

Environment Scrutiny Panel – 20 July 2010

Emergency Planning Informal Scrutiny Group - Final Report

Report of the Chairman of the Emergency Planning Informal Scrutiny Group - Councillor Lipscomb.

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1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 To provide the Scrutiny Panel with the opportunity to comment on the final report from the Emergency Planning Informal Scrutiny Group (ISG) convened in November 2009 and make any amendments it considers necessary before being recommended to Cabinet.

1.2 The Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider this matter as part of its role in holding the Portfolio Holder to account and monitoring the progress the Council is making in building emergency planning resilience at the community level. The ISG considered issues related to communication in the event of a civil emergency and the extent to which local communities are involved in planning for civil emergencies.

Recommendations

1. That the Scrutiny Panel considers the report and recommendations of the Informal Scrutiny Group.
2. That the Panel request that Cabinet approve the recommendations of the ISG set out on page 13 of the report.
3. That the Portfolio Holder for Communities report on Cabinet's progress to implement the recommendations of the ISG to the Environment Scrutiny Panel in 2012.

Risk Management Issues

There are no risk management issues arising from this Report.

Background Documents

None

Appendices

Emergency Planning Informal Scrutiny Group Report



Winchester
City Council

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

REPORT EN100

20 July 2010

**Report of the Chairman of the Scrutiny
Review**

Councillor Barry Lipscomb

**EMERGENCY
PLANNING
INFORMAL
SCRUTINY
GROUP**

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN – Cllr Barry Lipscomb

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 At the Environment Scrutiny Panel on 11 November 2009, Councillors Lipscomb, Busher, Howell, Mather and Spender were appointed to the Emergency Planning Informal Scrutiny Group.

1.2 The Panel met on four occasions. At its first meeting held on 14 December 2009 the City Council's Chief Executive, Simon Eden and the Head of Emergency Planning at Hampshire County Council, Ian Hoults, were in attendance. The second meeting of the Group was held on 14 January 2010 with Kate Ball, Head of Communications, Hampshire County Council; Eleanor Hodge, Head of Communications, Winchester City Council, and Dennis Brady, Senior Emergency Planning Officer, Hampshire County Council in attendance.

1.3 The third meeting of the Group was held on 4 March 2010 with the following representatives of parish councils and voluntary and community groups in attendance:

Durley Parish Council - Frank Holttrum and Ann Collins
 Hursley Parish Council – Councillor Bell
 Northington Parish Council – Monica Nightingale
 Otterbourne Parish Council - Suzanne Hudson
 South Wonston Parish Council - Eileen Bolton
 Sparsholt Parish Council - David Parker
 Whiteley Parish Council - Kairen Goves
 Wickham Parish Council - Michael Bennett
 Winchester Area Community Action (WACA) - Paul Williams

1.4 The final meeting of the Group was held on 14 April 2010 and was attended by Simon Eden and Dennis Brady and gave consideration to the content of the final report of the Informal Scrutiny Group.

1.5 At the first meeting of the Group held on 14 December 2009, the following terms of reference were agreed, bearing in mind that, in initiating the ISG, the Environment Scrutiny Panel had asked it to concentrate its scrutiny on local communities' involvement with Emergency Planning

1. To review WCC and HCC procedures and plans that are in place to involve local communities in preparing for and reacting to civil emergencies.

2. To assess the extent to which there are emergency plans and procedures in place at the parish (or Winchester Town level).
3. To review the effectiveness of communications with the public and Parish Councils on arrangements to be followed in the event of a civil emergency (to include a review of work being undertaken by the Local Resilience Forum Warning and Informing Group).
4. To assess the extent to which local communities are involved in planning for civil emergencies.
5. To take oral evidence in pursuance of 2 to 4 above.
6. That the conclusions of the Panel be reported to Cabinet.

1.7 In terms of defining what constitutes an emergency, the guidance from the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 states that it is:

“Any event or situation, which threatens serious damage to human welfare, threatens serious damage to the environment and war or terrorism, which threatens serious damage to security.”

