

# Briefing Note

**Title:** Emergency response capability for Wolverhampton

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**Intended audience:** Executive Team

Internal

Partner organisation

Public

## Aim

To provide both assurance and reassurance in the wake of a series of tragic major incidents such as the Grenfell Tower Disaster and terrorist attacks in London and Manchester in relation to the City of Wolverhampton and the plans, capabilities and resources that are in place to respond should a similar disaster occur in our city. This note will also make reference to resilience at a regional level where it should be noted that mutual aid arrangements enable greater capacity to respond to major incidents at scale.

## Emergency Planning and Response Capabilities

### Major Incident Response Slides

The accompanying presentation illustrates how City of Wolverhampton Council coordinates our response to major incidents and how our work integrates with the local emergency services and partner agencies; both within the City of Wolverhampton and across the West Midlands Conurbation (please note that the presentation also contains a number of embedded plans for ease of access).

For information approximately 189 members of staff across council services have received some form of emergency planning training to enable them to take on various roles during an incident. An example of this would be the role of Rest Centre Manager or Forward Liaison Officer. We are in the process of recruiting additional volunteers for these roles and training took place last week and will be repeated again this week.

### Major Incident Response Plan

The Major Incident Response Plan is a generic 'enabling' plan, which allows the council to dynamically adapt to a spectrum of risks and perform its emergency response duties, as set out by the Civil Contingencies Act (2004). The plan details how we receive calls, pass information during an activation and the roles and responsibilities required to coordinate our response.

The plan is designed to be scalable in nature. This means that the 24hr Contact Centre, Duty Manager, Resilience Team, Duty Director and Senior Communications Advisor can deal with most smaller incidents (such as a contained toxic spillage or a small, temporary or precautionary residential evacuation), by coordinating our response remotely. Larger or protracted incidents may require full activation of the plan, where directors and senior managers are brought into the Major Incident Control Room to coordinate the response from a central location.

During our response, the council will seek to mitigate the damage caused by pursuing the following strategic aims;

1. Save and protect human life
2. Contain the emergency – limiting its escalation or spread and mitigating its impacts
3. Maintain or restore critical activities.

The council can do much to achieve these strategic objectives, but one of the most important responses is to establish a place of safety where evacuees, who have been displaced from their homes, can take shelter and access vital services.

### **Rest Centre Activation Plan**

Rest Centres are a fundamental part of the council's response to an emergency and, as such, their activation forms the bedrock of our weekly training sessions, known as Exercise Clockwork (see below for more details). During these exercises, the Duty Manager on call has a chance to practice working with the 24hr Contact Centre in a simulated emergency, each one requiring a rest centre as part of the response. As a result of the lessons learned from these exercises, the current rest centre plan is being revised, simplified and divided, so that the section needed to select and activate a rest centre is separated from the section needed to open and operate it.

Rest centre activation essentially involves the 24 Contact Centre using a Geographical Information System (GIS) to locate the site of an incident, before displaying nearby rest centres that have sufficient capacity to shelter the number of evacuees displaced. The 24hr Contact Centre then works with the Duty Manager to identify the venue key holder, a Rest Centre Manager and call out the British Red Cross (further details of British Red Cross service below). Once this has been achieved (using the council's incident management website), all three are directed to the selected rest centre and passenger transport is arranged as appropriate.

### **Wolverhampton's Rest Centres**

The Resilience Team has identified 5 primary and 21 secondary sites. The primary centres vary in size and can shelter up to 620 people during the day and 256 people at night. They are all council-owned and have rest centre equipment boxes pre-located on site, reducing the time taken to establish the centre when needed. If needed at the same time they could provide shelter for 2360 people during the day and 1180 people at night.

The secondary rest centres are smaller venues that can shelter an average 93 people in the daytime and 47 at night. As there are so many of them, they do not have pre-located equipment boxes but three more rest centre boxes are stored in the Major Incident Control Room so the Rest Centre Manager can pick one up on their way to a secondary centre, enabling additional, or more appropriately-sized, shelters to be established.

Please note that capacity can be increased through the use of our mutual aid agreement with neighbouring authorities which would be coordinated through the Regional Local Resilience Forum's (see below for more details) response group called the Strategic Coordination Group if required.

