Subject: Emergency Planning and Business Continuity

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Background and Reason for Briefing Note	Emergency Planning is the preparation that we take to respond to any emergency situation which may occur within the district's boundaries. Business continuity management refers to the arrangements we have in place to ensure that we can provide an agreed level of services in the event of an incident that has a detrimental impact on the organisation's ability to operate at normally. The Council has entered into an arrangement whereby we will receive support from Oxfordshire County Council to help us fulfil our emergency planning and business continuity requirements. This report provides a summary of our emergency planning and business continuity arrangements and the partnership approach with Oxfordshire County Council.

Background

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 ('the Act') creates a set of roles and responsibilities for those involved in emergency preparation and response at the local level. Under the Act, local authorities are defined as category 1 responders – one of the organisations at the core of emergency response. As a category 1 responder we are required 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 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.

Category 2 organisations (e.g. transport and utility companies) are "co-operating bodies" who, while less likely to be involved in the heart of planning work for emergencies, will be heavily involved in incidents that affect their sector.

Category 1 and 2 responders are also required to come together to form 'Local Resilience Forums' (based on police force areas) which will help co-ordination and co-operation between responders at the local level. We are an active participant in the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum (LRF).

The Act defines an emergency as an event or situation that threatens serious damage to human welfare if it involves:

- Loss of human life
- Human illness or injury
- Homelessness
- Damage to property
- Disruption of a supply of money, food, water, energy or fuel
- Disruption of an electronic or other system of communication
- Disruption of facilities for transport
- Disruption of services relating to health

An emergency incident can take many forms and includes-
- Severe weather (snow, flooding, wind, etc).
- Loss of utilities to residential properties (e.g. burst water pipe).
- Fire or explosion resulting in the need to evacuate an area.
- Serious accidents blocking major roads for significant periods.
- Terrorist attacks.

Our Current Arrangements

Cherwell District Council maintains an emergency plan which details the council's arrangements for responding to emergency incidents. This plan is in 2 parts. Part A is a public document explaining our role and how we prepare to respond to emergencies. Part B is an internal document detailing our emergency response arrangements. Central to our plans is a command and control structure based on the common and accepted structure used by all emergency responders. This approach is based around the following 3 levels-
- Gold level - with responsibility for policy decisions and determining overall strategy.
- Silver level – responsible for operational control to implement the policy and strategy determined by the gold commanders.
- Bronze level – responsible for tactical arrangements, at the location of the incident or support arrangements, to ensure agreed actions are implemented.

To support this we have in place a 'duty gold' manager arrangement under which there is a senior manager available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The duty manager will receive any calls or email alerts from our partners about current or potential emergency incidents. The duty manager will instigate the initial response to any incident, engaging with partners through any conference calls or coordination group meetings that are set-up, and bringing in other council staff as required.

Our emergency plan details the council staff able to fulfil the silver and bronze level roles and the key contacts for supporting services (e.g. ICT and property). The plan also includes our arrangements to establish Disaster Emergency Control Centres (DECCs). DECCS are established in the event of a significant incident the response to which requires cross-council coordination and close communications with partners.

The Emergency Plan also includes details of our arrangements to support the establishment of reception centres in the event that significant numbers of local residents have to be evacuated from their homes, or are unable to return to their homes, as a result of an incident.

Alongside our emergency plans the Thames Valley Resilience Forum maintains scenario specific plans for incidents which would require a coordinated response by a range of organisations. These plans encompass, as examples, water supply disruptions, fuel supply shortages, heatwaves and loss of use of key strategic roads. Locally, within Oxfordshire, we also maintain plans for incidents at high risk locations (e.g. where hazardous substances are stored) and high impact locations (e.g. Bicester village where an incident could affect a large number of people) in the district or close by.

An important part of planning for emergencies involves engaging with communities to raise awareness of the potential scenarios that could arise and to encourage community emergency planning and community resilience. Whilst we and our partners will always provide assistance in the event of an emergency situation, the need to prioritise helping the most vulnerable and those at greatest risk might mean individuals and communities need to rely on their own resources to ensure they are able to cope and to minimise the impact of an emergency.

