

Emergency Planning

Bury Metropolitan Borough Council

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Introduction and background

All local authorities have at their heart the well-being of their residents. Emergency Planning is central to this with its objective to reduce the potential impact of disaster through the delivery of civil protection arrangements. The profile of emergency planning has been raised through a series of national events such as the fuel crisis, foot and mouth and the current fire dispute. Consequently, we have included a short review of Emergency Planning as part of our 2002/2003 audit plan. Our approach has been based on interviews with key officers and a review of documents one of which is the Home Office's 'Standards for Civil Protection In England and Wales' published in October 1999.

Historically the Emergency Planning Service within Bury has been linked with the Health and Safety Service. During the last 18 months a structural review has led to the separation of the two Services with an emphasis on developing the approach to emergency response.

Conclusions

The profile of emergency planning is not high within Bury MBC. There is clear support from senior officers in the event of major incidents but the Service is not perceived as being corporately owned and there is limited commitment from members and officers in the development of robust response arrangements.

The current low corporate profile of the Service acts as a barrier to effective liaison arrangements and leaves some key gaps when the Service is benchmarked against current good practice.

One of the critical success factors in coping with an emergency is the effective use of resources. The Council has an innovative team structure that releases additional resources in the event of an emergency. The current 'call-out' arrangements place a heavy responsibility and reliance on the two emergency planning officers and are in need of further review.

An extensive training plan is used by the Emergency Planning Service as part of a robust validation process for the emergency response arrangements. This training does not yet include Members.

Effective liaison and consultation arrangements are in place with key stakeholders and statutory responders within the Borough and across Greater Manchester but not within the council.

Issues for further consideration

The review has highlighted a number of key issues for the Council to consider further. Under an overall challenge on whether the Council's current arrangements support the aim of reducing the potential impact of disasters, we would particularly emphasize the following:

- Is the corporate profile of the Emergency Planning Service at a sufficient level to demonstrate a commitment to developing and maintaining effective emergency management arrangements?
- Does the internal arrangements encourage regular cross departmental liaison for assessing planning and training needs?
- Is there demonstrable, positive support from Members?
- Do the current arrangements provide an effective mechanism for accessing alternative resources and for contacting and calling out staff?

Summary of findings

Policy/profile

- The Emergency Planning Service is located in the Central Personnel Department. The revised line management arrangements are through a Principal Personnel Office to the Head of Personnel and on to the Director of Personnel.
- There is little involvement from senior members. Before the adoption of the new Constitution the Service reported to the Emergency Planning Sub Committee but since the introduction of the new arrangements there have been no reports to the Executive. Reports to Scrutiny have been restricted to details of the arrangements put in place for the Fire Strike.
- The implication of the lack of member involvement is that although it has recently produced Major Incident Plan, the Council does not have a formal, publicly agreed statement on emergency planning. Such a statement is seen as a key requirement under the Standards in Civil Protection.
- The current arrangements do not support a corporate approach to emergency planning. Service departments with key involvement in emergency arrangements are not involved in the planning process. For example, Social Services have to date not played a significant part in emergency planning and as a result, arrangements for rest centres have been finalised without any input from them. The Emergency Planning Manager is due to meet with the Director of Social Services soon.
- The low corporate profile of emergency planning has impacted on the effectiveness of emergency response arrangement. During a response to a bomb threat at a school the Emergency Planning Manager struggled to get an adequate response from service departments. The issue was only resolved through the fortuitous involvement of a member of the Management Board.
- The Emergency Planning Manager does have direct access to the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive in emergency situations.
- Other key operational problems that arise are problems with updating the contact lists which are essential tools for effective emergency response plus a lack of any link to the Council's risk management arrangements.
- The Service has a work plan for 2002/2003. The work plan makes a clear link between the Service and the Council's corporate objective 'Making our communities safer and healthier'. The work programme has two clear sources:
 - The Home Office Standards for Civil Protection October 1999
 - The Council's own recently revised Threat [Hazard] Assessment.

