

Report to: Place Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 22 September 2021

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Emergency Planning and Business Continuity report

Purpose: To inform the Place Scrutiny Committee of actions taken during the Covid-19 Pandemic, the lessons learnt, and the way plans will change in future

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Committee is recommended to:

(1) Note the actions taken during the Covid-19 Pandemic, note that lessons capture planning is in progress and intended changes to future planning.

1 Background Information - ESCC Statutory Duties

1.1 East Sussex County Council (ESCC) has Statutory responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (CCA 04) to assess the risk of, plan for, train for, respond to and recover from emergencies that may occur within the Council's Area of Responsibility.

1.2 Organisations listed in the act have a duty under Section 2 to assess the risk of an emergency occurring, make plans to prevent, mitigate or control the emergency and provide advice, guidance and to warn and inform the public. These organisations are numerous and varied and are divided into two Categories:

- Category One responders are, essentially, organisations that have a legal obligation to carry out these activities. This includes Local Authorities, Emergency Services, The National Health Service, the Environment Agency, Maritime and Coastguard Agency and similar organisations.
- Category Two responders are those organisations that may have a role in the management of an emergency but are not subject to the Act's requirements. This again includes a large number of organisations, but essentially is comprised of organisations such as Network Rail, Utilities Companies, Health and Safety Executive and similar and are referred to as 'co-operating bodies.'

In addition to these two Categories, there is a third group which consists of other organisations such as the Military, Volunteer Organisations and similar who do not have duties under the act, but can be available to provide support to an Emergency Response. Category One responders are specifically required to have regard for these organisations in relation to Emergency Planning and Management.

1.3 In general Category One organisations are required to carry out the following:

- assess the risk of emergencies occurring and use this to inform contingency planning
- put in place emergency plans and 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 and co-operate with other local responders to enhance co-ordination
- co-operate with other local responders to enhance co-ordination and efficiency

2 The Sussex Resilience Forum

2.1 In order to carry out effective Multi Agency contingency planning there is a need for a mechanism to enable the various partners to come together in an organised manner. To achieve this, the United Kingdom is divided into 42 non-Statutory Bodies known as Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) which follow the boundaries of local Police Services. LRFs are not legal entities, do not have the power to elect members and are not currently provided with regular core funding and activities are instead funded by partners. Responders do, however, have a collective responsibility to plan, prepare and communicate in a multi-agency environment. LRFs also have reporting lines to the Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBR) via the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) who are represented locally via a Government Liaison Officer for the area. In early 2021, the Government provided funding to LRFs via MHCLG as part of a central funding pilot with the intent that LRFs use this to augment their operations and report on impacts. At the time of writing, this is projected to be spent against securing staff to support the Secretariat and certain key delivery areas such as Risk and Learning and Development.

2.2 Locally, The Sussex Resilience Forum (SRF) is this body and aligns with the Sussex Police boundaries. From a Local Authority perspective, this means that West Sussex County Council, Brighton and Hove City Council and the Borough and District Authorities are all partners and have a responsibility to be involved in the activities of the SRF bringing to bear the capabilities, resources, and responsibilities of Upper and Lower Tier and Unitary Local Authorities. These responsibilities are summarised in Appendix 1.

2.3 Emergency Planners work closely with their opposite numbers within partner organisations to create regional plans that draw on the skills, specialist knowledge and capabilities of their respective organisations. Operational information is also routinely shared among partners such as forthcoming events, protests, weather reports and similar. During an Emergency, there may be occasions where a partner organisation needs assistance with their response or specialist capability. This is managed via a notification cascade and any partner can declare a Major Incident¹ or request support via the SRF. The forum may then stand up to control and mitigate the incident and to provide support to partner agencies.

2.4 There are additional pan regional groupings and other partnerships that also carry out joint planning and communication activities, but these are omitted from this report to concentrate on the key bodies. These groupings vary in their composition and structure depending on the needs and arrangements made between their member organisations.