Experience has shown that those who have spent time planning and preparing for potential problems are better able to cope and recover more quickly. Community emergency planning enables groups to provide more effective support and also provides better information to responding agencies (emergency services, local authority etc.) to help us plan and coordinate responses on a wider scale. It also helps to minimise the impact of incidents.

Business Continuity

Our business continuity management processes aim to ensure that we can continue to provide services to an acceptable level in the event of an incident that has a detrimental impact on the organisation's ability to operate normally. The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 requires local authorities to put into place effective business continuity management (BCM) systems to ensure that they can continue to perform their functions in the event of an emergency. In addition to this legal duty, councils have a moral duty to seek to maintain the provision of critical services in all eventualities.

A good business continuity management (BCM) system will reduce the risks of business continuity incidents as well as ensuring robust arrangements are in place to respond to incidents. There are a number of important elements in a comprehensive system. Central to the system are-
- Business Continuity Impact Assessments. These are assessments of the most important functions performed by teams or services, the impact of a loss of ability to provide these functions, the maximum amount of time we could sustain without providing this function before these impacts become unacceptable, the minimum resources required to continue to provide these services and our dependencies on other parties (e.g. supplies). These assessments form the basis of business continuity plans.
- Business Continuity Plans. These are the plans which are held at a team or service level which detail the how we will respond in the event that something occurs which impacts on our ability to provide the service and what we will do in order to reinstate a minimum acceptable level of services.

All our services have recently refreshed their business continuity impact assessments and business continuity plans.

Our Partnership with Oxfordshire County Council

Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) has an Emergency Planning Team consisting of 6 dedicated emergency planning officers. This team sits alongside the Fire and Rescue Service within their Community Safety Services directorate. The team fulfils the emergency planning responsibilities for OCC and also provides a coordinating function for the City and District Councils in Oxfordshire.

An important function provided by OCC's Emergency Planning Team is the development of the Oxfordshire elements of the Thames Valley plans. For example, the Thames Valley Adverse Weather plan includes an Oxfordshire annex which details the arrangements for responding to adverse weather incidents in Oxfordshire. This includes the key risks in Oxfordshire (e.g. locations more likely to flood or be isolated if roads are blocked by snow). The Oxfordshire annex includes more localised plans for each district. OCC's Emergency Planning Team coordinates the development of the Oxfordshire plan by working with each district council.

We have recently commenced a new partnership approach to emergency planning with OCC. Under this partnership OCC now provide direct support to us in order to help us maintain and improve our emergency plans and promote community resilience.

Until early 2018 Cherwell and South Northants Councils employed an Emergency Planning Officer. The separation of the councils would have resulted in a financial pressure for each council to sustain a dedicated emergency planning officer. As a result of the new arrangement with OCC, we will no longer need to directly employ an emergency planning officer. Instead, by working closely with OCC we are able to draw on the expertise of the wider group of emergency planning specialists which increases our resilience in this important area. Other benefits of this arrangement include a reduction in duplication of effort through having a single person represent both authorities at meetings and community events and the ability to undertake joint training and exercising of our plans.

Over the next few months OCC's Emergency Planning Team will be assisting us by-
- Training officers in the use of Resilience Direct (the national website used to share plans, incident response information, etc).
- Refreshing the information provided to our staff through the Intranet about Emergency Planning and Business Continuity.
- Developing training for our gold and silver managers on responding to incidents at sites where hazardous substances are stored (these locations have site specific plans to recognise the increased and unique risks they present in the event of fire, explosion, etc).
- Aligning the key contacts lists that we both maintain and which provide details of stakeholders and partners we may need to work with in the event of an incident. Through aligning these lists we can reduce the effort required to keep them up to date.

In addition, we are currently putting in place the arrangements which will enable OCC to represent us at community events and meetings where we wish to promote community resilience.

OCC are also assisting us in relation to business continuity through developing a new incident response plan and providing some exercises for teams to use to test their business continuity plans.

Whilst this partnership arrangement is being established and developed it will be reviewed quarterly in order to ensure that it fulfils our needs and delivers the benefits intended.

Completed by: Richard Webb   **Date: 12/3/19**

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