1.8 Of importance is who can declare an emergency incident. A major incident can be declared by any member of the emergency services, but in certain circumstances, such as flooding, it can be declared by a local authority. At the local level, communities that have prepared their own Emergency Plans would be able to consider their invocation to support the emergency services on declaration of an emergency incident, or could choose to implement them in part outside of a declared incident, such as in response to a minor flooding situation, or to clear a fallen tree.

1.9 During an emergency incident, Winchester City Council also provides support to the emergency services. If the incident is of significance, the City will establish its Emergency Control Centre in the City Offices. The City Council will provide expertise in the functions for which it has responsibility, principally environment health, housing, building control and engineering. It will also provide a point of contact and dissemination of information for the District’s population and undertake a coordinating role. The City can also provide equipment and plant as requested by the emergency services.

2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

2.1 **At the first meeting of the Group**, Ian Hoult informed Members that the Cabinet Office was itself forming legislation to improve community resilience at the local level.

2.2 The objective of community resilience was to allow communities and individuals to harness local resources and expertise to join together to help themselves.

2.3 There had been a number of significant incidents such as flooding and severe weather that had highlighted the benefits that could be obtained through building community resilience.

2.4 Work had been carried out in recent years by Hampshire County Council prior to the forthcoming legislation to assist in building community resilience. The County Council had on its website under Emergency Planning Unit, Emergency Plans templates for preparing a Community Emergency Plan and associated guidance notes – these can also be viewed by this [link](#). These had been progressed through the Winchester Association of Parish Councils and via direct contact. Swanmore and Denmead Parish Councils had prepared their own plans with professional support provided by Hampshire County Council's Emergency Planning Unit.

2.5 It was for communities themselves to define the most appropriate boundaries and representation for their plan. For example, some community plans might be based on geographic boundary, such as a parish council ward area, but in other cases a cultural or ethnic Group or an individual housing development might be more appropriate. The template could be used in all circumstances with minor adjustment. A partnership approach was encouraged to develop the Community plan. An important message was for communities and individuals to protect themselves but not to put themselves in danger.

2.6 At the first meeting, two principal themes developed - the protection of the vulnerable and the importance of communications.

3.1 **At the second meeting of the Group**, the communication representatives stated that in response to the reporting of an incident, the emergency services would provide an immediate response where lives were threatened. Should the County Council's Emergency Planning Unit be contacted by the emergency services, the County's Communications Team would also be contacted through their 24 hour contact arrangements.

3.2 If the incident was of a significant nature, then a media cell would be established and the Local Resilience Forum's Major Incident Media Plan would be implemented. Within the Media Plan, mutual aid was important, with a duty officer on standby to provide an out-of-hours response if required.

3.3 During the heavy January snow, a telephone helpline was established through Hants Direct, with the Emergency Planning Unit working in association with Adult Services responding to calls. Adult services used their contacts with existing carers and the meals-on-wheels service to provide information about those at risk. Employers had been requested to allow staff to stagger their journeys and Local Resilience Forum agencies had worked together through the Media Plan to provide a consistent message.

3.4 Local media, such as BBC Solent, were used to provide a local message. Details on closures of schools were provided through radio and websites. In considering methods to provide local messages it was now recognised that social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, provided valuable sources of information.

3.5 Members agreed that a positive message should be given on the legal liabilities of homeowners clearing pathways outside of their properties.

3.6 The Group also discussed methods of communication with the public and parish councils. It was suggested that working through Neighbourhood Watch schemes, Residents' Associations, Scouting organisations and neighbours acting as volunteers could be useful. Information on access to sandbags would also be of use.

3.7 It was also recognised that for messages to be adopted, the timing of the message was important. Times of stress, such as in periods of heavy snow, were more likely times to stimulate public interest. Any proposal also needed to be resilient.

3.8 The Group supported the use of an emergency response card to promote the emergency planning message, including the promotion of wind-up radios and torches.