3 The East Sussex Resilience and Emergencies Partnership

3.1 Within East Sussex, Emergency Planning and Resilience is provided through a Local Authority partnership between East Sussex County Council and 4 of the 5 Borough and District Councils. Member organisations all contribute to a central budget that provides funds to employ the Emergency Planning Team and to carry out training activities across the partnership. The following organisations are members: East Sussex County Council, Lewes and Eastbourne Councils, Wealden District Council and Hastings Borough Council and East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service. Each Authority has an Emergency Planning

¹ A Major Incident is defined under Joint Operating Doctrine as “An event or situation with a range of serious consequences which requires special arrangements to be implemented by one or more emergency responder agency.”

Officer allocated to provide support. Each officer will also be responsible for specialisms that are relevant across the partnership, such as flooding or coastal pollution.

4 The Emergency Planning and Resilience Team

4.1 The overarching role of the Emergency Planning and Resilience Team (EP&R Team) is to support each organisation to meet their statutory requirements under CCA 04 and a key part of this is to work towards common approaches, depending on the needs of each partner. The team also works closely with our multi-agency partners within the SRF to support pan-Sussex Emergency Management planning. A structure chart of the EP&R Team is at appendix 4.

4.2 The EP&R Team operates a 24/7 on call system in order to receive notifications of and carry out initial steps into managing notifiable incidents. A notifiable incident can be loosely described as one that meets or could meet set notification criteria, requires a multi-agency response, is a declared Major Incident or requires the support of one or more capabilities specific to an organisation. This is, however, by no means limited to these descriptions and the Team support a wide variety of calls. While the activities and subject matter of the Team are broad, they can be distilled into key areas of delivery that apply to all of our partners. The detail can be found at appendix 2:

5 Emergency Planning during the Covid-19 Emergency

5.1 The EP&R Team first began working with the Covid-19 Emergency as cases were being identified in Wuhan, China and subsequently as the first cases were identified in Brighton. Initially, this role was one of horizon scanning, consideration of likely tasks, support to Public Health teams and provision of operational advice as contact tracing and similar activities commenced. In March 2020, the government imposed the first of the series of lockdowns and the Sussex Resilience Forum declared a Major Incident therefore activating the Forum on an Emergency Response footing. All partners activated their Business Continuity plans to enable a rapid shift to long term home working.

5.2 A number of working groups were established in order to manage the fast moving and complex situation. These were not limited to Covid-19 work due to the need to retain the ability to manage concurrent emergencies, carry out EU Exit planning activities and prepare for the summer and winter weather. These working groups consisted of Emergency Planners, Senior Officers and specialists and have varied throughout the response to Covid-19 depending on areas of work, current guidance and need. Entire organisations have been mobilised to support the events of the last year. Appendix 3 details the workstreams set up to respond to the Covid-19 Major Incident. Much of this work continues today.

5.3 At the time of writing, the SRF partners, ESREP Senior Officers and the EP&R Team are continuing to monitor the situation while taking initial steps forward to recovery of the communities that we serve, our own organisations and our team. In the same way that responding has been wholesale, this recovery is wholesale and includes recovering our communities, organisations, teams, capabilities and fundamental ways of working while supporting the decompression and wellbeing of ourselves and our colleagues. This period serves as an opportunity to reflect and to take the time to change our approaches where needed. The SRF is currently carrying out Business Planning in order to inform recovery of Business as Usual Work and this should be in a position for sign off in September. This SRF Plan will consider the one-off pilot funding outlined at paragraph 2.1. Additionally, the ESREP Board is now sitting in its peacetime format and as such, the Emergency Planning Team are working on their proposals for the recovery of ESREP work to Business as Usual.

6 Business Continuity

6.1 At the beginning the Coronavirus Pandemic, East Sussex County Council was required to implement business continuity arrangements. Most plans were able to flex to meet the immediate requirements placed upon the Council.

6.2 One of the most notable requirements was the rapid adaptation to enable most of the workforce to work from home. This was unprecedented and required significant work to provide equipment and software to enable this effectively including providing Display Screen equipment and similar to staff members. At the time, Skype and similar tools were not commonly used so staff members had to adapt quickly to working from home. The roll out of these measures had not previously been planned for to the extent that was required, however, ESCC successfully implemented them to continue delivering vital services while simultaneously responding to an emergency that affected nearly every aspect of staff and service users lives.

