



Emergency Planning Arrangements



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Community Safety
Scrutiny Review
of
Emergency Planning
Arrangements

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GLOSSARY

This report is written as far as possible in plain English with the minimum of jargon. All acronyms are spelt out in full when they first appear but for sake of clarity their meanings are repeated here.

BCM	Business Continuity Manager
CBRN	Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear
CATS	City Alert Texting System
CCA	Civil Contingencies Act 2004
CCMT	County Council Management Team
CEPO	Chief Emergency Planning Officer
CPA	Comprehensive Performance Assessment
COMAH	Control of Major Accident Hazards
DEPO	District Emergency Planning Officer
EIC	Emergency Information Centre
EP	Emergency Planning
EOC	Emergency Operations Centre
PIs	Performance Indicators
RRF	Regional Resilience Forum
TVLRF	Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum – meets 6-monthly and comprises the Chief Executives of all the local authorities and the Strategic Health Authority, plus chief officers from the emergency services and the Environment Agency
TVLRFWG	Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum Working Group – meets quarterly and comprises the operational heads of the above agencies

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REVIEW OF EMERGENCY PLANNING ARRANGEMENTS

Report of the Community Safety Scrutiny Committee 6th Feb 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Recent events across the UK and the world have shown that all major service organisations need to be prepared for a wide variety of incidences, ranging from severe weather to acts of terrorism. The Review originated from a concern that Oxfordshire be as prepared as possible to deal with any such emergency and the Committee sought to scrutinise the current level of readiness across the Council's services.
2. The Review Group visited the Emergency Planning Unit at their offices in Woodeaton where they met most staff. As a result they formed a very positive picture of the Council's arrangements. Most notably, they believe the authority should be proud that it has robust arrangements for effectively dealing with a wide range of emergencies that would allow the Council to support emergency service partners and communicate effectively with the public about the emergency at any time. The Committee is satisfied with the implementation of plans to date. The Council is also well positioned to shoulder the additional duties arising from the Civil Contingency Act.
3. Overall, the Review Group concluded that there is an effective team of appropriately experienced and trained staff to undertake planning and to respond to emergencies. All the witnesses spoke highly of the Emergency Planning Unit and expressed confidence in the arrangements that are in place to provide a co-ordinated and effective response to emergencies. These include command and control, the mobilisation of vital responders such as staff and contractors, and procedures for obtaining specialist equipment and granting additional expenditure. The council can demonstrate involvement in relevant local joint multi-agency arrangements, including the coordination of effective resource sharing. It has re-confirmed its agreements about mutual aid with neighbouring authorities.
4. Plans have been developed to tackle a wide range of major incidents that could impact on local communities. These plans are generally clear and unambiguous and are explicitly linked to risk assessments. The special needs of vulnerable members of the community could be applied in a more systematic way in response plans and arrangement with more tailored arrangements to meet a diversity of potential needs.
5. There is a structured approach to risk assessment and the Emergency Planning Unit has systematically identified a comprehensive range of hazards that could impact on local communities. However it is not clear that these are well co-ordinated with the corporate risk register and appear to have been developed in isolation from the corporate centre. CCMT have begun to demonstrate ownership of the challenges facing them but have not yet ensured that the outcomes of the risk assessment process drive sufficiently the rest of the authority to determine their priorities for reducing and mitigating known risks.
6. A programme of training covers general staff awareness and specific requirements for identified staff. It involves people from relevant voluntary and community sectors and other agency partners. A programme of exercises to validate and improve response plans, to test procedures and joint working arrangements, is in place (although the Review Group were unable to observe these in action for confidentiality and security considerations).

7. Debriefing is reasonably effective and should ensure that all weaknesses are identified and appropriate actions are then taken to make improvements. There are also signs that it is being used to ensure that plans are made as simple as possible and are scalable to be appropriate for incidents of varying sizes, including catastrophic events. However more could be done to demonstrate how debriefing has led to improvements by distributing debrief reports more widely and generally improving the audit trail. Information sharing protocols may need to be developed in order to enable wider distribution of multi-agency debriefing reports that are not the property of any single organisation.
8. A range of communication and warning systems are in place, although there are signs the public may have become complacent in their reliance on ordinary means such as the television and their mobile phones. Much more could be done to raise awareness amongst the public as to the preventative steps they themselves should take rather than relying on mainstream services to help, and to educate them on the best courses of action to follow in an emergency. However, it would require additional resources to implement such changes and to monitor their effectiveness.
9. Some areas of partnership working could be improved, in particular the relationship between GOSE and the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum run by the Police but in which the Council participates. Mechanisms are in place to develop further a regional approach and response, through which the council makes a contribution to the regional and national civil contingencies agenda (for example, through the Regional Resilience Forum). However, there appears to be a lack of shared understanding as to how these layers interact and precisely what value they add. It would be beneficial for all concerned if the differing roles and responsibilities were clarified. Regional tiers should demonstrate their additional utility by improving their information sharing and general communication with local councils, and negotiating on their behalf with national and regional companies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of its conclusions the Committee RECOMMEND the Cabinet to:

