

Civil Contingencies & Whistleblowing Update

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Purpose of the Report

This report provides an update to the Audit Committee on our preparedness regarding civil contingencies. The report also reports on any whistleblowing which has taken place in the last year.

Recommendations

That the Committee note the current update on civil contingencies and whistleblowing as detailed in this report

Background

In 2019 SSDC adopted a new approach for dealing with the out of hours calls to improve efficiencies with the process and of our preparedness for civil contingency emergencies.

Out of Hours Calls

If a member of the public calls the office out of hours then their call is routed through to the Deane Helpline, who take details and assist. They then contact the relevant team or person directly to deal with the reported issue, or where it doesn't need to be dealt with in the evening or at weekends, they will log the calls and pass it to the right teams on the next working day. The Service Agreement was updated in October 2019 to clarify the scope of response and ensure that only calls for emergency civil contingencies and for unsafe structures that present a risk to the safety and welfare of members of the public are routed through to the duty officer(s).

Civil Contingency Emergencies

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 identifies Local Authorities as Category 1 responders and so we have a statutory responsibility to maintain an emergency response capability. We deliver this capability as part of the Somerset Local Authorities Civil Contingency Partnership (SLACCP) which gives us the benefits of economies of scale and a mechanism for mutual aid and combined training with other Local Authorities and responders. The Partnership, which is delivered via staff at Somerset County Council, meet regularly, and have a combined plan and response protocols in the event of an emergency (attached as Appendix 1). The Director for Strategy & Support Services also sits on the Avon and Somerset Local Resilience Forum (ASLRF).

In December last year, the Partnership agreed to have one of their senior officers regularly work from each of the District offices 2 days per month. While they will continue to work in the usual way on specific countywide projects, they will be present and available to all staff for advice, guidance and support on any local issues. This has already started at Brympton Way and going forward this will enable SSDC to build on existing relationships, identify opportunities and facilitate local projects.

Key priorities on the Partnership's current work programme includes consolidation, usability and access to planning and response packages, refining operational maintenance, and developing a training

programme in line with strategy, including strategic, tactical and operational roles, evacuation and shelter, loggist and business continuity management.

We have maintained the approach with our Civil Contingency capability and have a pool of trained officers from within SSDC. There is a Strategic Duty Officer on call 24/7. The Strategic Rota is made up of:

- Chief Executive
- 3 Directors
- 3 of the Leadership & Management Team

The Strategic Duty Officer is supported by an Operational Duty Officer (Leadership & Management Team) who are also available 24/7. This gives us the ability to quickly establish high level command and control (usually linking in with the emergency services and County at the strategic level) whilst at the same time having an officer available to deploy to the scene of an incident to liaise with the emergency services on the scene, other responders, and the local community.

Following on from the classroom based training for strategic and operational officers in 2018 and early 2019, there was a strategic coordination centre familiarisation session in October 2019. We planned to hold a second major scenario based training exercise in August 2019 however this was delayed due to shortage of experienced personnel at the time that could deliver the training. Since then new course material has been developed that will form the basis of a further training exercise to be run this year. One of our operational officers attended a JESIP training course to feedback what elements of this are best incorporated into part of the SSDC exercise. JESIP is the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme and the JESIP Doctrine lays out how the emergency services should work together around major incidents. We are currently working with the Partnership to develop a wider training and development programme for 2020 to maintain a high state of preparedness.

In February and March 2020 all of the Gold/Strategic Officers attended an Emergency Planning College course on Emergency Planning & Crisis Management, delivered locally in Somerset.

There has been a focus on BREXIT in 2019/early 2020 and the potential impacts of a disorderly/no-deal departure from the EU. This work has been led by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government and we have been working very closely with them, the Avon & Somerset Local Resilience Forum, Heart of the South West LEP and other local and regional partners.

Civil Contingencies Update

There have been no calls which have been classified as a major incident where we have been asked to support any of the emergency services.

We have had 1 occasion where we were contacted in the early hours of the morning to assist the police with an incident.

Whistleblowing

There have been no occasions during the last year where whistleblowing has taken place.

Conclusion

We intend to bring an annual report to committee detailing information regarding civil contingencies & whistleblowing.

Financial Implications

None direct from this report

Council Plan Implications

Aligned to our Council Plan values of empowering a confident, flexible workforce.
<https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/media/2020/council-plan-201920.pdf>

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

None direct from this report

Equality and Diversity Implications

None direct from this report

Background Papers

None
