

Joint Area Committee South – 7 October 2009

11. Civil Contingencies Update

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Purpose of the Report

To update members on the work of the Somerset Local Authorities Civil Contingencies Partnership.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note and comment on the report.

Background

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (the act) designated all Local Authorities as Category One responders. Under the Act, those in Category 1 are organisations at the core of the response to most emergencies (e.g. emergency services, local authorities, NHS bodies). In August 2004 Somerset County Council, South Somerset District Council, Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council & West Somerset Council entered into a partnership to carry out the duties imposed by the Civil Contingencies Act. Somerset County Council acts as the lead authority for the partnership. The Somerset Local Authorities' Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU) carries out planning activities and projects on behalf of the partnership. The current partnership agreement is due to end in August 2009. Partners have agreed to extend the current arrangement until March 2010 in order to come into line with the financial year. A partnership review is currently being undertaken, the results of which will formulate future partnership arrangements.

National, Regional & Local Arrangements

The Civil Contingencies Act put in place a framework for the management of major incidents. This provides for command, coordination and communications at national, regional and local level.

National level

The lead government department (e.g.: Department of Health for pandemic flu) co-ordinates the government's response via the Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBRa)

Regional level

The Government Office of the Regions co-ordinate regional activity and act as a conduit for information to and from central government.

Local level

- Local Resilience Forums (LRF) are based on police constabulary areas.
- The Avon & Somerset Local Resilience Forum includes the emergency services, local authorities, Environment Agency, Met Office, Highways Agency, health authorities, utility companies and the voluntary sector.
- Representatives from these organisations meet on a regular basis for planning purposes.
- In an emergency, the representatives would form the Strategic Co-ordination (Gold) group, chaired by the police.
- During the current flu pandemic, organisations including local authorities are supplying daily exceptions reports to the LRF. The LRF is reporting daily to Government Office South West (GOSW) and the Government Office is sending information to central government for the regular COBRa meetings. In addition, the Avon & Somerset LRF is holding a weekly telephone conference to share and cascade information.

Local authority level

As category one responders under the act, district and county councils are required to carry out the following duties:

- 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 in place arrangements 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 co-ordination;
- Co-operate with other local responders to enhance co-ordination and efficiency; and
- Provide advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about business continuity management (Local Authorities only).

Working in Partnership

All of the six authorities make a financial contribution to the partnership which is used to fund emergency planning staff in the Civil Contingencies Unit who produce countywide plans, provides training and exercises, delivers projects to increase the resilience of all six authorities and supports emergency planning activities within each of the six partners. Partnership achievements so far include:

- Improved partners' preparedness;
- Resilient communications e.g.: satellite phones & radios

- Reviewed rest centres and purchased emergency supplies
- Held annual live rest centre exercises (usually involving up to 500 people)
- Produced, reviewed and exercised emergency plans including the Somerset Flood Warning & Response Plan, Hinkley Point Off-Site Plan, Somerset Gas Pipelines Plan, and Somerset Rest & Reception Centre Guide.
- Contributed to Local Resilience Forum multi-agency plans.
- Held annual events for elected members.
- Produced information for the public including a Somerset Flood Guide, folding help cards and business continuity information for businesses.
- Won £267,000 from Defra for Household Flood Protection Schemes in West Camel and Queen Camel.

Each of the district & borough councils provide a liaison officer who, in the case of South Somerset District Council, deals with the operational response to an emergency by:

- Agreeing a suitable rest centre for evacuees
- Organising staff to run a rest centre
- Liaising with the Emergency Services at an incident
- Sandbagging
- Organising the out of hours response
- Acts as a champion and source of information about civil contingencies within their authority

The Civil Contingencies Unit provides advice to the six authorities within the partnership about business continuity planning. However, partners are responsible for carrying out risk assessments, producing their own business continuity plans and dealing with internal resilience projects. For example: the South Somerset District Council Power Outage Project or the Somerset County Council Corporate Pandemic Influenza Business Continuity Plan.

Current Partnership Priorities

Generic recovery planning

A Recovery plan deals with the process of rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitating the community following an emergency. Somerset does not have a current recovery plan. During 2009, recovery plans will be developed, based on a government template and drawing from good practice in the Gloucestershire 2007 floods and elsewhere. The recovery arrangements will form part of each council's individual corporate emergency response plans.

Evacuation planning

Partner authorities are well practised in running rest centres to look after residents who are displaced by emergencies. Rest centres are designed to cope with around 250 evacuees. Evacuation and shelter plans are designed to provide for much larger numbers of evacuees.