- R1** identify suitable ways to use appropriate performance information to enable the authority to demonstrate what it is achieving in terms of risk mitigation.
- R2** require that future Emergency Planning risk assessments clearly evidence the changes that have been made as a result of the regular review process they undergo.
- R3** investigate the need to extend its funding for the Business Continuity Manager post beyond March 2007.
- R4** place emergency planning responsibilities on personnel records and ensure when officers with such responsibilities leave the employ of the Council it is highlighted to both EPU and a relevant contact in the Directorate.
- R5** improve the audit trail for changes to plans and activities arising from post incident debrief and exercise review.
- R6** conduct at least one in every four FASTBALL exercises outside of office hours.
- R7** look at the feasibility of using fire officers' visits to schools to broaden out the fire safety messages they given by incorporating an element of emergency planning education.
- R8** create a virtual library of exercise evaluation reports and post incident debriefs to improve the sharing of lessons learnt, and to improve the audit trail.
- R9** continue to request GOSE to provide greater clarity as to the added value it expects to provide to LA Emergency Planning arrangements and how it plans to demonstrate value for money.
- R10** The Committee RECOMMEND bringing the EPU into County Hall, ASAP, to raise the profile of the service and ensure it is fully integrated with mainstream Council working.

REVIEW OF EMERGENCY PLANNING ARRANGEMENTS

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SECTION 1 ~ INTRODUCTION

A) What The Scrutiny Review Group Aimed To Do

10. The scoping document for the Review was produced in September 2005 and formally adopted on 10th October 2005 (**Annex 1**). Four main aims were distilled out of the broader objectives, namely to: -
 - ❖ review the Council's approach and arrangements for emergency planning
 - ❖ assess the Council's level of preparedness for the duties imposed by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and its likely speed of response
 - ❖ review the effectiveness of communications with the public and local organisations on arrangements to be followed in the event of an emergency
 - ❖ establish how effectively emergency planning is integrated within regional and national planning and what value GOSE add.
11. The Community Safety Scrutiny Committee was tasked with commissioning the review and appointed three County Councillors to carry it out (Cllrs. Hudspeth, McIntosh-Stedman and Rose). The Review has identified key issues by gathering a large amount of relevant written information and have examined a number of documents and plans relating to the service (listed in **Annex 2**) and analysed the Audit Commission's self-assessment questionnaire completed by the Emergency Planning Unit on behalf of the authority. They have also held a small number of semi-structured interviews with officers within the Community Safety Directorate and elsewhere (listed in **Annex 3**).
12. Recent events in Oxfordshire (flooding, foot and mouth) combined with events in the rest of Britain (fuel crises, Boscastle and Carlisle floods, July 7th London bombings, Birmingham tornado, and Hemel Hempstead oil depot fire), and large scale problems elsewhere in the world (SARs, Asian tsunami, New Orleans, and bird flu) – have highlighted the disruption that natural and man-made emergencies can bring to communities. Smaller scale emergencies are also a continuing local concern. The Review was therefore considered timely in the light of such disasters.
13. It should be noted that the Review could not cover everything and in line with good project management methodology deliberately restricted its focus to keep the scope of their assessment manageable. The Councillors comprising the Review Group chose *not* to examine Business Continuity issues for the wider business community due to their belief that what private companies choose to do or not do was less of a priority for them than the authorities own resilience. Moreover, it was known to the Review Group that the authority's internal audit section were examining business continuity across the authority and were mindful to avoid duplication of effort with them.

B) Legislative Context

14. The Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) 2004 was enacted to replace previous cold-war inspired legislation which placed a statutory duty on Emergency Planning to respond to a hostile attack from a foreign power. The aim of the CCA 2004 is to deliver a single statutory framework to enable an effective response to all forms of disruptive challenges to modern society. Key to this was an updating of the definition of what constitutes an “emergency” to be any event or situation that could be defined as a major incident. That is, “a situation arising with little or no warning, causing or threatening to cause injury or death to numbers of people or damage to property, which is outside the capability of the emergency services to deal with alone, and which requires the special mobilisation, organisation and coordination of other services.”¹ In their capacity as community leaders, local authorities thus have an important role to play in planning for and responding to emergencies, and in supporting a ‘return to normality’ in the weeks, months, and sometimes years that follow.
15. The CCA emphasises the importance of ‘Integrated Emergency Management’ and promotes multi-agency working as vital. It includes new duties and changes to the role of local authorities, NHS Trusts, and other public and private agencies, and to the way they work with the emergency services and with regional and central government. With it came the introduction of the concept of building ‘service resilience’. The CCA encourages all organisations “...to maintain plans for the purpose of ensuring ...that if an emergency occurs... the body is able to continue to perform its functions”.
16. The CCA imposes seven duties: -
 - corporate arrangements;
 - risk assessment;
 - emergency planning arrangements;
 - ‘warning and informing’ local communities;
 - sharing information;
 - co-operating and joint working; and
 - business continuity management and promotion.

C) Background to Emergency Planning Unit

17. ‘Service resilience’ and the seven duties of the CCA are ultimately corporate responsibilities. However, in common with most major councils Oxfordshire has a specific unit that takes the lead for emergency planning. The aim of the EP Unit is to ensure that effective preparations are made by the County Council to respond to the full range of possible emergencies. To this end it plans and co-ordinates the Council’s response to major civil emergencies and co-ordinates local authority and other service responses in an emergency. To do this it develops, trains for, and revises core emergency plans covering the arrangements for responding to major incidents, and co-ordinates these arrangements with all other agencies involved in emergency management.
18. The Emergency Planning Unit has 5.5 staff (1 x CEPO, 1 x Deputy Chief Emergency Planning Officer, 1.5 x Training Officers, 1 x BCM (new), 1 x Admin). The CEPO reports to, and is line-managed by, the Director of Community Safety. The County Council

¹ Oxfordshire County Council Emergency Plan 2005, p.1

provides funding for the unit. Emergency Planning has a budget of £324,000 p.a.² (plus additional provision to fund emergencies if needed).