Resources

- The Service currently employs two members of staff:
 - an Emergency Planning Manager
 - an Emergency Planning Officer
 - an additional staff member, an Emergency Planning Assistant, is due to take up their post in February 2003.
- The 2002/2003 budget for the Service is £89,000 which includes a civil defence grant of £67,600. The civil defence grant is due to rise to £71,000 in 2003/2004.
- The Council has a 'Major Incident Response Structure' that acts as a mechanism for securing additional resources during an emergency. The structure is based on a series of teams staffed by council volunteers that include the Emergency Planning and Response Team and the Forward Incident Team. The other teams are:
 - Operations Team
 - Information Team
 - Resources Team
 - Welfare Team
 - Service Works Team
 - Environment Works Team.

The teams have a manager and four deputy managers and are responsible for preparing their sections of the Major Incident Plan. Some of the teams currently have vacancies.

- The 'call out' arrangements currently rely on the Service's two staff [the Emergency Planning Manager and the emergency Planning Officer] covering all incidents. In effect the officers are on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This clearly restricts the Service's ability to respond appropriately to situations. The Service is currently considering using the five members of the Forward Incident Team to extend the duty officer rota. Currently there is no additional payment made for taking on the duty officer role
- Mutual aid arrangements with the Greater Manchester authorities also expand the resources available, e.g. there are protocols in place that facilitate the pooling of resources such as tracksuits, hygiene bags and sleeping bags that are owned by individual councils

Continuity of service

- As part of an assessment of arrangements to maintain essential services the Emergency Control Centre has been moved from the basement of the Town Hall where it was too close to the town centre cordon, to alternative premises in Radcliffe.

Training/validation

- The Emergency Planning Service conducts extensive training: all of which is run in-house by the Service. This ranges from a half day introduction course which is the main mechanism for recruiting volunteers to detailed training to support the Emergency Planning and Response Teams and assist in the development of their parts of the Emergency Plan. Examples of the detailed training include:
 - Communication in Emergencies
 - Rest Centre Management Training.

- A training needs analysis framework has been established to target the detailed training. The analysis is based on competencies for emergency planning and response and covers elements of the introductory training as well as specific training requirements for the Response Teams
- The Service conducts an evaluation of each session undertaken and uses the findings to develop future training sessions. Recent evaluation of the revised introductory sessions has been very positive
- Exercises are conducted regularly as part of the validation process. The Service is hosting a multi-agency table top exercise around terrorist isolation of the Borough in January 2003. The exercises are followed up by a review of the emergency planning and response arrangements and appropriate elements of the Plan. Live exercises are conducted on a Greater Manchester cross-boundary arrangement every two years or so
- Currently there is no training for members but the Service is aware of the gap and is planning to hold sessions in this year.

Consultation/liaison

- There is an Emergency Planning Forum established within Bury which brings together all the key partners, stakeholders and statutory responders. Health representatives from the PCT and Acute Trust also attend. The Forum meets on a quarterly basis. Plans are being drawn up to set up a similar forum for liaison with voluntary and community organisations
- There are no 'strategic' cross-departmental liaison and consultative meetings within the Council. The Emergency Planning Manager does not see this as a notable gap in arrangements as the emergency response arrangements are team rather than service based
- The Emergency Planning Service is well linked into a number of the Greater Manchester liaison arrangements. These include the Greater Manchester Emergency Planning Liaison Group.

The way forward

This report has been discussed and agreed with key officers and presented to the Board. We understand that the issues raise here are being addressed as part of the authority's service planning framework. We will follow up progress in this area in around 12 months.

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Our reports are prepared in the context of the Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies issued by the Audit Commission. Reports are prepared by appointed auditors and addressed to non-Executive Directors/Members or officers. They are prepared for the sole use of the audited body, and no responsibility is taken by auditors to any Director/Member or officer in their individual capacity, or to any third party.