6.3 It is too early to comprehensively report on lessons while ESCC has only recently moved away from a response and business continuity footing. At key points during the pandemic, interim lessons capture was conducted, and planning is now in progress to enable the capture of a more consolidated picture. Anecdotally, key areas that have been identified include:

- The requirement to have sufficient supplies / procurement channels of vital equipment and people trained in their use including:
 - PPE
 - Laptops and IT equipment
- Staff members require effective software solutions to enable effective remote working and be trained or familiar with their use.
- Team Managers will need to be flexible in their approaches and afford staff welfare a high priority; supporting the social aspects of work to ensure staff are not isolated.
- All staff members should be aware of what to do in the event of an emergency and / or business continuity incident and receive training to be able to effectively carry out their role.
- The Pandemic has demonstrated how well organisations and departments can work together. Strong partnerships and working relationships have been built and these must be maintained wherever practicable.
- Where information exists that suggests a response may be required (for example an incident that may increase in severity), supporting structures should be stood up to carry out refresher training and be prepared to respond.

6.4 Going forward, the Corporate Business Continuity Group is preparing to undertake a review of Business Continuity measures across the East Sussex Resilience and Emergencies Partnership. This review is likely to focus on identification and implementation of lessons, review of structures, roles and plans, supporting staff with updating their parts of the Business Continuity Management System (BCMS) and implementation.

7 Recovery and Forward Planning

7.1 Recovery from an incident is usually led by Local Authorities and this is the case for the recovery from Covid-19. As the SRF transitions to recovery, a handover of responsibilities will take place between the Emergency Services and Local Authorities. Working with our partners in both the SRF, ESREP, and within ESCC, the team will be focussing on supporting organisational recovery objectives as they are

developed. It is anticipated that much of this work is likely to be undertaken by departments as they recover to their own normal service provision and the EP&R Team stands ready to provide support.

7.2 An Executive Recovery Steering Group chaired by the joint ESCC and West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) Chief Executive will set the strategic direction of recovery in Sussex and will be supported by a Recovery Co-ordinating Group and in turn its supporting working groups. These groups will be focussed towards economic, cultural and skills recovery while ensuring community safety activity continues. This work is already underway with the establishment of Events working groups, Summer and Coastal Safety Working Groups and re-establishment of prioritised Business as Usual structures and outputs.

8 Emergency Planning & Resilience Team Forward Look

8.1 The Team will initially focus inwardly in order to re-organise and develop the capability but will support priority emergency planning activities of our partners. While forward planning is currently in the conceptual stage there is a need to capitalise on the time available to us and carry out a programme of review and change to develop a long-term approach that effectively re-invents the capability. Many activities have been paused due to the response to EU Exit and Covid-19 and require review and either refresh, restart or redesign. To support this the team will be proposing a draft new Vision for Emergency Planning within ESREP:

“To provide a, well prepared, agile and innovative Emergency Management capability in order to protect, support and recover our communities in the event of any incident”

8.2 The likely areas of focus will include:

- Review and redesign of Emergency Management processes where appropriate to focus on agility, information management, decision support and staff confidence from a pan organisational perspective.
- Development of a large-scale learning and development programme aimed at ensuring our teams continue to be prepared and resilient. The vision for this work will include core training, horizon scanning, emerging thinking and knowledge sharing as well as offering more opportunity to practice and rehearse roles.
- Identification of new technologies to reduce information and administrative burdens while improving long term sustainability
- A renewed focus on decision making tools and information management structures

8.3 While there is no ‘End State’ for Emergency Planning due to the nature of the work and the ever-evolving risks our nation and communities face, the ultimate goal for the team is to ensure our organisations and colleagues responsibilities are standardised, clear, and that staff are well trained, rehearsed and confident to carry out their roles in Emergency Management. We will work towards developing the use of technology such as Geographic Information Systems, Learning Management Systems, distributed learning, and Information Management / Communication channels to provide the right information and learning to the right people at the right time. Our learning and development activities will work towards ensuring that colleagues are not only trained, but are practiced, confident and empowered. We will support work towards creating an open culture that is not afraid of learning and sharing lessons.