19. The EP Unit is based in a bunker at Woodeaton Manor, outside a likely attack area such as the City centre – i.e. some seven miles from County Hall (and thus beyond a 400m bomb cordon that would seal-off Oxford). It was moved there 4 years ago at a cost of approx £98k, a decision approved by the (then) Executive, Director and staff. The Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and the Emergency Information Centre (EIC) are co-located within the EPU offices in a protected underground complex with an air filtration system, standby power from 2 generators with a fuel supply of up to two weeks, and full communications of landline telephones, mobiles and satellite communications. It is located near the ring road and to the two main emergency services (Fire HQ and Police HQ) and has car-parking facilities for up to 60 vehicles.
20. Emergency Plans are supported by training and validated by exercises, which also bring agency staff together and increase communication and understanding in the even of a real emergency. The EPU has 5 priorities for 2005/ 06: -
 1. To improve co-ordination of actions, provision of information and advice to people affected by flooding
 2. To meet the revised standard of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004
 3. To revise plans and to write any new statutory plans
 4. To prepare the annual training programme
 5. To review annually the Standard Operating Procedures
21. The local authority's primary concerns in the aftermath of an emergency are:
 - To provide support to the Emergency Services
 - To continue normal support and care for the local and wider community
 - To use resources to mitigate the effects of the emergency and co-ordinate the response by organisations other than the Emergency Services
 - To attempt to reach a phase of 'normality' asap after the event has moved into the recovery phase.

Emergency Planning is about preparing to deal with the consequences and not causes of an incident. Whatever the cause they must meet similar needs around evacuation, looking after and recovery. On Health and Safety Executive advice they do not therefore write plans for individual threats, unless there is a statutory requirement to do so.

"We are not 'blue-light' – what we do is deal with the consequences. We do the 'long-term consequences management'."

² see page 5.10 of Medium Term Service & Financial Plan 2005/06 to 2009/10. The budget was formerly boosted by a specific Cabinet Office grant of £200k but is now 100% County Council funded and in 2005/06 an appropriate adjustment was made to the council's general grant funding.

SECTION 2 ~ FINDINGS

a) Corporate arrangements and recognition

22. The CCA applies to local authorities not just to the Emergency Planning Unit. This section therefore assesses the extent to which emergency responsibilities in Oxfordshire are recognised as a corporate responsibility and integrated into the authority as a corporate whole. Unfortunately the Annual Audit and Inspection letter was not available at the time of writing this report but will be published shortly and will comment in more detail on this issue.
23. On the plus side, the portfolio holder for Community Safety has good links to the service, and other Councillors are invited to attend awareness briefings and encouraged to visit the unit at Woodeaton. All Councillors are sent a copy of the Emergency Plan and the training programme. Responsibilities for service delivery with other organisations are clearly understood. Emergency plans, especially those addressing specific risks, are jointly prepared with other agencies (for example the Oxford United Football Club and the COMAH plans for dealing with major industrial accidents/hazards). The Council's Marketing and Communications team is well linked to the EPU and plays a vital role in running its Emergency Info. Centre to field media enquiries in the event of an emergency.
24. Although CCMT have demonstrated ownership of the challenges facing them they have not been very involved in the assessment of risks and preparation of plans. The EP Unit has been comfortable devising these documents without the involvement of senior managers or integration with the corporate centre. We are concerned about a possible pervasive unspoken culture whereby both parties find it mutually convenient to delegate responsibility to the Emergency Planning Unit under the management of the CEPO.
25. The results of Emergency Planning's risk assessment are not yet being used in prioritising preventative and mitigation work in other Directorates. Senior managers across the authority have not agreed the risk assessment or used it to inform their own service plans. Emergency arrangements are not universally seen as an integral aspect of service management. Nor is the notion of 'service resilience' well integrated into the authority's performance management arrangements. Suitable performance information is not regularly requested or reviewed by CCMT. Local indicators should be developed in the absence of national guidance from the Cabinet Office, which has been looking at performance information for several years without establishing any clear precedent.
26. One of the other authorities consulted felt they achieved greater integration because of their location in the central County offices. They welcomed the close working enabled by being in the same building. In Oxfordshire the EPU is sometimes seen as a tightly managed discrete entity (a "freestanding independent unit"³), which as a result precludes greater corporate involvement. When comparing arrangements with like authorities (see Appendix 4) there is considerable variation regarding the Directorate in which the Council places the EPU function for their County, although many place it within either their corporate centre or their safety/ protection arenas. One clear pattern is that the vast majority do not place Emergency Planning under the direct control of the Fire Service.

R1) The Committee RECOMMEND the Cabinet to identify suitable ways to use appropriate performance information to enable the authority to demonstrate what it is achieving in terms of risk mitigation.

