

BEST VALUE REVIEW - EMERGENCY PLANNING

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report outlines the conclusions of Best Value Review of Emergency Planning within the District, for Members' consideration. It sets out proposed range of actions for Members' approval.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report follows a report made to this Committee on 19 March 2002. (Minute No. 113/02).
- 2.2 Members may wish to consider this report not only as a Review in itself, but against the changing landscape of current threats.
- 2.3 The Review therefore takes account of the District Council's implied responsibilities to the Community throughout a number of Statutes, or as referred to in the Local Government Act 2000, and looks ahead to emerging legislation, which could further define Shire District responsibilities, notwithstanding our current role and functions continuing without future enhancements.
- 2.4 Throughout the Review, the Team was mindful of who the stakeholders and partners in planning for emergencies are - and who they might be in the future as greater and continuing partnership working carries though. Our principal stakeholders and partners include:-
- Essex Police
 - Essex Fire and Rescue Service
 - Essex NHS Ambulance Trust
 - Maritime and Coastguard Agency
 - Castle Point and Rochford PCT
 - Southend Hospital
 - National Farmers Union (local branch)
 - Environment Agency
 - Essex & Suffolk Water
 - Anglian Water
 - British Gas (TransCo)
 - 24/7
 - Essex County Council
 - Southend Borough Council
 - Castle Point Borough Council
 - Maldon District Council
 - Chelmsford Borough Council
 - Parish and Town Councils in the District

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- Basildon District Council
 - Red Cross
 - Women's Royal Voluntary Service
 - Our Public
 - Service Team and Other Contractors

3 STATUTORY AND IMPLIED RESPONSIBILITIES, AND PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS

- 3.1 There is no one Statute that requires any level of local government to provide an overall emergency planning response. There are a number of Statutes requiring specific action. Currently, many of these affect first tier authorities (e.g. Shire County).
- 3.2 So far as District Councils are concerned, our most notable statutory response is to provide temporary accommodation under the Housing Act 1996.
- 3.3 Nevertheless, there is considerable expectation that "the local Council" will provide - something. This Council's experience of even relatively minor flooding incidents, (when compared to events in other areas) is that the public at large turn to the District Council for help in terms of either physical response or for advice. During the Foot and Mouth crisis, (FMD), this Council took such action as was appropriate to support certain restrictions, and acted as a conduit for information to the public at large, and to Parish Council's. No incident, major or minor, is likely to be dealt with in isolation. Central Government's current guidance, in the form of the document "Dealing with Disaster, (3rd Edn.), makes this clear. A multi-agency response is inevitable - and expected. There is also an expectation that District Councils should have an emergency plan. However, there is no funding for this.
- 3.4 Essex County Council deals with a number of areas of Emergency Planning. It receives a grant from Central Government, and tops this up with extra funding. It provides County based/funded training events and co-ordinates work across the County, including liaison with the Blue Light services. The County Council provides equipment, which this Council could not either afford or provide storage for, (e.g. bed packs), and it has a transport plan that Districts can activate when needed. The County Council provides the focal point for clean-up arrangements with a Contractor for its Oil Spill Plan, to which Maritime Districts contribute a share of the overall costs, currently £450 a year. Most recently, the County Council is funding set up and year one costs for the replacement to the old County Emergency Planning radio network. The County can provide an overarching co-ordination role should two or more Districts become involved in separate, (concurrent), or joint operations. There is a Memorandum of Understanding between Essex authorities, mainly concerning mutual aid.
- 3.5 The Review findings are that, whilst mindful of the requirement to provide an emergency planning response, each District in Essex does this in various ways. This difference extends to:
- funding,

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- where within the Council structure the responsibility for emergency planning lies,
 - what resources are available.

The matrix at Appendix A provides an outline of the differences.

- 3.6 The two Unitary Authorities in Essex also feature in the joint arrangements within the County, and are part of a County-wide emergency planning officers forum. They receive their own funding from Central Government.
- 3.7 The creation of Regional Offices of Central Government, and the very recent appointments of Deputy Directors for Emergency Planning in each office, suggests that more account must be taken of Regional Offices at both the County and District level. Relationships have yet to emerge.

