

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, Washington on MONDAY, 6 JULY, 2009 at 10.30 a.m.

Present:

Councillor Bell in the Chair

Councillors Charlton, Clark, Jordan and T. Wright.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors N. Forbes and Scaplehorn.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 9 March 2009 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Pandemic Influenza Update

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer (CEPO) submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an update on current planning activity in relation to pandemic influenza.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Committee noted that there had been 8,000 cases of pandemic influenza in the United Kingdom with 5 deaths and there had been 50 cases in the North East and no deaths.

In reply to a question from Councillor Clark, the Deputy Chief Emergency Planning Officer advised that the Emergency Planning Unit and other organisations had planned for a 50% loss of staff and anti-viral medicines would be available for staff in the health, police, fire and emergency planning services and those helping and treating people.

Councillor Clark asked when the next Local Resilience Forum (LRF) meetings would take place and the Deputy Chief Emergency Planning Officer confirmed that the LRF Exercise and Training Group had arranged two 2½ hour awareness sessions on 16 July 2009 at Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Headquarters for all LRF Members.

The Northumbria LRF Excess Deaths Group was due to meet in July 2009 to address the issue of the Northumbria LRF Pandemic Influenza Excess Deaths Plan for activation and to agree trigger points for escalation between the phases of the Plan.

The LRF Vulnerabilities Group had been established to take forward issues about supporting vulnerable people before, during and after an emergency and would meet in due course.

A small working group made up of Members from the LRF Public Communications Group was developing an LRF Communications protocol.

Councillor Clark asked who was responsible for the LRF Vulnerabilities Group and the Chief Emergency Planning Officer confirmed that Tony Metcalfe at Newcastle City Council was responsible for taking forward the Vulnerability Strategy.

In reply to a question from Councillor Wright relating to risk assessments, Councillor Bell reported that as Chair of the Committee she received regular updates from the Authority on the planning activity in relation to pandemic influenza, however the risk assessments were undertaken by Officers through the emergency planning groups and she did not have involvement as Chair of the Committee.

In reply to a question from Councillor Wright regarding immunisations for flu for vulnerable people, the Deputy Chief Emergency Planning Officer stated that normal seasonal flu vaccinations would be given but there was no specific vaccination for H1N1 Pandemic Influenza.

Councillor Jordan referred to the World Health Organisation (WHO) Pandemic Alert System set out in Table 1 of the report and asked where the UK were in terms of alert levels. The Deputy Chief Emergency Planning Officer commented that, based on the description of Alert levels, the UK was operating at Alert Level 3, although this had not formally been declared.

In reply to a question from Councillor Clark, regarding preparations to support vulnerable people before pandemic flu, the Deputy Chief Emergency Planning Officer reported that this included work areas such as clarifying duties of care within the discharge pathway and caring in the community phases, planning the ratio of staff to patients in homes for the elderly, monitoring the care of older people who had contracted flu on a regular basis, and monitoring the meals on wheels service for older people. It was noted that the Vulnerability Strategy would address the supporting of people with learning disabilities in a supported living facility.

Councillor Bell welcomed the proposed strengthening of links between all agencies (statutory and third sector) to maintain the provision of community based health and social care during an influenza pandemic.

The Deputy Chief Emergency Planning Officer stated that increased involvement from the Third Sector community groups/ voluntary agencies was anticipated and the voluntary sector would be seen as valuable resilience partner agencies during the planning and responses of an incident.

Councillor Clark welcomed the proposed exchange of information with residential care teams and that Adult Social Care Teams had been identified as taking the lead role for vulnerability emergency planning.

2. RESOLVED that the report be noted and further reports be received on this important issue as the situation develops.

Northumbria Local Resilience Forum (LRF) Flood Plan, Flooding Debrief Report and Flood Related Issues

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer submitted a report (copy circulated) advising Members of the significant developments in relation to flooding, in particular the development of the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum (LRF) Multi-Agency Flood Emergency Response Plan, the LRF Debrief Report into the September 2008 floods, which affected the North East area (particularly Morpeth) and Government progress on implementing some of the key recommendations arising from the Pitt Report.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer advised that the Pitt Report had identified Reservoir Safety as another area of concern, particularly the scarcity of information available to responders to enable them to plan for a dam breach.