³ Emergency Planning Unit Performance Plan 2001-03, p.6

b) Robust local risk assessment

27. Oxfordshire's arrangements and the EPU's priorities to stem from a robust local risk assessment. Plans are explicitly linked to risk through the systematic and comprehensive identification of local and neighbouring hazards that could damage an organisation's most valuable assets. This has been undertaken in consultation with partners such as District Councils, neighbouring counties, NHS Trusts, voluntary agencies, utilities, MoD and the emergency services. There is a structured and documented approach to risk assessment, which adapts likelihood ratings as produced by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat. Eight ratings are used to categorise sites which have then been allocated a high, medium or low risk level.
28. According to the self-assessment checklist completed by the CEPO, systems and resources are in place to store and process information related to risk assessment. Risk information is shared with other Directorates within the Council, for example they link with planning and environmental health information systems. A Geographical Information System (GIS) is used to map known hazards and emergency incidents, which provides graphical information to the council. However it is not clear that these assessments are well co-ordinated with the corporate risk register and appear to have been developed in isolation from it. Integration with the corporate centre could be done in a more systematic way to ensure the inclusion of all council services.
29. In terms of the likelihood of any given event, whilst bombs, fires and floods capture the headlines, witness interviews have strongly suggested that the vast majority of crises are 'quiet catastrophes.' It is these less spectacular incidents that are the most likely to cause disruption to the public, and more especially, to the most vulnerable in the community. Most of the examples given of recent incidents have been quite localised, small-scale events (the evacuation of 20 families from flooding, contamination from a spilled tanker lorry, a power-cut in a Housing Association). The biggest evacuation the EPU has practiced as part of a national training exercise was for 30,000 persons but in reality they have never evacuated more than 300.
- "We participate in the planning for the big and we deal day-to-day with the small; this is the reality."*
30. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that these smaller events are what provide the day-to-day work for many of the team, and this should be reflected in revised risk assessments in the future. Changes to risk assessments should also reflect the increasing likelihood of problems arising from more extreme weather, such as severe winters and summer heat waves, and increased risk of flooding and tornadoes.

<p>R2) The Committee RECOMMEND the Cabinet to require that future Emergency Planning risk assessments clearly evidence the changes that have been made as a result of the regular review process they undergo.</p>

c) Delivery of emergency response

31. Plans which can be scaled up (or down) as required according to the type, location and extent of the emergency are in place to deliver appropriate emergency response. Through these plans the Authority can provide a planned, co-ordinated, practised and monitored response to emergency situations. They ensure such services as rest centres

for survivors and evacuees, a temporary mortuary, and decontamination facilities, can be provided when needed.

“There are two key ideas in what we do – agility and scale.”

The Unit is highly mobile and can set up its Emergency Operations Centre virtually or off-site as required. Each staff member has two copies of the Emergency Plan – one in the office and one at home – and carry lap-tops and memory-sticks, etc.

32. The EPU has excellent communication systems in place. One or other of the staff members is on call 24 hours a day, every day of the year. The EOC has good telephone links, including the Government Contingency Communications Network. Hand-held Satellite phones are also used to ensure continued capability even when the mobile phone system collapses owing to over-use. The EPU vehicle is fitted with satellite to provide mobile broadband and Voice over Internet protocol telephony. Radio links between emergency centres and other locations can be provided by the Radio Amateurs Emergency Network (RAYNET).
33. The EPU are flexible in terms of adapting to what the public want, including catering differently for people with special needs. For example these days people are often reluctant to evacuate and in say a flood are more likely to want to live upstairs. Plans are therefore changing to take this into account, by establishing arrangements to take help to people in their homes rather than assuming they must be taken to an evacuation centre. The special needs of vulnerable members of the community however could be applied in a more systematic way in current response plans and arrangements, with more tailored arrangements being specified to meet a diversity of potential needs.

d) Resource identification

34. The County Council provides the Emergency Planning Unit with a budget of £324,000 p.a.⁴, although financial resources in Oxfordshire add up to £400k when including the District Councils. The EPU does not use contingency funds as need is so unpredictable it would just deplete Council reserves to allocate monies to such a fund. The Unit are satisfied that the CEPO may in an emergency make a decision to spend what is needed in the knowledge that the Council will find the money afterwards.
35. Mutual aid arrangements for Local Authorities in the Thames valley have been re-confirmed, which means that all costs incurred by a supporting council are met by the requesting council. Oxfordshire Emergency Planning Officers can staff emergency command structures until other authorities are able to attend, and visa versa. Physical resources such as communications, vehicles and materials can be requested from elsewhere, or provided to other authorities, as and when needed. A memorandum of understanding has been signed with all the District Councils in the county to facilitate joint working and mutual aid arrangements are in place with surrounding County Councils.
36. In comparison with similar authorities it would appear that adequate resources for Emergency Planning have been identified, such that they would be “accessible in a crisis, having regard to risk, to deliver an effective emergency response”.⁵ A table detailing

⁴ see page 5.10 of Medium Term Service & Financial Plan 2005/06 to 2009/10. The budget was formerly boosted by a specific Cabinet Office grant of £200k but is now 100% County Council funded and in 2005/06 an appropriate adjustment was made to the council's general grant funding.

⁵ Audit Commission self-assessment checklist, p.10

resources in like authorities is included as Appendix 4. This shows that there is a wide range of budgets which are allocated by County Councils for Emergency Planning purposes in comparison to Oxfordshire County Council. The greatest allocation being £740k, but if we exclude this one outlier then Oxfordshire is not far below the mean average of £418k and just above the median average of £388k. Oxfordshire has fewer staff members than the median of 7.5 (FTE) officers. Generally the number of Emergency Planning staff employed corresponds to the size of the budget, with the exception of Cambridgeshire who have as many staff as Oxfordshire but with a smaller budget. One clear similarity between the Authorities is that District Councils tend to contribute to a proportion of the Emergency Planning budget through service level agreements.