4 EMERGING THEMES FROM THE REVIEW

- 4.1 The Review Team has looked at essential areas of emergency planning to meet the Best Value requirements of Challenge, Compare, Competition, Consult. Several themes emerged. These are examined below and follow this sequence:

- How differently could we deliver (external)
- How differently could we deliver (internal)
- What attributes would we have to look at to improve performance

- 4.2 Members should be mindful that, although referred to last in the sequence, training underpins every aspect of emergency planning, no less so than in any other functional area.

4.3 Communications and the Media

- 4.3.1 The Council has a media strategy within its Emergency Plan, and it has a Corporate Communications Strategy. Although not in conflict, these need further merging to become more effective and gain wider ownership.
- 4.3.2 It will be apparent from television, and radio news items that communications with the public and the media is vital in an emergency situation. It is therefore paramount to have a strategy that enables the Council to engage the media and the public in an appropriate way. It is important to understand very quickly what is going on, what needs to be done immediately, how quickly the Press will respond to an incident, particularly a major incident, what expectations the Press have, who will deal with first response, and, as the incident progresses, how the local authority will need to take over media management.
- 4.3.3 Training is key to this process. Developing a good relationship with the Press is important, as is developing a relationship with probable partners, (e.g. the Police), in media management. Training may also be viewed as a suitable initiative for collaboration with other authorities.
- 4.3.4 The strategy should include spokespersons for the Council. Member representation is discussed below. The level of Officer response will depend on

the level of the issue, the operational stage reached, whether it is a short medium or long term issue, and availability at the time of the call. It is suggested that where an Officer response is sufficient, the following Officers should speak for the Council:

- Chief Executive
- Corporate Directors
- The relevant Head of Service
- The Emergency Planning and Health & Safety Manager
- The Communications Officer

4.4 The Role of Members in Emergency Planning Media and Communication

- 4.4.1 The Best Value Review identified the main role of Members as spokespeople for the Council during an incident, where a political representative is required.
- 4.4.2 In addition, for incidents of either some magnitude or of a longer duration, and certainly, where there are significant resource implications, a small working party or sub Committee, capable of convening swiftly, could be established. If agreed, training will be required for Members with an amendment to the Councils constitution.

Actions

- That the Councils spokespersons throughout an emergency incident requiring Member representation be (in order of priority):
 - The Leader of the Council
 - The (nominated) Ward Member
 - The Chairman of the Community Services Committee
 - The Chairman of the Council
- That an Emergency Planning Sub Committee or Working Party be established, to consist of the Leader of the Council and the Chairmen of the 4 main Committees of the Council to be convened in the event of a significant emergency incident.

Actions for Consideration

- Expand the corporate communications strategy to reflect the needs of the media communications strategy in the Emergency Plan.
- Determine key staff and their roles in communication with the Press
- Ensure all relevant staff are trained to communicate with Press
- Ensure the Council can set up Press Conferences in emergencies

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- Ensure that liaison with Essex Police takes place in order to facilitate a handover as an incident moves on
 - Conduct media training for Members in dealing with Emergency Planning situations and in seeking partnership arrangements with other Essex authorities