Community Resilience

The Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) is developing policy around community resilience. The partnership has contributed ideas to CCS based on the partnership's successful flood fairs, parish emergency plan templates and other activities with local communities. Parish emergency plans have been developed with a number of Parish Councils; the plans are designed to be simple with lists of contacts, resources available, possible emergency centre and details of vulnerable residents.

Continue to develop business continuity plans

- Fuel shortage planning
- Business continuity exercise programme

Partnership development

Building on the successes of the last four years with new arrangements that will be flexible enough to cope with changing situations including the review of the Civil Contingencies Act, the requirements of the Pitt Review and any emerging new threats and hazards.

Recent Events

The emergency incidents in the table below relate to South Somerset District Council only, there have been other incidents across the partnership during this period.

Date	Incident details	Officers involved
29/5/08	25 to 30 residents of Hermitage Street, Crewkerne evacuated due to a gas leak. Attended and evacuees were being safely looked after in the local pub, as gas supply been made safe and was being tested when attended the site, decided against moving the residents. Stayed on site until Transco confirmed we could stand down	Civil Contingencies Manager
8/6/08	Attended Abbey Manor Park, Yeovil, potential threat of need to evacuate 600 properties due to a severe fire at car dealers. Attended at 8.30pm, stood down at 11pm	Civil Contingencies Manager
20/7/08	Attended Free Street, Ilchester - scene of a gas leak after a road traffic accident. Attended at 1.30pm – stood down at 3.30pm after Transco had plugged the leak. Residents finally back in their homes at 4pm.	Civil Contingencies Manager
13/12/08	Major Flooding incident affecting most of district - attended Bronze control at Little Chef, Southfield Roundabout (A303). Stood down at 9pm. Over 1500 sandbags delivered to addresses across the district	Civil Contingencies Manager, Head of Streetscene, Streetscene Support Supervisor, plus 3 additional crews to deliver sandbags.
9/01/09	School bus skidded on ice at Herne Rise, Ilminster and crashed into a home. Arranged for family to be re-housed at Shrubbery Hotel until suitable alternative accommodation could be found by housing.	Civil Contingencies Manager, Building Control Surveyor and Manager. Housing Advice Centre Manager.

3/2/09	Severe snow and ice with restricted travel – offices closed at 4pm to allow staff to get home safely	No Action except issuing warnings
7/2/09	Again severe snow and ice and restricted travel - offices closed at 4pm to allow staff to get home safely.	No action – except issuing weather warnings
9/2/09	Severe flooding incident – staff from Lufton and 3 additional crews stayed on until 11pm, over 800 sandbags issued	Civil Contingencies Manager, Head of Streetscene, Streetscene Support Supervisor plus 3 to 4 additional crews
9/2/09 – 11.30pm – 12.20am	Landrover delivering sandbags at Cad Road, Ilton in trouble due to flooding called recovery service in case needed and put on standby. Landrover left until next day under advice from supervisor.	Civil Contingencies Manager, Lufton staff
23/5/09	Police diving team called to request permission to search for a missing person in Chard Reservoir - permission granted - no sign of missing person - Anglers found body Sunday 24 May.	Civil Contingencies Manager
23/5/09	Fire Brigade reported severe gas leak at Broadway Farm, Charlton Adam – 8 properties in immediate vicinity evacuated. Potential for 3 villages to be evacuated. Put staff on standby as well as Westlands Sports & Social Club as a rest centre. Stood down at 11.30pm after Wales & West Utilities managed to cap the leak.	Civil Contingencies Manager, Streetscene Support Supervisor, plus others.

Swine Flu

Swine flu is a respiratory illness caused by the type A flu (H1N1) virus. The latest outbreaks in countries around the world have been caused by a new version (strain) of the virus.

Transmission of this new virus is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu. The infection can be effectively treated with antiviral medication. Most reported cases in the UK have been mild and people have recovered fully after treatment.

The UK has now moved to a treatment phase to manage the current pandemic flu outbreak. As a result GPs will diagnose cases on the basis of clinical observation rather than laboratory testing. Everyone who has flu-like symptoms will be assessed by a doctor and if diagnosed with swine flu will be given antivirals to manage their illness.

All Civil Contingency partners have been reviewing their Pandemic Flu response plans and their Business Continuity plans in regard to the current outbreak.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

Enhance the environment, address and adapt to climate change

Financial Implications

None

Background Papers: *None*