37. Like many authorities, the Council appointed a business continuity officer to focus on business continuity arrangements as a result of the new legislation. The Chief Emergency Planning Officer has made clear his wish to see funding for this new BCM post extended beyond the initial two year fixed term appointment. The Review Group believe that further analysis would need to be undertaken by a financial specialist before determining whether this is a function that needs to remain within a specialist EPU or would be better being 'mainstreamed' into Directorates own business and service planning arrangements. There may also be efficiencies to be realised by sharing the function with the Districts and seeking co-funding from them.

R3) The Committee RECOMMEND the Cabinet to investigate the need to extend its funding for the Business Continuity Manager post beyond March 2007.

e) Training

38. The EPU employs two training officers (1.5 FTE) who run a full programme of training events built around a rolling 3-year thematic cycle to validate each plan. This is published in advance every year and followed-up through targeted letters sent out advising and requiring those expected to attend. The sign-up rate is personally monitored by Training Officers to ensure the appropriate participation. This ensures that individuals likely to be involved in emergency response receive appropriate training covering all of the emergency functions. The target of delivering 500 training occurrences has been exceeded for the current year.
39. The eleven staff who act as County Contact Officers for the Emergency Planning Unit's cascading call-out system are expected to attend an annual 1-hour briefing session. Nine of those staff participated in this years training event. Those that did not attend have been on the roster for several years and will have attended many previous sessions. The 3 individuals who were new to the CCO roster in 2005 all attended. This is effectively monitored to ensure that such named individuals, most of whom are volunteers, are made operationally familiar on an annual basis with the County Contact Officer (CCO) roster, sickness, sever weather/ flood warnings, and log keeping statistics.
40. Key individuals will also be advised of specific events in which they or their department may have a role (for example the Operation Sassoon workshop in Sep 05 and the Built Environment Decontamination workshop in Jun 05) and again they will be expected to take part.

41. In addition, Training Officers also hold a series of Emergency Planning and BCM awareness briefings for the purposes of general awareness raising and are open to a range of to Council staff.

R4) The Committee RECOMMEND the Cabinet to place emergency planning responsibilities on personnel records and ensure when officers with such responsibilities leave the employ of the Council it is highlighted to both EPU and a relevant contact in the Directorate.

f) Exercises and reviews used to validate plans

42. The Emergency Planning Unit is viewed as a successful partner and participant in a range of exercises. Regular testing of corporate and multi agency arrangements is essential if personnel responsible for carrying out actions are to be fully confident and competent to carrying out such action in a real incident. Exercises not only validate plans they also enable them to be improved where necessary by identifying unforeseen issues that need to be addressed.
43. Exercises such as GOSE's Triton, and real incidents, are reviewed through multi-agency reports in order to address any unforeseen issues and improve emergency responses in the future. The report written in July 2005 following a multi-agency decontamination workshop, praised by GOSE for the impressive technical content of the exercise scenario, is a good example. A GOSE witness also cited the report written after the fatal train accident at Ufton Nervit in 2004 (although a copy was not made available to the Review Group).
44. Partners are involved in exercises and their comments are routinely sought and action has been taken as a result. For example, it was decided to open help-lines at an earlier stage in the incident after the flooding debrief in Jan 2003, and a City Alert text messaging service was created for businesses and the public in June 2003. After 9/11 the EPU also invested in satellite communications with two special phones, and after the 7th July bombings arrangements were made for the public to use LA reception areas' phones to call loved ones. However, evidence of such improvements needs to be made much more transparent by a requirement to produce clear action plans. Such action plans should be logged so as to create a clear audit trail and disseminated to all relevant agencies.
45. The Review Group has been unable to comment as confidently as anticipated on the subject of exercises, as a result of problems encountered in accessing suitable events and exercises to observe. This was mainly due to a reluctance to compromise the 'safe environment' partners had become accustomed to expect by the presence of outside observers, and 'security issues' due to the involvement of special branch.
46. Notwithstanding some of these difficulties verifying all the comments witnesses have made, the Review Group feel table-top exercises are necessary but not sufficient and would like to be satisfied that they will be supplemented with sufficient simulations that are used to practice emergency responses in the field. An exercise involving Council staff in the set up and operation of a Rest Centre for displaced people, and a simulated exercise for EOC personnel are planned for 2006. The Review Group wish to see that further exercises are undertaken especially those which test the effectiveness of the collaborative response with partners.

47. Exercise FASTBALL is a biannual validation exercise practiced to verify call out details for the contacts for all Oxfordshire councils and voluntary organisations, to check sufficient numbers are on call, to check that those involved know the procedures and to assess the time necessary to implement them and activate the EOC. The Review Group are concerned that this is always done during office hours. Whilst the EPU remains sensitive to the fact that most Contact Officers are volunteers holding down a day job, the Review Group would like to see it being done occasionally in the evenings, on weekends or during holidays. Another authority stated that this provides better validation than say calling at 2:00 a.m., as most people are in bed and thus easy to find in the early hours of the morning. It is far more testing to see how reliable cascade systems are when emergency contacts are likely to be much more dispersed.

R5) The Committee RECOMMEND the Cabinet to improve the audit trail for changes to plans and activities arising from post incident debrief and exercise review.