4.1 **At the third meeting of the Group**, representation was received from the following Parish Council and Voluntary Sector representatives:

Durley Parish Council - Frank Holtrum and Ann Collins
 Hursley Parish Council – Councillor Bell
 Northington Parish Council – Monica Nightingale
 Otterbourne Parish Council - Suzanne Hudson
 South Wonston Parish Council - Eileen Bolton
 Sparsholt Parish Council - David Parker
 Whiteley Parish Council - Kairen Goves
 Wickham Parish Council - Michael Bennett
 Winchester Area Community Action (WACA) - Paul Williams

4.2 Durley Parish Council had an emergency plan for the village and a list of vulnerable persons. Lessons learnt from the heavy snow in January had been the need for grit bins at crossroads and on steep hills, and also the importance of the parish hall for providing a safe refuge. The parish had no resources to provide bedding or emergency supplies. The publicity regarding the location of Rest Centres and local facilities was also raised.

4.3 Otterbourne Parish Council did have an emergency plan. What would be of use would be information on the availability of sandbags in the event of ground water flooding and also a building to store them in, together with information on their distribution and effective use. Neighbourhood and Civil Enforcement Officers also provided a valuable asset in protecting a community.

4.4 Sparsholt Parish Council sought clarity on methods of communication between parish councils and the Adverse Weather Unit, which had been established at Netley to co-ordinate the emergency response to the heavy snow in January. The awareness and sharing of information was extremely important.

4.5 The January heavy snow had caused considerable problems at Whiteley. Commuters had been trapped at Whiteley all night. No emergency refuge had been allocated and no signage or diversion signs had been provided to indicate that the Yew Tree Drive rising bollard system was open to all traffic. There was a need for digital information signs for Whiteley. In the event of an accident on the M27 or A27, Whiteley often came to a complete standstill. Unfortunately, when Whiteley traffic realised that there was a problem, residents were already committed to Whiteley Way and could not therefore turn around. Non urgent journeys could be postponed if digital traffic information signs were in place and this could reduce additional congestion. The principal issues arising were identifying who to call, the direction of people to an allocated safe area and the provision of improved information, perhaps through digital signs.

4.6 Hursley Parish Council did not have an emergency plan. However, a lot had been done to address the principal risks to the area including flooding, by installing pumps within cellars that were prone to flooding and also providing sandbags for individuals. Many properties within the community relied upon electricity for heating. During heavy snow and with the loss of power these properties would be unheated, perhaps for a period exceeding 24 hours. The provision of grit bins was now being looked into, as it had been found that in many areas their provision and the stockpile of grit had proved to be inadequate. The County Council had set aside financial provision for grit bins and had consulted with parish councils for their future provision. They would also ensure that they would be kept full.

4.7 South Wonston Parish Council did not have an emergency plan, and did not have a list of vulnerable people. The grit bins were also found to be empty in the January heavy snow. South Wonston was a compact community which aided communications, and information had been placed on Parish notice boards to inform the local community.

4.8 Wickham Parish Council did not have an emergency plan. The Parish Council did not have a list of vulnerable people and it was commented that such a list would be soon out of date unless it was frequently updated. The protection of the vulnerable relied upon neighbours checking each other's welfare. To improve communications in an emergency situation, it was suggested that a telephone number could be published to take calls and to receive, gather and collate information. For example in the recent heavy snow, parish councils had not been aware that the Adverse Weather Centre at Netley had been opened.

4.9 Northington Parish Council had coped well during the heavy snow. There was no provision of gas in the local area and following electricity cuts, hot drinks

could not be supplied. The Parish Council was unaware of the support that could be obtained from the County Council.

4.10 Winchester Area Community Action (WACA) supported voluntary and community Groups in parishes across the Winchester District. The organisation had 30 part-time staff. The organisation also provided skills in fund-raising, organisation and governance to voluntary and community organisations. WACA also had responsibility for dial a ride and community transport and had five minibuses and additional cars at its disposal. In the event of an emergency situation WACA could assist in compiling lists of vulnerable persons, provide transport, use its communication network and assist in co-ordination.

4.11 In respect of the involvement and support of WACA, the Group agreed that this should be investigated further but, due to the short lead-in time that was required to respond to an incident, for example in identifying vulnerable persons, the existing databases of Hampshire County Council Adult and Children Services should be relied upon.

5. Protection of vulnerable persons

5.1 Protection of those deemed to be vulnerable at local level was a major consideration for the Group. Mr Hoult informed Members that experience had shown that in the event of an evacuation of an area following an incident, some 70 per cent of those affected would self-evacuate. The focus of the emergency services was therefore to ensure the welfare of those remaining.

