

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

PERFORMANCE, AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE – 26 SEPTEMBER 2017

REPORT BY THE HEAD OF HOUSING AND HEALTH

THE ROLE, RESPONSIBILITY AND PREPAREDNESS OF EAST
HERTS COUNCIL IN A MAJOR EMERGENCY SITUATION

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- This report covers the key elements of East Herts Council’s Emergency Plan, focusing on how the council would react to a major incident.
- The report discussed work currently underway to review and, if necessary revise, the Plan. Members views are invited to raise additional issues for consideration during this review.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PERFORMANCE, AUDIT AND
GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: That**

(A)	Officers conclude the current review of the Council’s Emergency Plan and bring forward a revised version for consideration by Members;
(B)	The issues for consideration as part of the Plan review, as detailed in paragraph 3.3, be endorsed; and
(C)	Any additional proposed issues identified by Members for consideration during the review be forwarded to the Head of Housing and Health.

1.0 Background

1.1 The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 defines an emergency as “an event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare in a place in the UK, the environment in a place in the UK, or war or terrorism which threatens serious damage to the security of the UK”.

- 1.2 The same act places a series of duties and obligations on all councils – districts, counties and unitaries – principally to:
- assess the risk of emergencies occurring and use this to inform contingency planning
 - put in place emergency plans
 - put in place business continuity management arrangements
 - put communications arrangements in place to make information available to the public about civil protection matters and maintain arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public in the event of an emergency
 - share information with other local responders to enhance coordination
 - cooperate with other local responders to enhance coordination and efficiency
 - provide advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about business continuity management.
- 1.3 In addition, emergency planning is a key component of the Council's various other community wellbeing and cohesion duties and powers.
- 1.4 The Council maintains a robust approach to emergency planning in the following ways:
- East Herts is part of a consortium of Hertfordshire districts which have pooled resources to 'buy in' emergency planning expertise from Hertfordshire County Council. As part of this, the council has a dedicated 0.3 FTE Senior Emergency Planning Officer based within the County's Emergency Planning Team
 - emergency planning is the specific responsibility of the Head of Housing and Health, with the Service Manger – Community Wellbeing and Partnerships (within Housing and Health) holding specific operational responsibilities in this field
 - East Herts Council is a member of the Hertfordshire-wide Local Authority Resilience Group
 - a detailed emergency plan is in place – see below
 - aspects of the emergency plan are periodically tested

- there are detailed arrangements in place 24/7 for senior Officers (and Members as necessary) to be informed of local emergencies.

1.5 Emergencies, be they sudden impact or slow onset, can be divided into five broad categories:

- **Natural** such as flooding, storms and snow
- **Accidental** where human error or technical failure causes the emergency such as an aircraft crash
- **Deliberate** where the emergency occurs as a result of terrorist or criminal action
- **Disruption** where, for some reason, essential services are not available for a significant length of time, for example gas and electricity outages
- **Health** such as a disease outbreak, for example pandemic flu.

1.6 Recent emergencies in East Herts, whether major or relatively more minor in nature, include handling significant flooding, unauthorised traveller encampments and power cuts within the community.

East Herts' Emergency Plan

1.7 East Herts Council holds its own Emergency Plan which has been written in conjunction with Hertfordshire County Council and with reference to the emergency plans of the other Hertfordshire district/borough councils and Hertfordshire County Council, the Hertfordshire Resilience Emergency Plan, HM Government Emergency Preparedness Plan and the UK Resilience Plan

1.8 The Emergency Plan is split into a number of main sections:

- Overview – very brief introduction and aim and objectives
- Section A – detailed response information starting from the first steps to respond through to the setting up and running of the control centre
- Section B – background information
- Section C – form templates
- Section D – contact directory
- Section E – key documents and references.

1.9 It is best practice to review the Plan on an annual basis as a minimum and after it has been invoked in the event of any

requirements to amend instructions and/or details. See section 3 below for more details of the current review.

2.0 Report

Activation of plan

2.1 Initial notification of any incident that may require activation of the plan is normally made by one of the following:

- Hertfordshire Constabulary/other emergency services (local or county level)
- Hertfordshire County Council Duty Resilience Officer (within the County's Emergency Planning Team)
- neighbouring district or borough council
- member of staff.

2.2 Of note, it is rare that a member of the public would approach the council first if there was a major incident, hence notification is likely to reach the council via one of the routes listed above.

2.3 During office hours, first contact is normally made with the Head of Housing and Health or another member of the Leadership Team in this Officer's absence.