R6) The Committee RECOMMEND the Cabinet to conduct at least one in every four FASTBALL exercises outside of office hours.

g) Communication and awareness raising

48. The authority has a responsibility towards the community which includes informing the public so that they can fulfil their own responsibility to help themselves. It is also imperative that arrangements are in place for warning the public. The Audit Commission wish to be assured that the:

“Local community are informed and aware and so able to take steps to protect themselves and their family and property/ business in an emergency; [and that] tested methods for communicating effectively with staff and the public during an emergency are in place.”⁶

49. To this end public information leaflets are produced in consultation with the five District Councils. These include a new flood booklet published as a result of a debriefing following the floods in January 2003, a leaflet on terrorism, a leaflet for commuters on evacuation advice, and business continuity checklist/ leaflet. Although written information is necessary the Review Group question its real value. Those who see a leaflet cannot be guaranteed to read it, and even those who have read a leaflet are very unlikely to have it to hand at the time of an emergency.
50. The County provides sirens for warning the public and a mobile public address system for use County wide. Radio broadcasts and website messages can also be used to produce announcements. Arrangements have also been made so that a Public Information (Helpline) telephone number can be released to the media in the event of an emergency. The County Alert Texting System (CATS) is used to warn people about any critical incidents. For a subscription charge (currently £1.50 per year per postcode) messages are sent via text message directly to mobile phones. Any alerts received are free of charge and “go down a different pipe” to traffic on the ordinary mobile network and thus have much greater resilience to crashing in periods of concentrated demand.

⁶ Audit Commission self-assessment criteria, p.15

Unfortunately, take-up of this scheme has been low as consumers are confident they will get warnings from mainstream media and are reluctant to pay the charge.

51. Despite these initiatives, this is one area in which the CEPO acknowledges that external inspectors would be likely to think there is room for improvement. The effectiveness of awareness raising activity is not currently monitored by the EPU. The EPU is not resourced sufficiently to allow it to attend assorted community groups and schools to educate people how to behave.

R7) The Committee RECOMMEND the Cabinet to look at the feasibility of using fire officers' visits to schools to broaden out the fire safety messages they given by incorporating an element of emergency planning education

h) Information sharing

52. Witnesses spoke about the good partnership arrangements that exist with other authorities, the NHS and other agencies. Contact numbers are listed in Oxfordshire's plan for Berkshire Unitary Authorities, Buckinghamshire, Gloucestershire, Northamptonshire, Warwickshire and Wiltshire, and adjoining authorities are sent a copy of Oxfordshire's emergency plan. Oxfordshire's EPU are involved in the planning for some events in neighbouring authorities, for example the annual international royal air tattoo in Fairford, Gloucestershire.
53. Information sharing could be improved and the Review Group believe real benefits would accrue from establishing a virtual library of exercise evaluations and debriefs linked to the training and Work Programme document, that could be made much more readily available across the authority as well as to all partners. GOSE in particular believe this would be a good way for different Councils to learn from each other.
54. Most witnesses had some concerns over the one-way flow of communication from the regional tier and the role they are seeking to play. It was generally felt that they should stick to dealing with catastrophes and not get too involved in local incidents. Their exact role remains to be clarified in the eyes of many and it would appear that the value added by GOSE is not generally well understood. As GOSE's own Triton Post Exercise Report observed:

*"The government Liason Officers' role, powers and links with Gold Strategic Command Groups were not clearly defined or understood."*⁷

*"There needs to be a wider understanding, up and down the chain and across the Region, of the roles, responsibilities, capabilities and resources of partner agencies to ensure fully effective multi-agency response."*⁸

Councils sometimes encounter difficulties with Category 2 responders such as public utility companies (such as Transco or the national grid) who run pipelines all over the country. Government Offices could play a useful role to negotiate with them at a regional level if they are reluctant to validate plans by testing them locally or share information.

⁷ Triton Post Exercise Report, Annexe, p.2

⁸ *ibid*, p.9

55. It makes good sense for Oxfordshire to be well linked to arrangements for evacuations of London, but being on the edge of the South East region means Oxfordshire is partnered with other authorities as far away as Kent. Neighbouring authorities like Gloucestershire are in the South West region, and although the two County Councils have good links some witnesses raised concerns over issues to do with the interaction between GOSE and GOSW at their boundaries, which mean that they tend to encourage inward looking into the region. Oxfordshire may experience particular difficulty by being caught in a three way split between the south east, the south west, and the East Midlands.

R8) The Committee RECOMMEND the Cabinet to create a virtual library of exercise evaluation reports and post incident debriefs to improve the sharing of lessons learnt, and to improve the audit trail.

R9) The Committee RECOMMEND the Cabinet to continue to request GOSE to provide greater clarity as to the added value it expects to provide to LA Emergency Planning arrangements and how it plans to demonstrate value for money.

SECTION 4 ~ CONCLUSIONS

56. This Review was always intended to be 'light touch' and yet when considering the Review as a whole it is clear that much evidence of good performance has been found. Sufficient resources are in place to enable the provision of a good level of response to any emergency. Plans are reviewed regularly and staff trained and briefed appropriately. At the local level multi-agency involvement is well developed and mutual aid arrangements are in place with neighbouring authorities. A range of warning systems have been established and the Emergency Planning Unit has very good communication mechanisms at its disposal.
57. The Authority's own Chief Emergency Planning Officer felt there was virtually nothing to give grounds for any concern and that very little could be improved upon given existing resource constraints. This picture is supported by the generally complimentary view from the other witnesses interviewed, all of whom regarded the Council's EPU favourably.
58. A few issues of concern have been highlighted and a number of recommendations made as a consequence. It is hoped that the Cabinet will implement these effectively to further improve performance and strengthen the authorities resilience.
59. In light of these generally positive findings, and in view of the fact that the authorities performance as a whole around Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Management are the subject of both internal audit investigation and the external auditors inspections, the Committee feels that a much more detailed investigation by the Committee is unnecessary at this time.

