

## **Civil Contingencies & Whistleblowing Update**

*Director:* Netta Meadows, Strategy & Support Services  
*Manager / Lead Specialist:*  
*Lead Officer:* Netta Meadows, Strategy & Support Services  
*Contact Details:* netta.meadows@SouthSomerset.Gov.Uk

### **Purpose of the Report**

This report provides an update to the Audit Committee on our preparedness regarding civil contingencies. The report also reports on any whistleblowing which has taken place in the last year.

### **Recommendations**

- (1) That the Committee note the current update on civil contingencies and whistleblowing as detailed in this report

### **Background**

SSDC have previously adopted an approach where all calls out of hours (stray dogs, drug paraphernalia, and emergencies such as civil contingencies) went to one single person who was paid to be “on call”. They would take the out of hours calls and then make further calls to pass them to the appropriate person to deal with them. This person left the authority in August 2018 and so the Director of Strategy & Support Services has been undertaking this task as part of their role since then. The Director of Strategy & Support Services and a Strategic Planning Specialist have worked on a new approach for dealing with the out of hours calls to ensure that there is a more efficient process in place, and that our preparedness for civil contingency emergencies is improved.

### **Out of Hours Calls**

If a member of the public calls the office out of hours then their call is routed through to the Deane Helpline, who take details and assists. Previously Deane Helpline would call 1 person who would then have to triage the calls and pass them on to another person(s) who could undertake action as required. From the beginning of March all out of hours calls go through the Deane Helpline as before, but now they contact the right officer directly, reducing the time to respond, and making the process more efficient. They will call the relevant team or person directly to deal with the reported issue, or where it doesn't need to be dealt with in the evening or at weekends, they will log the calls and pass it to the right teams on the next working day.

### **Civil Contingency Emergencies**

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 identifies Local Authorities as Category 1 responders and so we have a statutory responsibility maintain an emergency response capability. We deliver this capability as part of the Somerset Local Authorities Civil Contingency Partnership (SLACCP) which gives us the benefits of economies of scale, improved representation on the Avon and Somerset Local Resilience Forum (AS LRF), and a mechanism for mutual aid and combined training with other Local Authorities and responders. The Partnership, which is delivered via staff at Somerset County Council, meet regularly, and have a combined plan and response protocols in the event of an emergency (attached as Appendix 1)

It is fair to say that historically we perhaps weren't benefitting fully from what the SLACCP could offer us, but over the last 6 months relationships have been greatly improved and the SLACCP have been fully engaged and involved in our developments.

Over the past 6 months we have worked to enhance our Civil Contingency capability so we are more resilient and can call on a wider pool of trained officers from within SSDC. We now have a Strategic Duty Officer on call 24/7. The Strategic Rota is made up of:

- Chief Executive
- 3 Directors
- 4 of the Leadership & Management Team

The Strategic Duty Officer is supported by an Operational Duty Officer (Leadership & Management Team) who are also available 24/7. This gives us the ability to quickly establish high level command and control (usually linking in with the emergency services and County at the strategic level) whilst at the same time having an officer available to deploy to the scene of an incident to liaise with the emergency services on the scene, other responders, and the local community.

To achieve this we have reviewed our procedures and systems and have carried out a number of training events. As well as classroom based training for strategic and operational officers, we conducted a major scenario based training exercise in February of this year. Another exercise is planned for August and similar events will take place biannually in the future to maintain a high state of preparedness. Officers have also attended a number of external courses and events including a Somerset Community Resilience workshop, a BREXIT study day and a training day focussing on humanitarian aspects of disaster relief.

There has been a good deal of focus on BREXIT recently and the potential impacts of a disorderly/no-deal departure from the EU. This work has been led by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government and we have been working very closely with them, the Avon & Somerset Local Resilience Forum, Heart of the South West LEP and other local and regional partners to be ready for this type of event.

### **Civil Contingencies Update**

There have been no calls which have been classified as a major incident where we have been asked to support any of the emergency services.

We have had 1 occasion where we were contacted in the early hours of the morning to assist the police with an incident by halting bin collections.

### **Whistleblowing**

There have been no occasions during the last year where whistleblowing has taken place.

### **Conclusion**

We intend to bring an annual report to committee detailing information regarding civil contingencies & whistleblowing.

### **Financial Implications**

None direct from this report

## **Council Plan Implications**

Aligned to our Council Plan values of empowering a confident, flexible workforce.  
<https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/media/2020/council-plan-201920.pdf>

## **Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications**

None direct from this report

## **Equality and Diversity Implications**

None direct from this report

## **Background Papers**

None

---