4.5 Emergency Planning Response Centre

- 4.5.1 The site for the Council's incident management has been considered as part of the Review. The District Council has retained facilities in the Civic Suite, Rayleigh, for its control centre during an emergency.
- 4.5.2 A room serves as the Communications Room and contains a dedicated telephone system known as the Emergency Communication Network, (ECN), which enables calls to be made directly to any telephone on the same system across the Country. This includes local and central government. Together with faxes and computer support, and suitably staffed, the room would serve as the message centre for the District Controller (Chief Executive). Central Government would fund this provision on a case by case basis.
- 4.5.3 In times of an emergency, the Committee Rooms at the Civic Suite would also be utilised as part of the Control Centre. For example, Committee Room 4 would be used for engineering, building control, building maintenance, housing and legal teams, whilst Committee Room 3 would provide CMB/OMT with a planning room. Committee Room 5 would be used for refreshments. The Hackney Carriage Room is used as a communications room.
- 4.5.4 Although there are telephone and computer points along the skirting of the Committee Rooms at the Civic Suite, no dedicated facility exists from which an incident can be managed immediately. Such a facility would enable plans and maps to be permanently on walls, with dedicated telephones and computers already in place. Other resources would be permanently installed. Furthermore, from practice sessions it takes approximately one man/hour to re-arrange Committee Room 4 for use by separate teams. This is wasted time in an emergency.
- 4.5.5 The Emergency Planning and Health & Safety Manager has his computer set up with a stand-alone option in order to improve integrity. This means he is not network reliant, in the event of a network failure, and, with the ability to print and fax within the office, (assuming telephone lines are working and there is no power failure), communications can be maintained. This is largely a no-cost issue.
- 4.5.6 It is of note that the Council offices in both locations do not benefit from an Uninterrupted Power Supply, (UPS), which would, in the event of a power failure for any reason, contribute to the Councils overall ability to function under a general heading of Business Continuity.
- 4.5.7 Preliminary discussions therefore have taken place with Castle Point Borough Council as to the feasibility of the joint use of its purpose-designed Emergency

Response Centre. The response to that is positive, and is open to continued, and more formal, negotiations. The subject is looked at again under Resource Implications below.

4.5.8 There are five possible options for a future Emergency Planning Control Centre:

- Use the Civic Suite for all major incidents.
- Use the Rochford Offices, as now, for minor incidents, and only use the Civic Suite if an opportunity to prepare emerges.
- Abandon the Civic Suite as a site for emergency management, and use the Rochford Offices. This has cost implications, not least, if the Emergency Communication Network equipment is transferred.
- Consider the development of a dedicated Emergency Planning Control Centre in the Civic Suite as part of the proposed improvements. There will be cost implications, dependant on the space available, and the level of dedicated resources provided such as maps, computers, furnishings, stationery etc. Further dependant on space, this location could also serve as day office space for emergency planning staff, or be used as an additional meeting room, though possibly for internal use only, given the nature of fixtures and fittings.
- Enter into a formal relationship with Castle Point Borough Council to use their dedicated facility.

Actions for Consideration

- Determine the most appropriate location of the Emergency Planning Response Centre.
- In any event, enter into negotiations with Castle Point Borough Council as to partnership arrangements for joint use of its dedicated facility, and report back.

4.6 Training

4.6.1 Training for emergency management, and by implication the validation of plans, covers three key areas:

- training internally, both staff and Members. (A number of Members took part in Emergency Planning training in November 2002).
- training with external partners,
- improving the awareness of the public.

4.6.2 The Review found that awareness of emergency planning requirements could improve in a number of areas, not least internally. In addition, training for an emergency should become part of the corporate culture, not just for itself but also

to improve the Council's reaction to business continuity issues. Arrangements with external partners could improve with increased liaison. We could do more to promote emergency planning with the public, including clarifying our role, re-assuring the public of our capability in emergencies, and ensuring that they do not have unrealistic expectations.

Actions for Consideration

Internal training

- Induction for staff – include Emergency Planning as part of the existing Health and Safety, or new Community Safety, induction – to improve the awareness of Emergency Planning within the Council.
- Maintain job profiles and job descriptions to accommodate emergency planning responsibilities for essential staff during an emergency.
- Conduct scenario testing internally to ensure that links between the Out of Hours Plan, the most likely trigger for full emergency response, and that subsequent responses, e.g. for Homelessness, with or without Rest Centres, are consistent and that officers are aware of the links and where each plan stops and others start.
- Implementation of officer training required as a result of these scenarios – at least once per year.

With partners

- Improve the communication and links with local emergency response teams, at local and County level
- Undertake twice yearly review meetings of emergency planning with the Blue Light services, neighbouring Authorities, (Southend, Chelmsford, Castle Point, Maldon and Basildon, and Essex County Councils), to ensure that relationships are maintained and that close and/or joint working is possible in case of an incident.
- Undertake one large test exercise every two years, with partners, to ensure all partners are aware of and can meet their responsibilities. (This cycle is a possible model under consideration by Essex County Council).