5.2 A major piece of work for the County Council at present was developing methods to identify and protect those deemed to be vulnerable. Work was progressing in conjunction with General Practitioners, the National Health Service and Hampshire County Council's Adult Services to identify those at risk.

5.3 Of importance to rural communities was the prolonged loss of electricity. Members of the Group identified that in rural communities which were without alternative means of power, such as gas or oil, the loss of electricity could leave a household without heating and a means of cooking for a considerable period. This situation was exacerbated where the vulnerable were involved. The electricity providers should prioritise restoration of services to take account of households that were most susceptible to the situation outlined above. Mr Hoult informed the meeting that the Emergency Planning Unit had close contact with Category 2 responders, such as the power utilities, to assist in prioritisation. During the heavy snow in early January 2010, 20,000 homes in the Hampshire Area had lost power, principally caused by trees falling against power lines.

5.4 The Group agreed that the Chairman would write a letter on behalf of the Group to all parish councils, to highlight the importance for residents and communities to build resilience at the local level in the event of a power failure.

5.5 The Group expressed concern that there was often no co-ordinated means of identifying the vulnerable within communities, though neighbour self-help was suspected to be widespread in varying forms. Members took this into consideration when taking evidence from Parish and Town Councils.

5.6 An additional consideration was the support to rural and vulnerable communities during a pandemic situation where communities and individuals could find themselves isolated from medical support and from neighbours to collect medical provision.

5.7 The Group acknowledged that in respect of the awareness of vulnerable people, the Winchester town area faced differing challenges from the rural communities due to its more transient student population and from visitors. It was agreed to take the Group's final report to the Winchester Town Forum.

6. Communications

6.1 Emergency planning had to strike a balance between raising awareness without raising alarm.

6.2 Of importance was finding a method to reach out into communities. A key objective was to identify a person to champion and lead on emergency planning at the local level and also a second individual to provide administrative support and be a custodian of emergency planning documentation. The Group agreed that the Chairman include reference to this in a letter to all parish councils.

6.3 The methods of communication employed were largely dependent on the nature of the incident. The emergency services would provide an immediate response where lives were threatened, and the "blue light" services were supported by their own communication teams.

6.4 In situations involving the County Council's Emergency Planning Unit, the means of contacting of the County's internal Communications Team was a priority. The Communications Team had a 24 hour contact arrangement. If the incident was of sufficient magnitude, then a media cell would be established and the Local Resilience Forum's Major Incident Media Plan would be implemented. The Media Plan also provided advice and guidance on disaster preparation and prevention. Members noted that this communication was perhaps more effective outward from the internal Communications Team and the Emergency Planning Unit than in the reverse direction.

6.5 The Major Incident Media Plan had been implemented on 5 January 2010, following notification of an extreme weather event by the Met Office. The Media Cell had been established at Gold Command at Netley Police Headquarters and had established a close working relationship with the national media to maintain a consistent message with the correct facts.

6.6 A telephone helpline had been established through Hants Direct. The filtering of calls provided the opportunity to check data on potentially violent clients and to use registered volunteers who had received the necessary clearance.

6.7 It was clarified that the Adverse Weather Office established during the January snows was part of the Police operation and was not for receiving public calls. However, consideration should be given to providing a point of contact for Parish Council's to use during an emergency as an alternative to the 999 number. Secondary points of contact in an emergency could possibly be through Hants Direct or Winchester City Council's out-of-hours service (though this would need enhancing for the purpose).

6.8 Appeals were made through local media and the County's own communications channels, such as its website, to encourage neighbours to provide support to those living within their local area. Messages had also been provided by radio and through websites to encourage employers to allow staff to stagger their journeys.

6.9 Examples of positive communications had been the update provided by the County's Director of Environment, which had been circulated to all Members and Parish Councils. In addition, frequent updates on the situation with regard to refuse collection had been circulated by the City Council.

6.10 The timing of promotional messages was important, for example to include items in the District's and County's publications in October prior to the winter season or to publish shortly after an incident such as the recent severe winter.