2.4 The Council has an out-of-hours emergency duty rota consisting of the two directors and all heads of service who adopt the Emergency Duty Officer role on a rotation basis. Thus, out-of-office hours, the first contact is made to the nominated Emergency Duty Officer. If another Officer within the council, such as an Officer on call out-of-hours within a particular service receives notification of an incident, they know to notify the nominated duty Officer.

2.5 There are a number of processes in place to ensure that Emergency Duty Officer learns promptly of emergencies arising out-of-hours, notably:

- a single phone number, that of the Stevenage CCTV control room, is used to notify the council. Key partners, most notably Hertfordshire Constabulary and the County Council, know to use this number to make initial contact. The control room staff have a copy of the Emergency Duty Officer rota which contains at least two phone numbers for each officer

- Emergency Duty Officers have access to key colleagues' contact numbers
- a web-based / app-based rota system, Rotacloud, is in place to make sure it is immediately clear who is on call on the rota
- there are cascade arrangements should the nominated Emergency Duty Officer not be contactable for whatever reason.

2.6 For all major incidents, the initial details of the incident will be taken by the nominated emergency duty Officer who will use the Emergency Plan, and conversation with partners, to determine the actions to take. The incident will be communicated to the Chief Executive and/or deputy. An Incident Manager within the council will be appointed.

2.7 The Incident Manager is responsible for arranging, where necessary:

- the deployment of a Silver and/or Site Liaison Officer
- the deployment of a Gold Liaison Officer
- the activation of the Incident Control Centre and Incident Management Team
- the deployment of staff to scene of incident (Bronze), for example reception centres for evacuees, Building Control Officers, Environmental Health Practitioners and the like.

2.8 The relevant Officers required to assist with a response to the incident will be alerted via the cascade call out. As part of each council service's business continuity plan, cascade contact details are maintained.

2.9 The Incident Manager will also:

- establish clear lines of communication with Hertfordshire County Council's Emergency Planning Team to gather intelligence on the incident and to assist joint decision making
- appoint a relevant person to be Communications Officer. This Officer will take responsibility for the co-ordinated release of information to the media, the public, Council Officers and Members in accordance with the instructions of the Incident Management Team, the Hertfordshire Resilience Emergency Response Plan and the Hertfordshire Resilience Warning and

Informing Strategy. The Communications Officer is also responsible for the monitoring of media coverage. This role will contribute to the multi-agency media response to the incident.

2.10 In the case of a major incident, public relations will normally be led by the police. In more minor incidents the council's communication department may well take the lead in the media response.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Officers within Housing and Health are currently in the process of reviewing and updating the Emergency Plan.

3.2 Officers are working closely on this with Hertfordshire County Council.

3.3 This review is incorporating the following elements:

- a planned emergency planning test exercise day on 11 October 2017 in partnership with Dacorum Council, so as to 'stress test' the Emergency Plan and incorporate any lessons learnt in the revised version
- a review of the Plan in light of recent major national incidents, notably terror attacks in London and Manchester and the Grenfell Tower fire and resulting national guidance as it emerges
- the scope for making the Emergency Plan more concise – the current version is over 200 pages long. (It should be noted that given the Emergency Plan covers in some detail how the council and partners, notably the police, would handle sensitive situations, including terrorist attacks, it is not circulated beyond those who would need to draw upon it and so has not been appended to this report.)
- a consideration of how best to use IT to maximise the ease and swiftness of communication – currently Slack and Rotacloud software is used, along with mobile telephony
- the potential to build upon the 'how to' guides currently produced for the more frequent local emergencies, notably unauthorised traveller encampments
- a review of training requirements for Officers, Members and other partners.

- 3.4 Members of the Performance, Audit and Governance Committee are invited to suggest additional issues that Officers should take into consideration when reviewing the Plan.
- 3.5 It is anticipated that the Emergency Plan will require some amendments as a result of this review, in which case a revised version will be presented to Members for approval in due course. It is anticipated that a revision version will come forward for Member consideration early in 2018.
- 3.6 The ongoing action plan for keeping the Emergency Plan under review is likely to include, for 2018/19, a review of the location and effectiveness of the council's Incident Control Room arrangements for various service's on-call procedures.
- 3.7 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

In 2016, the Local Government Association produced 'A councillor's guide to civil emergencies'. This provides a useful overview of the relevant issues discussed in this report. A copy can be accessed at: <https://local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-civil-emergencies>

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