With the public

- Building on achievements already as a response to this review, (website and a flood leaflet), by undertaking a promotional campaign with the aim to increase public awareness of the role of the District Council in emergency planning.
- Engage with other partners in this strategy where appropriate

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- Train officers and Members to ensure they can advise the public of the Councils' emergency plans and our response.

4.7 Models of Delivery

4.7.1 The Review Team looked at external and internal models of delivery. The external modelling looked at what our immediate second tier neighbours and Essex County Council could offer. Next, the Review Team looked at possible internal alternatives.

4.8 External models of delivery

4.8.1 Involvement with the private sector was considered as part of the Challenge and external delivery. Although a number of functions undertaken by local authorities can be managed by the private sector, Emergency Planning was identified as being a subject too close to the decision making process and the functional areas of Council business to be contracted out.

4.8.2 With that in mind, the remaining options appeared to be either joint working with other Authorities, or contracting out to another Authority on the basis that the intimacy of the functional areas was well known to those potential partners.

4.8.3 Essex County Council and Basildon and Castle Point Councils were consulted. Their views are represented in the matrix at Appendix B.

4.8.4 It became clear that unless a partner was given full authority, including financial freedom, emergency planning is best managed as a personal function to the Council. (Note however that discrete areas of activity are capable of successful partnership working).

4.9 Internal methods of delivery

4.9.1 As the Council's structure has altered, so have the functions that Chief Officers have undertaken in an emergency. Nevertheless, Members will note from their copies of the Emergency Plan that the Chief Executive, the Corporate Directors, all Heads of Service, the Property Maintenance and Highways Manager and a number of other named officers all have a role in the Emergency Plan. Support staff are also necessary during the course of an emergency.

4.9.2 The day-to-day management of the Council must be maintained in case of a major incident, although some consideration may well have to be given to the circumstances at the time.

4.9.3 With a limited staffing resource, there is some concern as to the capacity the Council has to concurrently fulfil its tasks for an emergency and maintaining services, especially as a shift system maybe necessary for the emergency team. Any system also needs to take account of providing sufficient cover during periods of sickness. Consequently, shadowing and deputising must be considered.

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- 4.9.4 During its researches, the Review team found that as a consequence of the Lockerbie incident, Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council came up with an alternative model for delivery that looked at functional response, rather than attempting to invoke the whole Council structure for incident management. A Regional Council has greater resources, but the Dumfries model offers a methodology that could be adapted as an alternative model for appropriate staff to deal with an incident.
- 4.9.5 The roles and responsibilities as outlined by the Dumfries model in this section are given as broad guidelines to the tasks and activities which would be undertaken by Functional Managers. Maintaining flexibility in the management of response and adaptability appropriate to particular circumstances would be vital if this model applied to Rochford. Individual managers roles may, therefore, develop to complement the general strategy adopted in any major emergency. See Appendix C.
- 4.9.6 The five roles of take up many if not all of the likely tasks that could fall to the Council during an incident, but at a reduced manpower bill. In addition to the reduction of senior officers, it would seem possible to reduce the administrative back-up also.
- 4.9.7 In addition, some consideration may also be given as to whether Chief Officers, other than the Chief Executive, should or should not be automatically involved in incident management. Heads of Service may take a role, but need not. It is suggested that the level of officer should be no lower than third tier.

Actions

- To determine the optimum numbers and level of senior officers to plan for and manage emergency incidents in the future.
- To create a new emergency response team based on that number.
- To train accordingly.