R10) The Committee RECOMMEND bringing the EPU into County Hall, ASAP, to raise the profile of the service and ensure it is fully integrated with mainstream Council working.

Lead Member Review Group on Emergency Planning

Cllr. Ian Hudspeth
Cllr. Olive McIntosh-Stedman
Cllr. Rodney Rose

Scoping Document

Review Topic (name of Review)	Emergency Planning
Review Reference Code	CS007
Parent Scrutiny Committee	Community Safety
Lead Member Review Group (Cllr's involved)	Cllrs Hudspeth, McIntosh-Stedman and Rose
Member responsible for tracking (nominate one Cllr)	Cllr Hudspeth
Officer Support (Scrutiny Review Officer lead)	Matt Bramall
Rationale (key issues and/ or reason for doing the Review)	Recent events (flooding, foot & mouth, fuel crises, and terrorist attacks) highlight the disruption that natural and man-made emergencies can bring Review is timely given that Civil Contingency Act comes into force in Nov 05
Purpose of Review/Objective (specify exactly what the Review should achieve)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To review the Council's approach and arrangements for emergency planning • To assess the Council's level of preparedness for the duties imposed by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and its likely speed of response • To review the effectiveness of communications with the public and local organisations on arrangements to be followed in the event of an emergency • To establish how effectively emergency planning is integrated within regional and national planning and what value GOSE add
Indicators of Success (what factors would tell you what a good Review should look like)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengths and weaknesses are highlighted • An overall appraisal of whether the service is broadly satisfactory or has major issues of concern is reported back to the Committee • Recommendations to support improvement are made
Methodology/ Approach (what types of enquiry will be used to gather evidence and why)	A small group will conduct an initial investigation as to how satisfactory our arrangements are, through visits, witness interviews and literature study before advising the Committee whether or not a much more detailed investigation is needed.
Specify Witnesses/ Experts (who to see and when)	John Kelly – O.C.C. Chief Emergency Planning Officer (CEPO) Linda Baker – JR Hospital Emergency Planning Officer Ted Vary – GOSE Resilience Unit a Birmingham City Council officer that dealt with the tornado

Specify Evidence Sources for Documents (which to look at)	Civil Contingencies Act 2004 Oxon County Council Emergency Plan Memorandum of understanding with DCs (Howard Perkins) Emergency Planning Service Plan 2005/06 Emergency Planning Service Plan 2004/05 Emergency Planning Unit Business Plan 2003/04 Emergency Planning Unit Performance Plan 2001/03 Emergency Planning Training & Work Programme 2005/06 Audit Commission Review of Norfolk Civil Contingencies '04 Audit Commission 30 page self-assessment questionnaire		
Specify Site Visits (where and when)	Woodeaton bunker 'Gold command' testing session		
Specify Evidence Sources for Views of Stakeholders (consultation/ workshops/ focus groups/ public meetings)	NHS partners Voluntary sector partners Police partners		
Publicity requirements (what is needed – fliers, leaflets, radio broadcast, press-release, etc.)	None for now – may decide to do more after 5 th Dec		
Resource requirements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person-days • Expenditure 	15 days £800		
Barriers/ dangers/ risks (identify any weaknesses and potential pitfalls)	May duplicate Audit Commission work which will investigate the corporate approach to EP (and EP elements of S&HC and L&C when doing Ofsted and CSCI inspections). It will be reporting on its findings in the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter (draft Jan 2006) Should avoid duplicating the work of internal audit which is focussing more on business continuity side of things		
Projected start date	29 th Sep 2005	Draft Report Deadline	5 th Dec 2005
Meeting Frequency	Every one or two months	Projected completion date	6 th Feb 2005
When to evaluate impact and response		6 –12 months later according to nature of recommendations	
Methods for tracking and evaluating		Cllr Hudspeth and Review Officer to prepare briefing for Committee	

BIBLIOGRAPHY

During the course of the review, the following documents were collated, prepared or considered. Copies of all these documents are available for inspection in the Members' Resource Centre:

- Civil Contingencies Secretariat, Civil Contingencies Act 2004: a short guide, 2004
- Self-assessment checklist for Emergency Planning readiness, Audit Commission, no date
- Emergency Planning Unit, Community Safety Service Plan April 2004 – March 2005
- Emergency Planning Unit, Community Safety Plan April 2005 – March 2006
- Emergency Plan, Oxfordshire County Council, June 2005
- EPU Training and Work Programme 2005-06, Oxfordshire County Council, 2005
- EPU Performance Plan 2001-03, Oxfordshire County Council, November 2001
- Home Office Update – Integrated Emergency Management – (Published Feb 2000)
- Home Office Booklet Recovery – An Emergency Management Guide (Published Oct 2000)
- 'Terrorism', guidance leaflet, Oxfordshire County Council, June 2003
- 'Business Continuity: preparing your business for the worst', guidance leaflet, Oxfordshire County Council, June 2004
- 'Commuters: evacuation advice', guidance leaflet, Oxfordshire County Council, July 2004
- Environment Agency – Lessons Learned Autumn 2000 Floods
- 'Floods: protect yourself', guidance booklet, Oxfordshire County Council, October 2003
- Good Practice in Emergency Planning for Evacuation from City Centres, Town Centres and Shopping Centres, Birmingham City Council, October 2000

List of Witnesses

Oral evidence was obtained from the following ‘witnesses’ during the review public hearings: -