9 Proposed Key Changes

9.1 Emergency Planning is currently working on a revised approach to delivery of Business as Usual activities. This approach will require ongoing development with numerous supporting elements, however, key highlights are listed below:

- **Creation of an ESREP Risk Register.** This will be created to complement the Sussex Community Risk Register and is intended to provide an overview of internal risks and to include operational risk areas such as skills shortages
- **Lessons Capture.** Due to the long duration and significant amount of work carried out to respond to the pandemic, the identification of lessons and their implementation will be a long term area of work. Emergency Planning are working on a procedure that is anticipated to enable debriefing of key working groups while supporting wider lessons capture from all staff via survey.
- **Consolidation of Plans.** Each Partner currently maintains separate plans and it has been identified that these contain common procedures. Where practicable and agreed by Partners, the team will aim to amalgamate these plans to improve efficiency, establish common operating procedures and strengthen the Partnership
- **Consolidation of Exercises.** In order to reduce demands on officer time across the partnership, Emergency Planning will seek to adopt a non-linear approach to exercising that reduces the number of individual events required. This will consist of a single annual emergency exercise supported by relevant multi-agency partners and a single Business Continuity exercise. Both of these will aim to validate multiple plans at once and double as a rehearsal and learning event so that colleagues can practice their roles together and develop new tools and ways of working. Essentially, switching focus from the plan to the people carrying it out.
- **Creating and Embedding Technological Solutions.** The team will be working to understand and incorporate new technologies available to the Partnership. In the early stages of the pandemic, a lot of activity and process had to be created at short notice and, due to the tools available at the time, this created sustained additional workloads. The team will aim to create information sharing systems that the whole organisation can utilise to access and manage the information they need at the right time while reducing workloads.
- **Focus on the Legislation.** Emergency Planning will base recovery work based on legislation in order to ensure that statutory requirements are at the core of our work. These areas will act as our priority and in future, we will look to expand our reach into new areas of work such as climate change adaptation.

10 Conclusion

10.1 Delivery of our work affects multiple partners and our ability to resource this effectively and sustainably is key to success. A revised approach which focuses on the ability to respond and simultaneously carry out rapid planning activities will be developed. The last 18 months have shown the importance of an effective Emergency Management and Business Continuity capability and, in addition, the need to ensure that plans are simple and clear. There is a need for the team to recover the “Pre-Covid” Business as Usual activities while simultaneously rebuilding, learning, and innovating.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

ALL

Local Authority Responsibilities in the Sussex Resilience Forum

County Councils Roles & Responsibilities

- Alert other local authorities and Category 1 (and 2) Responders
- Deploy liaison officers (when appropriate)
- Provide a Strategic level officer to the Strategic Coordinating Group
- Assist in warning and informing of the general public
- Coordinate voluntary organisations response in conjunction with the SRF Community Resilience Partnership.
- Establish an Emergency Mortuary
- Provide Social Care and welfare arrangements to assistance centres and receiving hospitals
- Provide social care staff to assist Police Family Liaison in the Victim Identification Process
- Provide and manage Humanitarian Assistance Centres
- Coordinates the provision of transport for evacuees
- Arrange road closures and diversions
- Site Clearance
- Waste disposal
- Co-ordinate aftercare, in conjunction with the police, health services and voluntary organisations.
- Co-ordinate the County Council's emergency response with adjacent areas
- Alert the relevant Director of Public Health to all emergencies posing actual or potential toxic hazards, including oil pollution, so that an early assessment can be made of any possible threat to public health
- Coordinate coastal pollution response, providing a Maritime TCG if requested by the MCA.

Boroughs & Districts Roles & Responsibilities

- Alert other local authorities and organisations, including parish councils.
- Deploy liaison officers
- Assist in warning and informing of the general public
- Provide a Strategic level officer to the Strategic Coordinating Group (when appropriate)
- Provide and manage Rest Centres & arrange emergency feeding
- Support the running of Survivor Reception Centres
- Coordinate the provision of Transport (if not already being carried out by County)
- Re-housing and accommodation needs for displaced persons.
- Support to major public events
- Respond to local coastal pollution incidents
- Waste removal
- Provide technical and engineering advice
- Environmental health advice and services,
- Building Control Services e.g. structural safety advice

Unitary Authority Roles & Responsibilities

As a Unitary Authority, Brighton & Hove City Council has all the responsibilities of both county councils and boroughs/district councils.