4.10 The Out of Hours Plan

- 4.10.1 As previously referred to, the Out of Hours Plan is the most likely trigger for an emergency planning response. However, it does not cater for major incidents. This plan is being reviewed as part of the Public Regulation review. However, it is clear that there should be defined boundaries between this plan and the Emergency Plan.
- 4.10.2 Flooding is inevitable. The effects of increased rainfall and global warming are becoming more apparent, more frequently, and are not helped by the gradual sinking of the East Coast. The Environment Agency is turning to "managed retreat" in rural areas to mitigate the effects of flood. Despite consistent messages to the public since the floods of 1998, the public are reluctant to take their own mitigating measures. There is still a high dependency on local Councils to provide sandbags. Our elderly and the vulnerable will always need more help

than others. It should be pointed out that there is no statutory responsibility on local authorities, the Environment Agency, the Police or the Fire Service etc. to provide the public with sandbags, or indeed any other form of individual property flood protection. (The Environment Agency does have some responsibilities for strategic flood defence).

- 4.10.3 Driven by these circumstances, the Council's website has been improved, and an advice leaflet produced. The leaflet, promoted through "Rochford Matters", was distributed to Parish Councils and to the Libraries in the District. Greater flood awareness, particularly for homes in high-risk areas, can be built on through any general awareness programme undertaken for the public.
- 4.10.4 Coupled with flood management are pre-flood warnings. The Council receives Severe and Flash Weather Warnings from the Meteorological Office by fax and email. The Environment Agency sends Flood Warnings by fax. A recent innovation is the onwards transmission of these to those Parish and Town Councils that have elected to receive them.
- 4.10.5 In the meantime, farmers representatives have been contacted with a view to providing readily available stores of sandbags in order to provide a quicker and more localised response in time of need. This scheme could be extended to Parish Councils. New filled sandbag storage facilities have been provided for the Council's Depot and an annual review of the numbers of sandbags and their condition is undertaken.
- 4.10.6 Sandbags are not necessarily the best form of defence. They require recovery if costs are to be reduced, and could be affected by raw sewage if, as often happens, sewers flood out with surface water, thus requiring not just recovery, but also careful disposal.
- 4.10.7 The Fire Service look to District Councils for assistance, as sandbags cannot be carried on appliances, being upto axle weight with other equipment.
- 4.10.8 Minute 411/01, (Community Services Committee 27 November 2001), voted a year on year sum of £2000 for sandbags. This figure has been spent on improving storage and replenishment of stocks used in incidents. This sum is required to meet the currently identified level of need. However, it will always be a case of balancing budget against the expectations of the public. A policy dedicated to providing sandbags to all those requesting them could force the Council into spiralling HR and distribution costs if we were to enable all residents with potential flooding to have access to sandbags. Members may consider that the current measures to assist where possible, with a priority to the elderly and the vulnerable, is the best service we can provide, given the current resources available.
- 4.10.9 In some Councils, sandbag management is not considered an emergency planning issue. It is identified as an operational procedure for the Depot services at large.

Actions for Consideration

- Maintain the current position of providing sandbags for the elderly and vulnerable, our own premises, and helping elsewhere if resources permit.
- Extend the current arrangements with increased localised stores of sandbags in locations most likely to be flooded, either within the given budget, or with increased funding if either possible or necessary.
- Consider transferring the management of sandbags to the Property Maintenance and Highways Manager as a day-to-day operational issue.

5 AIMS TARGETS AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- 5.1 The District Council Emergency Plan should be an aid to the management of major emergencies to ensure that the partners in its development and implementation are fully prepared for action at all times.
- 5.2 The principal aims of the Plan are proposed as:
- to preserve life and property
 - to reduce to a minimum the harmful effects of a major incident
 - to bring about a swift return to normal life
 - to promote preparedness by all partners and the public.
- 5.3 The targets/policy objectives proposed for the District Council Emergency Plan are:
- to establish a partnership dedicated to the resolution of all difficulties presented by major incidents, of any type, with the principal aims of preserving life and property, minimising harmful effects and bringing about a swift return to normal life.
 - to establish a unified and integrated scheme for emergency planning and response to major incidents within the District.
 - to establish a partnership which is fully prepared to respond to major incidents at any time.
 - to ensure the most effective and efficient management of response to major incidents.
 - to maintain a dedicated team of managers who will co-ordinate the activities of all partners and others with a role to play in response to major incidents.
 - to support to the fullest the activities of all partners to the Plan and those supporting it's principal aims.

