

EMERGENCY PLANNING - BEST VALUE REVIEW UPDATE

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report updates Members on the current position of the Emergency Planning Best Value Review Action Plan.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Emergency Planning Best Value Review Action Plan identified a number of activities to pursue to improve the Council's response to a major incident, or a longer-term event.
- 2.2 The report will also outline other work that has emerged as part of local partnership building. It will provide a broad explanation of the Essex Resilience Plan, an outline current momentum behind response to a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) event, and evolving relationships with NHS Emergency Planning.

3 ACTION PLAN POINTS

Communications and the Media

- 3.1 Members will note that the Communication and Consultation Strategy is being reviewed. It is anticipated that a report on the external elements of this will go to the Policy and Finance Committee, meeting on 4 February 2004. The review will include a media response to a major incident.
- 3.2 Key media handling staff are identified as:
- Operational Management Team
 - Emergency Planning & Health & Safety Manager
 - Communications Officer
- 3.3 The report to Members in March of this year had already identified Member spokespersons.
- 3.4 Training is in the process of being arranged at the time of writing this report. A date in January or February 2004 will be arranged, subject to availability of all parties.

4 Emergency Planning Sub-Committee

- 4.1 The convening of an Emergency Planning Sub-Committee *in extremis* has been agreed.

5 Emergency Planning Response Centre

- 5.1 Hitherto, either the Civic Suite or the Rochford Offices would have been used as the centre of operations during a major incident. The Civic Suite lacks dedicated facilities, and it is considered that too much time would be needed to create an operations centre. Proposals for the future of the Civic Suite also preclude any immediate use of that place for emergency response. The latter offers a more realistic possibility, not least with focussing response through the Old House. This proved useful during the Foot and Mouth crisis. However, its shortcomings are that if a major (longer term) incident required attention, it too would prove inadequate.
- 5.2 Work is progressing, following negotiations with Castle Point Borough Council, to install Rochford items such as maps in the Castle Point facility.
- 5.3 A further aspect that is work in progress is around the Emergency Communication Network, (ECN), a private wire telephone system that links Government to every Local Authority. Currently the ECN switchboard is located at the Civic Suite. Clearly this must move. Preliminary discussions are in hand with the Home Office regarding relocating the ECN to the Rochford offices, as well as dealing with a shared number, or a second line, into the Castle Point facility. So far, it is understood that the Home Office will foot the bill, with only electricity charges falling to the Council, as they do now for the existing equipment.

6 Internal Training

- 6.1 Rest Centre training for team managers will take place in December. Team training, possibly with Castle Point and Basildon Councils, will follow in early 2004.
- 6.2 The Action Plan identified that staff induction, with Community Safety, could improve awareness of emergency planning. Other work has not permitted this being taken forward so far. A slot is being negotiated with Human Resources concerning a revised induction process for staff, possibly to commence in January 2004.

7 Partners

- 7.1 Preliminary discussions with the local Police Headquarters indicate a willingness to develop emergency response arrangements. This will be taken forward in the form of a currently planned two meetings a year, and to engage selected police officers in training events, specifically aimed at improving working relations within this particular area between J Division and senior Council managers.

8 A new model for delivery

8.1 Operational Management Team has agreed a new model for delivery based on the functional areas of:

- Communications Manager (Corporate Director – Finance & External Services)
- Emergency Support Manager (Principal Building Surveyor)
- Welfare Manager (Head of Revenue & Housing Management)
- Works Manager (Property Services & Highways Manager)

8.1 A training package, including an external course at the Emergency Planning College for each as necessary, will be developed.

9 Re-writing the Emergency Plan

9.1 Re-writing the Plan has begun, but is tempered by the passage of the Civil Contingency Bill. The consultation period has expired. A number of issues, including funding, may prohibit a reference in the Queens Speech.

10 ESSEX RESILIENCE PLAN

10.1 The Essex Resilience Plan is the result of a requirement to be able to react to a major incident in London, as well as an event within the County itself. The County Council Emergency Planning Unit is leading this work.

10.1 As a result of the events in New York, now known as “9/11”, some eighteen months work on the London Resilience Plan identified that an incident in the Capital would almost certainly need a response from one or more of the Home Counties. This could be either *in situ* support to the Metropolitan Police, the London Ambulance Service and the London Fire & Rescue Service, or from outwith London to provide a response to a mass evacuation from the Capital. Consequently, and in addition to individual Service and Authority plans, a joint approach was adopted. The result is the draft Essex Resilience Plan.

10.2 Work is ongoing. However, it is clear that to be successful, an Essex Resilience Plan will be resource intense, financially and in terms of personnel, equipment and property to be used. Working parties have identified a number of concerns that need addressing, notably about funding and training. These will be reinforced through local and Regional emergency planning forums at every suitable opportunity.

10.3 This leads in to further mention of Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear, (CBRN), activity.

11 CBRN EVENTS

- 11.1 There is an increasing perception of the need to be able to react to a significant event that involves a chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear component. If such an event does take place, it is likely to involve a large part of the Emergency Planning community in a collective effort to deal with it.
- 11.2 The County Fire and Rescue Service, under a National scheme called “New Dimensions”, and the Essex Ambulance Service, have both obtained, and are developing expertise in the use of, decontamination equipment. Essex Police has a large number of its officers trained in CBRN matters. The level of, and proximity of, Local Authority involvement in such an incident has yet to be determined, in addition to the normal emergency-planning role. A doctrine has yet to develop for dealing with “dirty” events.
- 11.3 Some training is available. The Emergency Planning and Health & Safety Manager is to attend a desktop exercise on 8 December organised by GO – East. He will be part of a cross service County team. The opportunity will be taken to highlight the resource issues.

12 NHS EMERGENCY PLANS

- 12.1 Members may wish to note that a number of NHS plans are emerging. These involve:
- Mass casualties
 - Communicable Diseases
 - Major Incidents
- 12.2 The support required of the Council will be written in to our own emergency plan.

13 RISK IMPLICATIONS

13.1 Strategic Risk

- The Emergency Plan will be re-written to take account of some significant changes in the way business is likely to be done. The revised model for delivery should provide greater resilience in the Council not only responding to an incident, but in also delivering the day-to-day services.
- New threats imply a need for strong mutual aid across the Emergency Planning community to provide a robust mechanism if a significant incident occurs.

13.2 Resource Risk

- The original Action Plan identified financial costs. The cost of Media training may increase the expenditure. Otherwise, there is no change to that for the time being.
- Following the publication of the Civil Contingency Bill, a recent survey by the Local Government Association identified a shortfall of some £17M for local authority emergency planning expenditure. District Council expenditure was assessed at £4M. Both figures are conservative estimates. The latter figure is not considered to be a proper representation and takes no account of the proposed statutory duty to fall to Districts, whose staff often have emergency planning as part of their job only.
- Increased demands on the emergency planning service may require increased funding.

13.2 Operational Risk

- The Civil Contingency Bill, if enacted, will place a statutory duty on District authorities to provide an emergency planning service. Regulations, yet to be tabled, will determine how that will go forward.

14 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1 See Operational Risk

15 RECOMMENDATION

15.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RECOMMENDS**

To note the progress to date on the agreed Action Plan.

Paul Warren

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Background Papers:

None

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