7. Methods to support community resilience

7.1 In planning for emergencies at the local level, the Group identified a number of key elements that should be given further consideration for inclusion within emergency planning.

7.2 To be effective at the local level a Community Plan needed to include details of plant and machinery that could be called upon to assist in the case of an incident. Examples included reference to local owners of chainsaws, tractors (with snow ploughs), four-wheel-drive vehicles and groups who may provide support, such as the Farmers' Union.

7.3 There were a number of high risk incidents that could be identified and planned for in advance. Such a situation might be the occurrence of flooding in a high risk area, such as an identified flood plain.

7.4 Although the County Council had opened five Prepared Rest Centres on the evening of 5 January 2010 due to the impact of heavy snow, two of which were in Winchester's area, the communication of their opening required further consideration. It was noted that the County Council was considering

mechanisms to open secondary buildings, for example schools and churches, to act as additional Rest Centres in times of an emergency.

7.5 The County Council and the supporting voluntary agencies, St John's Ambulance and the Red Cross, had committed considerable resources to provide these Rest Centre facilities and to support their continued opening, but the representatives of Whiteley Parish Council were unaware of their opening and had made representation to the Group that no facility had been provided. Appropriate signage should be provided, which could include the use of a parish notice board.

7.6 The means of communication between Parish Councils and the Adverse Weather Unit, which was opened at Netley to co-ordinate the emergency response to the heavy snow in January, needed to be established. There was a need to know who to call in the event of an emergency. The publication of a telephone number to take calls and to receive, gather and collate information would be of assistance. Parish Councils and residents needed to know who to go to for help. They also needed to be made aware that an incident was taking place and to be kept up-to-date on developments. There was also a need to know that a helpline for a co-ordinating body had been opened.

7.7 The use of local radio and websites was vitally important, for example in providing information on school closures as well as traffic information. It would be up to each Parish Council to decide how best to disseminate the information received within its own community.

7.8 The provision of salt and grit to cope with an extreme weather event, such as the heavy snow encountered in early January, required further consideration. It was noted that Hampshire County Council had contacted communities to treble the amount of grit bins provided in order that local communities could help themselves to improve community resilience.

7.9 In the parishes, it would be for the Parish Council to provide grit bins and Hampshire County Council would fill them free of charge. Winchester Town Forum was also considering provision of additional bins for the Winchester town area. The provision of grit bins at crossroads and on steep hills would be welcomed. There needed to be a regime to ensure that grit bins were kept full and there should be identification of who took responsibility for spreading the grit once it had been delivered by Hampshire County Council.

7.10 A clear and positive message should be given on the legal liabilities of homeowners clearing pathways of snow and ice outside of their properties prior to events.

7.11 The establishment of communication links with parish councils, neighbourhood watch schemes, residents' associations and scouting organisations could be useful. Methods of communicating information also

needed to be resilient and the messages themselves needed to be of sufficient quality, frequency and consistency to be of benefit.

7.12 Clarity of information on the provision of sandbags would be useful. This included information on their availability, distribution and effective use together with a means of storage.

7.13 The direction of people to allocated safe areas was of vital importance. Parish and community halls provided important safe refuges as part of community resilience. A number of parish councils had recognised the use of their parish hall to provide a refuge for stranded commuters, but they had no resources to provide bedding or emergency supplies. These parish halls were separate to the Rest Centres opened and operated by Hampshire County Council. Once opened, the Rest Centres and parish halls required sufficient publicity of their location.

7.14 The extent of the identification of the vulnerable between parish councils was variable, with some parish councils having a list of those deemed to be vulnerable, and with other parish councils relying on local knowledge and good neighbourly contact. Where a list existed it required frequent updating.

7.15 Retired military personnel had often been used at parish council level to prepare emergency plans.

7.16 Neighbourhood Wardens and Civil Protection Officers and PCSOs provided a valuable resource in protecting a community.