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- to pursue a policy of total co-operation with all engaged in preparation for and response to major emergencies.
 - to pursue a policy of immediate procurement to address the needs of those engaged in pursuing the Plans principal aims.
 - to promote, encourage and support the active involvement of the community in response to major incidents.
 - to encourage innovation, imagination, flexibility and adaptability in preparation for, and management of, response to major incidents.
 - to promote the welfare and well being of all engaged in response to major incidents.

5.4 The Performance Indicators for the District Council Emergency Plan are proposed as:

- To respond to the initial notification of an incident with 15 minutes of the call.
- To provide a functional team for response within 75 minutes of initial notification.

Actions

- That the above aims, targets/policy objectives, and Performance Indicators be adopted for inclusion.

6. THE EMERGENCY PLAN

6.1 The base Emergency Plan document is, barring minor amendments, a little less than two years old. Notwithstanding, changes to external procedures, and the need to accommodate new partners require a review of the document. Improvements can be made to the form of the contingency plans section that will clarify roles and actions.

6.2 Were Members minded to approve the Actions above, the District Emergency Plan would need re-writing accordingly, with due consultation, subsequent training, and with validation testing, for which a dedicated programme must be devised.

Actions for Consideration

- Revise the District Emergency Plan in line with the Actions referred to in this Report, absorbing other relevant comments as necessary.
- Consult with partners and stakeholders as part of that revision process.
- Refer back to members at the close of the consultation period.

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- Adopt the new District Emergency Plan, and publish accordingly.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Fouled sandbags as mentioned in the Report.

8 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 No guidance exists as to the level of capital expenditure that should be put into Emergency Planning. Necessarily, Council's will spend according to Risk, both actual and perceived. The Bellwin Scheme exists for local authorities to claim funding back, but this is only over a given threshold that varies from Council to Council. Rochford's threshold is currently £16,000.
- 9.2 Known heads of expenditure are for sandbags, £2000, and the contribution to oil spill, £450 a year. Courses at Easingwold cost £300 each, and the training budget is £400.
- 9.3 The possible use of a Castle Point Council facility has, (other than for the more obvious use of office sundries), proved difficult to cost by that Council. However, it has considered the possibility of utilising some of the Emergency Planning and Health & Safety Managers time, possibly at the level of a half-day a week. The full effects of such an arrangement could not be realised until tried. Were Members inclined towards such an arrangement, it would be prudent to commence on the basis that the whole project should be reviewed at, say, 6 months with a formal report back after 12 months.

9 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There is new legislation on the horizon. A new Act will either place a direct responsibility for emergency planning on Shire District Councils, or it will require Districts to share information, and to "co-operate". The precise nature of "co-operation" is assessed as depending on local circumstances. It is conceivable that co-operation could extend to having a full plan, although with no funding. In either case, the Best Value Review puts the Council in a solid position to provide an Emergency Planning response in line with emerging statute.

10 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Emergency Planning has implications for all Parishes and the Town Council in the District.

11 RECOMMENDATION

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

That the Actions referred to in this Report and summarised in Appendix D.
(CE)

Paul Warren
Chief Executive

Background Papers:

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	RDC	Basildon	Chelmsford	Colchester	Epping	Tendring	Braintree	Harlow
Salaries/ Costs								
FTE %	50% FTE	20% FTE	100%/50%	45%	60%	50%	20%	5%
Supplies and Services	11450	12800	4150	12700		5180	18000	
Resp. Department	Chief Executive	Highways Engineers	Directorate Services	Chief Executive	Legal	Highway/ Contracts	Personnel (H & S)	Assets & Facilities
Current (Self) Rating of Service	Good	Average	Good	Good	Good	Below Average	Good	Average
Improvement s would like:- Quantity & Awareness		✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dedicated Emergency Response Centre		✓	Have dedicated E. response centre	Have dedicated E. response centre	✓	✓	-	Have dedicated E. response centre