

CIVIL CONTINGENCIES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the CIVIL CONTINGENCIES COMMITTEE held in the Authority Rooms, Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Nissan Way, Barmston Mere, Sunderland on MONDAY, 7TH JULY, 2008 at 11.30 a.m.

Present:

Councillor Bell in the Chair

Councillors Charlton, Clark, Cooney Renton and Wright.

Appointment of Chairman

1. RESOLVED that Councillor Bell be appointed as Chairman for the ensuing period to the next annual meeting.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Heron and McIntyre.

Appointment of Vice Chairman

2. RESOLVED that Councillor Charlton be appointed Vice-Chairman for the ensuing period to the next annual meeting.

Minutes

3. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last Committee held on 10th March, 2008 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

TWEPU Business Plan 2008 - 2010

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer (CEPO) submitted a report (copy circulated) informing Members of the publication of TWEPU's Business Plan for 2008 - 2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The CEPO outlined the Agreement that existed between the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority (TWFRFA) and the five Tyne and Wear constituent authorities to provide an annual business plan in order to meet the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) 2004.

Members were advised that a joint Business Planning Workshop was held in October 2007 between the TWEPU and T&W councils to review progress against the requirements of the CCA and the national capabilities programme and identify and agree future challenges for inclusion in the EPU Business Plan. A further Workshop was planned to be held on 30 October, 2008, prior to which, a review of the current EPU Business Plan would be undertaken.

Partnership Risk Management had been included as a new feature in the Business Plan 2008 – 2010. The CEPO explained that arrangements had also been made for an Internal Audit of the resilience partnership to be undertaken during 2008-09 and for a 'health check' to be undertaken by the Strategic Management Board to identify improvements. Moreover, a National Capabilities Survey had been undertaken in January 2008 which included questions on the work of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) partnership. A report detailing the results of the survey would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

The CEPO advised that an extensive list of key achievements throughout 2007 - 2008 were outlined within the document on pages 16 and 17. Nonetheless, the TWEPU were not complacent and many challenges lay ahead. Members were advised of the intention to refine the Business Plan further, in order to make clearer linkages with council business plans to work in a more integrated way; and to address the new CLG National Performance Indicators for local authorities.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

4. RESOLVED to note the publication of the TWEPU Business Plan 2008 - 2010.

EPU Performance Against Targets 2007 - 2008

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with a progress update regarding the analysis of performance against the targets contained in the EPU Business Plan 2007 – 2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members were advised that the process of reporting progress on performance was fairly rigorous with five reports produced each year. These were discussed at regular meetings involving the CEPO and the five constituent authorities.

The CEPO stated that various challenges had occurred during 2007-2008 which significantly increased the work pressure of EPU staff. The challenges included long-term sickness, followed by the untimely and very sad death of a long standing, highly respected and valued senior colleague; and the recruitment of new staff.

Notwithstanding the above, the TWEPU had met all planned work targets with exception of one target relating to the National Emergency Fuel Plan which was delayed as information was awaited from BERR. Furthermore, a series of unscheduled work projects which had arisen during the course of the year had also been completed - these were individually outlined within the report.

Councillor Renton enquired whether feedback would be provided following the Vulnerable People Workshop event held on 13th March, 2008. In response the CEPO advised that follow up reports would be presented to the Civil Contingencies Committee to supplement the report in question.

The Chairman thanked the CEPO and all the EPU staff for their hard work which had resulted in an excellent years work once again.

Consideration having been given to the matter, it was:-

5. RESOLVED to note the report.

Exercise 'Northern Sentinel'

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer submitted a report (copy circulated) providing feedback to the Committee on Exercise 'Northern Sentinel' – a two day counter terrorist event facilitated by Northumbria Police, held in Gateshead on 27th and 28th March, 2008. The report included information regarding exercise outcomes, the impact on local authorities and next steps.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

6. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

COMAH Regulations 1999: International Paint Off Site Emergency Plan – Consultation and Evaluation

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer and Chief Fire Officer submitted a joint report (copy circulated) advising the Committee of the off-site emergency plan validation exercise for International Paint based in Felling Gateshead.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

International Paint had been designated as a top-tier COMAH site in 2005 following an amendment to the COMAH regulations lowering the thresholds within Schedule 1. The specific category identified for the site was Schedule 1, part 3 which specifically related to substances classified as 'Dangerous to the environment'. An off-site plan was developed in conformity with the statutory guidance, and a validation exercise held to test its provisions. The plan would be reviewed regularly to sustain the safety of the public near the site.

Consideration having been given to the matter, it was:-

7. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Vulnerability Workshop on 13 March 2008

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with feedback on the key issues raised following the Northumbria Vulnerability Workshop held on 13th March, 2008.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The CEPO advised that TWEPU were one of the first areas in the country to begin work in addressing the vulnerability people issue and there was currently very little guidance available on this important and challenging topic.

The Chairman of the Civil Contingencies Committee was present at the Workshop which involved experts in relative fields including representatives from the EPU, local authorities, health agencies, police and voluntary organisations. The aim of which was to enhance planning, response and recovery within the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum area for personal vulnerability arising from major emergencies.

Comments and observations from the workshop had been collated and used as a starting point for a strategy paper. The paper was intended to provide a strategic context within which individual responding agencies would undertake planning activities. This was due to be presented to the Local Resilience Forum for approval on 25th June, 2008.

The Chairman expressed that it was pleasing to see that communications were conducted as widely as possible and involved representatives from voluntary groups.

Councillor Renton enquired in what context or respect people would be identified as vulnerable. In response, the CEPO advised that an agreed definition of vulnerability in the context of emergencies was currently being developed as part of the workshop outcomes.

Councillor McIntyre enquired whether the Mississippi Hurricane and other incidents from across the world had been used to inform this work. The CEPO advised that the EPU and Cabinet Office do examine the valuable lessons learnt from previous incidents and these are taken into account in the development of national guidance and local resilience planning work.

Consideration having been given to the matter, it was:-

8. RESOLVED to:-
 - (i) note the contents of the report; and
 - (ii) receive future reports as appropriate.

Emergency Planning Beacon Authority Event

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer submitted a report (copy circulated) advising the Committee of the key issues and lessons learned from the one day Emergency Planning Beacon Event held on 1st April, 2008 in Leeds.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The purpose of the event was to provide an opportunity for the two-way sharing of good practice between Beacon Authorities and Emergency Planning colleagues. Much of the good practice promoted by Beacon Councils was already in place in Tyne and Wear. Even so, the information provided was being assessed to identify whether any refinements could be made to improve practice.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

9. RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

Website Monitoring: Terrorism

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer submitted a report (copy circulated) advising Members of the stringent management and monitoring procedures in place for the EPU website.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The CEPO advised that the TWEPUs were one of the first Units in the country to launch a bespoke website in 2005 to help address the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act, and statistics showed that it was quite popular with over 20,000

unique visits to the site. A revamp of the site was planned to update the appearance and content of the site. Members were informed that all published data was compliant with legislative requirements, and that measures were in place to ensure that sensitive information was excluded. However, a secure area was available for local authorities to access secure information via the use of a username and password.

Members were informed that terrorists were known to interrogate such sites in an attempt to glean information to inform the planning of illegal activities, and that some instances of potentially suspicious browser activity had been identified. However members were reassured that website activity was carefully monitored and that well established processes were in place for the routine reporting of this activity to the Police Counter Terrorist Security Adviser for investigation where necessary.

Consideration having been given to the matter, it was:-

10. RESOLVED to note the content of the report, particularly the robust arrangements in place for website monitoring.

(Signed) J. BELL,
Chairman.