7.17 Special consideration should be given to Whiteley, which had been particularly badly affected in the January heavy snow. The provision of digital signage would have been of assistance to provide information that the Yew Tree Drive rising bollard system had been lowered and this access route was open to all traffic. Due to transport infrastructure issues, Whiteley was also vulnerable to other hazards, such as a major fire or an accident on the M27. The Group agreed that the County Council was making progress on a traffic management plan for Whiteley and it was satisfied that no further action needed to be taken. The Group was not supportive of the use of digital signs, as proposed by the Parish Council representative at Whiteley, in view of the balance of cost to benefits and the practicality of their use.

7.18 Parish Councils might consider establishing links with major employers in their areas to improve resilience and establish the possibility of mutual aid.

7.19 Winchester Area Community Action could provide assistance in compiling lists of vulnerable persons, providing transport and using its communications network to assist in co-ordination in the event of a major incident.

7.20 Parish Councils should establish a chain of command. Where possible, there should be a champion to lead on Emergency Planning and also a support

officer to collate documentation. There should also be a recognised point of reference such as the Parish Council Offices or the Clerk to the parish council.

7.21 The building of community resilience in Winchester Town required separate consideration. Due to the location within the town of the emergency services and Hampshire County Council's and Winchester City Council's Emergency Planning Units, an emergency would be readily dealt with through existing arrangements. It was agreed to take the Group's final report to a meeting of the Winchester Town Forum.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That in respect of the vulnerable:
 - 1.1 That Hampshire County Council be aware of the need to provide assistance to the vulnerable, not already on at risk register, living in rural communities in the event of a loss of electricity or a pandemic situation.
2. That in respect of communications:
 - 2.1 That Parish Councils and community groups be encouraged to identify a person to champion and lead on emergency planning and provide a second individual to provide administrative support and to store and update emergency planning documentation.
 - 2.2 That in the event of an incident, such as severe weather, frequent updates on the situation be circulated to all Members.
 - 2.3 That further consideration be given to publicising the opening of Prepared Rest Centres and Parish Community Halls when opened, to include signage and the use of Parish Notice Boards, in order that the public are directed to safe areas.
 - 2.4 That resilient communication channels be established between Parish Councils and other Community Groups with Emergency Plans and an incident control point, such as through Hants Direct or Winchester City Council's out-of-hours service (though this would need enhancing for the purpose).
 - 2.5 That public awareness of the need to tune into local radio stations and websites be increased.
 - 2.6 That information be provided on the provision of grit bins, their location, their replenishment and responsibilities for spreading grit in the event of adverse weather.
 - 2.7 That information be provided on the availability, distribution and effective use of the provision of sandbags.

- 2.8 That a clear and positive message be given on the legal liabilities of homeowners clearing pathways of snow and ice outside of their properties.
3. That in respect of Community Plans:
- 3.1 That plans include details of plant and machinery that can be called upon to assist in the event of an incident.
- 3.2 That identified high risks, such as flooding, be planned for in advance.
- 3.3 That special consideration be given to the needs of Whiteley (including the participation of the Whiteley Business Forum) and Winchester Town and that the final report be taken to the Winchester Town Forum.
- 3.4 That appropriate Parish Councils consider establishing links with major employers in their Parishes to improve resilience and establish the possibility of mutual aid and that Parish Councils be encouraged to work with neighbouring parishes to produce effective emergency plans.
- 3.5 That the resources and expertise available from Winchester Area Community action be given consideration when preparing community plans.
4. That the Environment Scrutiny Panel should review biennially the effectiveness of the changes recommended by it to Cabinet, if adopted.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The recommendations can be implemented from within existing resources, although if it is agreed that resilient communication channels are required to be established between Parish Councils and Winchester City Council's out-of-hours service there may be costs associated in enhancing it for this purpose.

RISKS

The Community Risk Register contains details of identified hazards and threats for the Winchester District.

HOW SUCCESS WILL BE MEASURED

That the Environment Scrutiny Panel biennially reviews the effectiveness of the changes recommended by it to Cabinet, if adopted.

THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ian Hault – County Emergency Planning Officer, Hampshire County Council.
Kate Ball, Head of Communications, Hampshire County Council
Eleanor Hodge, Head of Communications, Winchester City Council
Dennis Brady, Senior Emergency Planning Officer, Hampshire County Council

Durley Parish Council - Frank Holttrum and Ann Collins
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