work on our Emergency Planning and Port Health arrangements continue with London Southend Airport as it expands. We are also working with QinetiQ as the way they manage their business on Foulness Island has brought them out the Top Tier category under the Control of Major Accident Hazard Regulations. This means a change in lead away from the County Council and more links to Rochford District Council. At present the plan is being maintained as it was under Essex County Council and providing a high level of information and support for local residents, but at some stage there will be a review and a level of planning more in keeping with the reduced risk will be developed by the Council working with QinetiQ.

TRAVELLER ENCAMPMENTS

- 3.16 Our contract with the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit has proved very successful and continues. Within what is allowable under law, we have been able to deal with illegal encampments in a quick and effective way.

COUNTER TERRORISM

- 3.17 Awareness training on Counter Terrorism has continued with staff. There was an overhaul of the post room procedures for Support Services and a new procedure for bomb threats has been developed and introduced. Information has gone to all staff and all staff have been invited to training sessions. There has also been specific training for all the Fire Marshalls to highlight the significant differences between a bomb evacuation and a fire evacuation.

BUILDING SECURITY

- 3.18 The Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Officer has taken a lead on building security issues, instigating the following work:
- New procedures for the use of the panic alarms in the reception areas and a testing regime.
 - Improving access to the CCTV outputs to computers and extending the number of staff who have that access.
 - Civic Suite reception and staff safety.
 - Two training sessions held on Conflict Management for staff dealing with the public.
 - Review of security issues related to the Hockley Woods Office.

This work will be taken forward and monitored via action plans.

4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 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.

5 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

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

6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Inevitably, some larger emergencies carry environmental implications, for example tyre fires or coastal 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. For example, on 29 August 2019 the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Officer led an event with local partners on Wallasea Island. This was to review the development of the RSPB reserve and discuss the implications for a response to different forms of coastal pollution. As a result, partner plans are being revised to help protect the reserve.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 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

8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 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.

8.2 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.

8.3 Emergency Planning and Business Continuity have been the subject of internal audits and the recommendations completed

9 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

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

10 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has not been completed as no decision is being made

11 RECOMMENDATION

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



Matt Harwood White

Assistant Director Assets and Commercial

Background Papers:-

None.

For further information please contact Jeff Stacey (Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Officer) on:

Phone: 01702 318132

Email: jeff.stacey@rochford.gov.uk

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