## **Rest Centre Manager's Handbook**

The Rest Centre Manager's Handbook contains the detail of how to set up a centre and the specific responsibilities of each of the roles needed to establish and operate the shelter. Although most of the roles are performed by the British Red Cross, it is important that a suitably trained council colleague is on site to ensure the necessary duties are being performed. The manager is also the key conduit to feed any issues, or requests for support, back to the council's Duty Manager or the managers and directors operating the Major Incident Control Room.

A live rest centre exercise, where we ask Rest Centre Managers to physically set up one of our rest centres, takes place in Wolverhampton on an annual basis.

## **British Red Cross Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**

The British Red Cross have a bank of volunteers on call who have been trained to perform the initial public facing roles in a rest centre. These roles include registering the evacuees, offering food, clothing, beds and befriending. The use of a charity to perform these roles reduces the training and equipment burden on the council and, depending on the scale of the incident, allows us time to arrange for specialist housing, benefits and bereavement support colleagues to attend the centre.

Like most other councils, Wolverhampton doesn't pay a retainer for this service, but has agreed to reimburse the volunteers' travel and food expenses, as well purchasing replacement care packages that are used by our evacuees. The British Red Cross operates in regional groupings that support each other by backfilling during serious or protracted incidents. Should an enormous disaster occur they can call upon assistance from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent.

## **Exercise Clockwork**

Ex Clockwork runs every Monday from 4-5pm and is a weekly command post exercise that is designed to identify improvements or gaps in our response plans, procedures and tools. As a minimum, it involves the Resilience Team, the Duty Manager and a Call Handler from the 24hr Contact Centre. Duty Directors and Call Centre Managers occasionally attend and the sessions are also open for On Call Senior Communications Advisors.

Following a recruitment drive for additional Forward Liaison Officers and Rest Centre Managers, we plan to involve each new volunteer in Exercise Clockwork once every six months.

Testing plans against a different hazard each month, the exercise has, so far, examined our ability to respond to large fires, building collapse, toxic spillage and flood. A risk specific aide memoir has been written for each risk and added to the council's bespoke incident management system [www.apprise-im.com](http://www.apprise-im.com).

## **Emergency Communications Plan**

Effective communication is an essential element of the Council's response to a major incident or disruptive event. Irrespective of the cause of an emergency, the Council will need to warn and inform our residents, businesses, staff and other stakeholders of the hazards or service disruption that may occur. As the incident unfolds, the Council must also inform stakeholders about our response and advise them of the steps they can take to help to keep themselves safe and avoid harm.

The Emergency Communications Plan was written by both the Resilience Team and the Communications Team, but is owned by the council's Communication Team and aims to maintain public and staff confidence by establishing an effective capability to communicate with our staff, the public and other stakeholders in the event of a significant disruptive event or major incident that requires a response from the Council.

In support of the plan's clear description of the roles designated to brief the press during a major incident, external Press Spokesperson training is arranged by the Resilience Team annually, with all Duty Directors and Cabinet Members being invited to attend.

These are in addition to the plans and capabilities developed through the CONTEST Board regarding the PROTECT and PREPARE elements of the COuNter-TErrorism STRategy that have been highlighted in the previous paper. A comprehensive list of the Council's current portfolio of plans and capabilities can be found below in appendix 1.

### **Resilience across the West Midlands**

Wolverhampton falls within the West Midlands Conurbation's Local Resilience Forum (LRF). This multi-agency planning group consists of the emergency services, local authorities, various NHS agencies, the military, transport agencies and companies, utilities providers and the voluntary sector.

The LRF meets quarterly at a senior manager level, with the Director of Public Health for Wolverhampton representing Public Health as Co-Chair of the Local Health Resilience Partnership (LHRP) and the Director of Public Health for Dudley MBC representing ABCA. Quarterly middle manager meetings also occur, under the guise of the General Working Group, these are attended by the Resilience Manager for the City of Wolverhampton Council. Four additional working groups also occur to look collectively at risk, training and exercising, technical communications (satellite phones etc.) and fuel disruption.

A number of multi-agency exercises have occurred over the last three years all of which have been well attended by the council. One exercise, based on a counter terrorism scenario, involved the full activation of the LRF's response group called the Strategic Coordination Group.

Over the past six months, the Strategic Coordination Group has been activated to respond to actual major incidents on three occasions (Storm Doris and the London and Manchester terrorist attacks). Usually involving a teleconference, the City of Wolverhampton has dialled into each and reported updates back to SEB.