In response, the government had established the Reservoir Inundation Preparedness Project, that had since issued draft guidance and plan templates (both specific and generic), which included a timetable for the review, maintenance and exercising of plans.

Responsibility for plan production would fall to the top tier local authority in which the dam was sited, who would be responsible for co-ordinating input from other LRF Members. Delivery of the reservoir inundation maps (for all reservoirs over 25,000 cubic metres) was scheduled to take place between July and December 2009; and this would be supported by a series of workshops for LRF's to be held over the summer. LRF's would also receive an explanation of the mapping process, further technical advice, and details as to the priority that should be given to each dam.

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer reported that further progress would be reported to the Committee when more information had been received.

3. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the recommendations contained in Annex 2 to the report be endorsed;
- (ii) the work of the Local Resilience Forum Flood Working Groups to further develop local arrangements to mitigate the effects of any future flood emergencies, be noted; and
- (iii) the Committee continue to receive further reports on important national developments in relation to flooding and related issues.

Local Resilience Forum Budget and Appointment of Local Resilience Forum (LRF) Programme Manager

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an update on the Local Resilience Forum Budget and appointment of the LRF Programme Manager.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer thanked David Hogg and Lindsey Horwood for their assistance with the report.

The LRF Programme Manager took up post on 29 December 2008 on a 3 year fixed term contract. The post was currently hosted by Northumberland County Council within the Resilience Team, and so was well placed to support the current Northumbria LRF Chair (the Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety of Northumberland County Council). Day to day line management for the post lay with the Head of Resilience and Chief Emergency Planning Officers in both Northumberland and Tyne and Wear.

At the conclusion of the three year period, a full review of the arrangements would be undertaken, in consultation with LRF members. The budget covered the cost of the appointment together with £10,000 for special projects.

4. RESOLVED that the report be noted and further reports be received as appropriate.

Emergency Planning Unit (EPU) Performance Report – 4th Quarter 2009

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer (CEPO) submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with a progress update regarding the analysis of performance against the targets for the fourth quarter contained in the EPU Business Plan 2008-2009.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer stated that due to other planning commitments, namely the significant levels of activity around Influenza A (H1N1) swine flu pandemic, a final end of year report had not been prepared for the meeting and would be tabled at a future Committee meeting.

5. RESOLVED that the report be noted and a final end of year report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

National Capabilities Survey

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer submitted a report (copy circulated) providing information on the National Capabilities Survey which was carried out in 2008.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Survey was divided into three strands; essential services, Government and local responders. The overall finding was of qualified improvement in all four pillars of resilience (general planning and levels of capability; specific plans for major contingencies; business continuity; organisation for crisis management).

The regional report confirmed that “Capabilities” was working. Locally the responders had engaged well with LRFs and sub-groups and had input into the RRF and there were clear signs of strong multi-agency working.”

6. RESOLVED that the report be noted and the continued involvement of the Emergency Planning Unit in this important workstream be endorsed.

Control of Major Accidents Hazards Regulations (COMAH) Exercise ‘NE-OX’ – Shasun Pharma Solutions Ltd

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer submitted a report (copy circulated) informing Committee Members of the COMAH (Control of Major Accidents Hazards Regulations 1999) exercise carried out at Shasun Pharma Solutions Ltd at Cramlington in March 2009.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The duty to write special 'off-site' emergency plans for industrial sites that fell under the COMAH 'top-tier' regulations lay with the Fire and Rescue Authority. This duty was discharged by the Emergency Planning Unit (EPU). One of the requirements of the COMAH regulations was that an off-site emergency plan had to be prepared and tested for any sites deemed by the 'Competent Authority' (i.e. the Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency) to have major accident potential.

7. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

Seveso Directive Survey

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer advised Members of a European wide survey of the Seveso II Directive (96/82/EC) on the control of major accident hazards, in which the Emergency Planning Unit had recently participated. The Seveso II Directive was implemented in the United Kingdom by the COMAH – Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1999.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

8. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the valuable contribution of the Emergency Planning Unit to the survey and the subsequent request to participate in a follow up interview be noted; and
- (ii) a further report on the survey results when it becomes available be received.

(Signed) J. BELL,
Chairman.