Local Authority Roles in Response and Recovery

The local authority will play an enabling role in close collaboration with a wide range of bodies who are not routinely involved in emergency response – e.g. voluntary sector, land owners. In particular, the local authority will work with partners to:

- Provide immediate shelter and welfare for survivors not requiring medical support and their families and friends via Rest, Humanitarian and other Centres to meet their immediate short-term needs. Support will also be given to the Police in the operation of Survivor Reception Centres and Family and Friends Reception Centres
- Maintain critical services to the community
- Provide medium to longer-term welfare of survivors and those affected by the emergency, including social care support and, in some cases, financial support. Local authorities play a major role in addressing the communities ongoing needs in the aftermath of a significant incident
- Provide Building Control inspectors to advise the rescue services on the condition and accessibility of damaged structures
- Clean up of pollution and facilitate the remediation and reoccupation of sites or areas affected by an emergency
- Liaise with the Coroner's office to provide emergency mortuary capacity where existing mortuary capacity is exceeded
- Coordinate the activities of the various voluntary sector agencies involved in an emergency, including the management of convergent volunteers
- Lead the Recovery effort, which is likely to carry on for a considerable time and is likely to involve many organisations that are not ordinarily involved emergency response. (See SRF Recovery Plan.)

The coordination of Voluntary Sector resources and response will be the responsibility of the County Council in conjunction with the SRF Sussex Community Resilience Partnership.

Key Areas of Delivery for the Emergency Planning & Resilience Team

- Risk assessment
- Creating and reviewing Emergency and / or Business Continuity Plans
- Training – either delivery or co-ordination of role-based training or training specific to a plan / activity.
- Exercising the plans and processes and providing an opportunity to rehearse roles
- Providing advice to staff with an Emergency Management Role
- Supporting Emergency Management
- Supporting Recovery from an emergency or incident
- Supporting debriefing and lessons capture following an incident, training, or exercise
- Continuous improvement

These activities are carried out routinely, no matter which subject area is being delivered. Some examples of the subject areas that are dealt with by the team include:

- Emergency Response and Recovery Planning
- Flood Planning
- Mass Fatalities Planning
- Coastal Pollution Planning
- Events oversight
- Pandemic planning
- Animal Diseases Planning
- Adverse Weather (e.g., heatwave, cold weather, ice and snow)
- Humanitarian Planning (e.g., Rest Centre plans, Vulnerable People plans)
- Specific site planning (e.g., Culfail Tunnel)

SRF Workstreams set up to Respond to the Covid-19 Major Incident and Concurrent Incidents Responded to.

The paragraphs below are intended to provide a high-level overview of the key work areas during the main phases of pandemic response. Due to the volume and diversity of work undertaken, it is not possible to cover all outputs and instead the detail below focusses on key purpose and themes.

- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Logistics.** In the early stages of the pandemic, PPE supply chains were stretched due to national demand. This working group was comprised of multiple partners who worked with MHCLG to co-ordinate the local supply and demand across the area. A distribution hub was created, and management of the facility was carried out by East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service with local prioritisation carried out by the Adult Social Care team. This group successfully managed a restricted resource and enabled partners to access required PPE on a priority basis.
- **Vulnerable and Shielded People and Wellbeing.** The Vulnerable People Group focussed mostly on the provision of support to the Shielded Population in Sussex who were required to isolate themselves due in most part to health vulnerabilities. Adult Social Care teams managed the distribution of food parcels to shielded people and augmented supply by organising local arrangements with meals on wheels providers and similar. Additionally, Borough and District colleagues worked to establish Community Hubs to provide advice and guidance to the public and businesses impacted by the lockdown arrangements.
- **Volunteers.** Due to the large number of volunteers who offered their support, a cell was set up in order to assist with the management of requests for support and to ensure that volunteer organisations were engaged with effectively. Volunteers were used extensively throughout the response and, in particular were central to the management of testing at Newhaven Port following the closure of the French Border and subsequent re-opening before Christmas 2020.
- **Economy.** An early decision of the SRF was to lead recovery through place-based services within each local authority. The economic work-stream was led by ESCC with involvement from partners such as the Borough and Districts and via the Chamber of Commerce.
- **EU Exit including port closures during the Christmas period.** Concurrently to the management of the second wave of Coronavirus in the lead up to Christmas 2020, a working group was established to plan mitigations for any impacts caused by the UK's exit from the EU on 31 December 2020. This group focussed on ensuring a co-ordinated response across agencies such as HM Border Force, Sussex Police, Local Authorities, the Chamber of Commerce, Department for Transport and Newhaven Port resulting in the production of an EU Exit plan that drew together traffic management, testing requirements and similar in order to ensure smooth operations around the port, surrounding areas and approaches from road Service Areas designated as advice points for HGV drivers. Notably, and with the support of the Red Cross, St John's Ambulance and volunteers from the NHS and clinical groups, the group successfully responded to the closure of French Borders; arranging volunteers and clinicians to carry out testing at the port which enabled around 200 drivers to depart before Christmas and return to their families on the continent.
- **Coronavirus Testing.** The Testing Group has worked in multiple areas of testing provision. These have included the initial provision of Mobile Testing Units subsequently followed by Pharmacy Testing, Community Mass Testing, Surge Testing. For reasons of brevity, these are not fully detailed within this paper, however, the Group was charged with translating Government plans into local delivery often at short notice.

- **Recovery and Events.** The Recovery and Events working group transition to become a stand-alone Events working group across Sussex. This group formed with the aim of understanding the numerous events being planned as part of the unlock programme. Formed from Local Authority Teams, it includes Emergency Planners, Directors of Public Health, Environmental Health Officers and numerous others. It focussed on ensuring coronavirus guidance for Event Organisers was clear, adhered to and that a common approach was taken across Sussex.
- **Vaccinations.** The Vaccinations working group was led by health partners and focussed on co-ordinated delivery of vaccinations across the region. ESCC assisted in identifying suitable premises as vaccination sites.
- **Winter and Summer Preparedness.** While focus was maintained on responding to the pandemic, there remained a requirement to ensure that multi-agency partners were prepared to respond to adverse weather, floods and similar hazards, while ensuring that a focus was maintained on public safety at coastal areas. In the winter period, this group worked alongside colleagues in Public Health and Testing workstreams to plan mitigations for adverse weather impacts on key pandemic facilities such as Mobile Testing Unit sites, Vaccination Sites, Temporary Mortuary Facilities and similar.
- **Communications.** The communications group transitioned to a Multi-Agency Coordination Cell early in the pandemic response and was supported extensively by ESCC Communications Team colleagues. The purpose of this group was to ensure that a common information and intelligence picture was maintained across the SRF, communications were aligned and that the large quantity of guidance and direction was managed.
- **Death Management and Bereavement.** The Death Management and Bereavement Cell was led by Local Authority members and was charged with establishing temporary mortuary facilities across Sussex in order to provide contingency and to ensure that the deceased and their families were treated with dignity. Temporary mortuaries were established in Hastings, Chichester, Worthing and the Brighton and Sussex University Medical School and these were stood up during the second wave of the pandemic in late 2020. This group has now absorbed the standing Mass Fatalities working group with a view to building these temporary facilities into core capability for the future to be located centrally at Woodvale Mortuary, Brighton.
- **MAIC – Multi-Agency Information Cell.** This was led by Sussex Police from Gatwick Airport using Police staff usually deployed in the busy airport. It was supported by Local Authority staff to co-ordinate information, advice and guidance from Government to partners. It provided maps and data to support the pandemic response.

Additional Incidents

In addition to the Covid 19 Emergency, the team and partners managed several large and sometimes Major Incident status emergencies that included:

- Major water supply failure
- Multiple fires including at Newhaven Port, care homes and a school
- Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) evacuations
- Care Home power failure
- Coastal pollution reports

- Wildfire
- Sulphuric acid spillage on the highway
- Storms and flooding

Emergency Planning and Resilience Structure Chart

