



# Emergency Planning Arrangements



## Review Panel Members:

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Cllr. Rose

**Community Safety  
Scrutiny Review**

of

**Emergency Planning  
Arrangements**

**Democratic Services**  
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CS007

## **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.*

<b>BCM</b>	Business Continuity Manager
<b>CBRN</b>	Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear
<b>CATS</b>	City Alert Texting System
<b>CCA</b>	Civil Contingencies Act 2004
<b>CCMT</b>	County Council Management Team
<b>CEPO</b>	Chief Emergency Planning Officer
<b>CPA</b>	Comprehensive Performance Assessment
<b>COMAH</b>	Control of Major Accident Hazards
<b>DEPO</b>	District Emergency Planning Officer
<b>EIC</b>	Emergency Information Centre
<b>EP</b>	Emergency Planning
<b>EOC</b>	Emergency Operations Centre
<b>PIs</b>	Performance Indicators
<b>RRF</b>	Regional Resilience Forum
<b>TVLRF</b>	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
<b>TVLRFWG</b>	Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum Working Group – meets quarterly and comprises the operational heads of the above agencies



# REVIEW OF EMERGENCY PLANNING ARRANGEMENTS

Report of the Community Safety Scrutiny Committee 6<sup>th</sup> 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.