In Wolverhampton, the Local Resilience Forum is replicated at a Local Authority level by the Wolverhampton Resilience Group, the quarterly meetings are chaired and minuted by the Resilience Team and are attended by representatives from the emergency services, NHS, Wolverhampton University, the Molineux, the Mander Centre, Jaguar Land Rover and a number of other local agencies and businesses.

The Local Health Resilience Partnership (LHRP) co-ordinates emergency preparedness, resilience and response across health organisations such as NHS trusts, the West Midlands Ambulance Service, CCGs and public health for the Black Country, Birmingham and Solihull. Co-

chaired by a lead Director of Public Health and Director of Operations for NHS England. This partnership has a direct relationship with the LRF.

Wolverhampton has a local equivalent, The Health Protection Forum (HPF) that pulls organisations and teams with a focus on planning and responding to incidents requiring a critical health response or a significant public health issue such as managing mass casualties or pandemic flu. The HPF is chaired by your DPH.

## **Future plans and capabilities in the pipeline**

### **Recovery Plan**

Recovery is a co-ordinated process of supporting affected communities in the reconstruction of the physical infrastructure and restoration of emotional, social, economic and physical well-being. After emergencies, the recovery phase will often target the restoration of an affected area to its previous condition, i.e. normalisation. However, there may be a strategic opportunity to go beyond 'recovery' and achieve longer-term regeneration and economic development.

### **Humanitarian Assistance Centre Plan**

The purpose of a Humanitarian Assistance Centre (HAC) is to act as a focal point for information and assistance to bereaved families and friends of those missing, injured or killed. It is also a place to deliver medium to longer term services to survivors, and to all those directly affected by, and involved in, the emergency.

### **Streamlining personal information collection and transfer**

The identification and registration of the displaced, missing and deceased is a challenge for all agencies responding to a major incident. Rapidly establishing a system to record and track those in Survivor Reception Centres, Rest Centres and Friends and Family Reception Centres, allows organisations to gain a clearer understanding of who has been involved in the incident and where they are currently located.

However, most systems rely on written paper records so the team would like to propose that a digital solution is developed to reduce paperwork and increase information flow to responders, while ensuring data protection remains secure. Current thinking includes the use of barcoded wristbands and computerised registration, allowing the relevant centres to reduce the requirement for duplicated registration and expedite services to the people who need them. Additionally, it will provide an information flow to the emergency services that would ease a difficult area of communication that provides many conflicting statistics about those affected.

### **Identifying Vulnerable People**

The council controls a number of datasets with information about local residents that indicates that they may be particularly vulnerable in the event of an emergency. This information can be extremely useful to the emergency services, allowing them to prioritise and adapt their response accordingly. For example, a hearing impaired resident would benefit from a tailored response if their building was inside a cordon area and they were unable to hear the general communication to evacuate.

Through the use of middleware, the council can interrogate our datasets and draw information from multiple sources to bring back the names, addresses and phone numbers of people within a

certain postcode or on a particular street. When combined with a Geographical Information System, the process would allow the council to draw a cordon on an electronic map and immediately create a table of names and addresses that can be emailed to the fire service command vehicle at the scene.

Working with IT and GIS colleagues, your current Resilience Manager developed an identical system in the London Borough of Brent in 2011 which was used to good effect in a number of trial exercises and actual incidents.

Prioritisation, timescales and the resources required to deliver the proposals highlighted above will be discussed as part of the on-going agenda for the Council's Resilience Board.

## **Appendix 1**

The current list of plans and capabilities prepared by the Council's Resilience Team is:

- Major Incident Response Plan,
- Major Incident Control Room,
- Control Room Manager's Handbook,
- Forward Liaison Officer's Handbook,
- Rest Centre Manager's Handbook,
- Major Incident CCTV Handbook,
- Emergency Communications Plan,
- Google Earth for Resilience,
- Apprise Incident Management Website,
- Contact Call Out (mass messaging),
- Business Continuity Policy,
- Business Continuity Strategic Plan,
- Service Resilience (bespoke business continuity planning tool),
- Civic Centre Lockdown Plan,
- Wolverhampton Multi Agency Major Incident Procedure Manual,
- Local Emergency Mortuary Arrangements (Mass Fatalities).

Each new plan and response resource developed requires multiple individuals to be trained in various roles, exercises to validate it and ongoing maintenance to ensure that the plan is in keeping with other new plans/capabilities.