- ❖ John Kelly - Chief Emergency Planning Officer, O.C.C.
- ❖ Ian Gardiner - Deputy Emergency Planning Officer, O.C.C.
- ❖ Cindy Jones - Emergency Planning Training Officer, O.C.C.
- ❖ Ian Travers Smith - Business Continuity Manager, O.C.C.
- ❖ Nigel Bullen - Emergency Planning Administrative Officer, O.C.C.
- ❖ Linda Baker - Emergency Planning Officer, Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals
- ❖ Ted Vary - Head of Regional Resilience Unit, G.O.S.E.
- ❖ Eddie Coventry - Chief Emergency Planning Officer, Gloucestershire County Council

Written evidence was obtained from the following: -

- ❖ Frederick Gentile - Cambridgeshire County Council
- ❖ Richard Horne - Devon County Council
- ❖ Rob Tripp - Dorset County Council
- ❖ Ian Hoult - Hampshire County Council
- ❖ Alison Carter - North Yorkshire County Council
- ❖ Andrew Osman - Suffolk County Council

Other Authorities

Authority	Staff Numbers (FTE)	Budget	Directorate
Oxfordshire	5.5	£324k (Budgeted spend in the County rises to £400k if district councils are included, although they do not contribute to the County Council whose budget is the same as it was in 1993.)	Community Safety
Cambridgeshire	7 Civil Protection Officers reporting to the Head of Risk Management	£288k (£70k from Council) + £100k from DC's by virtue of an agreement for CCC to handle all their category 1 responsibilities (quid pro quo)	Corp Services
Devon	6 + 1 new B.C.M for 1 yr fixed contract	£371k (£140k from Council)	Chief Exec's
Dorset	6 (Soon to increase to 8)	£315k (£142k comes from Revenue Support Grant, £73k from County top-up. £100k from buy-in by boroughs and districts. This buy-in has only just been achieved under the terms of a local agreement which will run until end FY 2006/7.)	Corp Services
Gloucestershire	10	£365k (£222k Central Government Funding, £5k for plan writing, £37.5k for the provision of emergency management support to our six districts under SLAs)	Environment & Community Services
Hampshire	15 + 1 vacant post	£740k (£220,000 from DC for provision of service and from writing of COMAH plans + Pipeline plans + recharging industries, MACR plans + recharging MoD, room rental income, +income generation from the Business Continuity Officer, providing services to districts, SMEs + voluntary orgs. up to a total of £50,000)	Chief Exec's

N. Yorkshire	8.5	£500k (Small amount of the budget made up of service level agreements between the County Council and District Authorities)	Financial Services
Somerset	9		Fire Service
Suffolk	8 (Reducing to 7 in September)	£687,600 (Funding for the joint unit is provided from each council according to FSS %. This equates to: Suffolk CC - £523k Forest Heath DC - £16.3k Babergh DC - £24.5k St Edmundsbury BC - £29k Mid Suffolk DC - £25.6k Suffolk Coastal DC - £33.8k Waveney DC - £35.2k	Public Protection Directorate
West Berkshire	3 (Unitary authority - 2 staff are employed by West Berks Council and the other by an agency)	£94k (All provided by the authority - as per the level of funding put into the Revenue Support Grant for emergency planning)	Environment & Public Protection
Wiltshire	6		Environmental Services

Oxfordshire's Emergency Planning Budget

Year	2001/ 02	2002/ 03	2003/ 04	2004/ 05	2005/ 06
Budget	??	£222,000	£245,000	£284,000	£324,000

“Formate alternative te ketij publikimi ofrohen me kerkese. Kjo perfshin dhe gjuhe te tjera, me shkronja te medhaja, shkronja per te verberit, kasete degjimi, disk kompjuteri ose email.”

Albanian

আপনি যদি অনুরোধ করেন তাহলে এই পুস্তিকাটি বিকল্প ছাঁদে, যেমন, অন্য কোনও ভাষায়, বড় হরফে, ব্রেইলে, অডিও-ক্যাসেটে, কমপিউটারের ডিস্কে বা ইমেলের মাধ্যমে পেতে পারেন।

Bengali

“本刊物備有其他的格式可供索取。這些包括有其他語言版，大字版，盲人用版，錄音帶版，電腦磁碟版或電子郵件版。”

Chinese

प्रार्थना करने पर यह प्रकाशन दूसरे रूपों में प्राप्त किया जा सकता है। जिस में सम्मिलित है, दूसरी भाषाओं में, बड़े छापे में, ब्रेअल, सुनने की टेप पर, कम्प्यूटर की डिस्क पर या ई-मेल द्वारा।

Hindi

“ਇਹ ਪੁਸਤਕ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਕਰਨ ਤੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਹੈ। ਜਿਵੇਂ ਕਿ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ, ਵੱਡੇ ਛਾਪੇ ਤੇ, ਬ੍ਰੇਲ ਵਿਚ, ਸੁਣਨ ਵਾਲੀ ਟੇਪ ਤੇ, ਕੰਪਿਊਟਰ ਡਿਸਕ ਜਾਂ ਈ ਮੇਲ ਤੇ।”

Punjabi

“اس اشاعت کو متبادل اشکال میں درخواست کرنے پر حاصل کیا جاسکتا ہے۔ اس میں دوسری زبانیں، بڑا پرنٹ، بریل (بیسے اندھے چھوکر پڑھ سکیں)، آڈیو کیسٹ، کمپیوٹر ڈسک یا ای میل شامل ہیں۔”

Urdu

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Scrutiny Review Report into Emergency Planning Arrangements
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