

Agenda Item 10.

TITLE	Proposed Shared Emergency Planning Service
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on 25 May 2017
WARD	None specific
DIRECTOR	Graham Ebers, Director of Corporate Services
LEAD MEMBER	To be confirmed

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

A resilient and cost effective emergency planning response.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive is asked to agree that WBC continue with its existing shared service arrangements with Reading Borough Council (RBC), with a continuation agreement up to May 2020.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This paper sets out the options of a proposed Shared Service for Emergency Planning across Berkshire (excluding RBC), and the continuation of the current shared services arrangements with RBC alone. The Berkshire Wide shared service proposal builds on a detailed business case that was prepared by BGG Associates in 2015. The RBC option is based on current arrangements.

In seeking agreement from respective Berkshire Authorities, RBC has made a decision not to join the Berkshire Wide arrangement. This means the shared service they have with WBC is able to continue in the same way. The option, to continue with RBC, should be considered against the Berkshire Wide proposal.

The shared service arrangement with RBC has a known cost and is known in terms of how it operates. It currently enables WBC to discharge its Emergency Planning functions in an effective manner. Although the broader Berkshire-wide shared service will provide a more significant collective resource, the costs are already £8k p.a. higher (which may increase when reworked with only 5 of the Berkshire Authorities) and the service WBC will receive is unknown (with each Authority seeking to ensure its particular Emergency Planning requirements are discharged).

Background

The Emergency Planning arrangements in Berkshire have remained largely unchanged since they were established in 1998. Each unitary authority has its own dedicated resource with informal joint working being established through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which is reviewed annually. Over time the staffing resources devoted to the function have diminished. This has created resilience issues and undermined the MOU. This has led to renewed interest in a potential Shared Service.

WBC has in recent years entered into a shared service arrangement with RBC which provides access to two of their staff, to discharge our Emergency Planning responsibilities. In exploring the Berkshire wide appetite for a combined shared service, RBC have decided not to enter into a County Wide service. This means that two shared service options are open for to WBC for consideration: the Berkshire Wide (now 5-way) and the continuation with RBC.

The Proposals

(i) Berkshire Wide

The proposed Berkshire Wide Shared Service would be based on the Lead Authority model comprising of 5 fte with a team in Berkshire East and one in Berkshire West (Appendix A, 5.2 - 5.6). The manager would be based in the Lead Authority which is proposed to be West Berkshire. Under this proposal the Lead Authority would be responsible for the shared service, i.e. Emergency Planning, Business Continuity and Out of Hours Co-ordination. An agreement would take form of a collaboration agreement and governance would be through the Berkshire Chief Executives' Group.

The budget for the Shared Service would be around 7-10% less than the current Berkshire Wide cost. The contribution to be made by each authority would be based on a combination of population share and inherent risk. If approved by all six authorities, a tentative start date of 1 October 2017 has been proposed.

A collaboration agreement between the six unitary authorities will set out what will be provided by the Lead Authority to others. It is intended that the governance under the agreement would be through the Berkshire Chief Executives' Group. The Shared Service will provide Emergency Planning, Business Continuity Planning and Out of Hours Co-ordination (where appropriate), to all six unitary authorities. A Joint Team of 5 fte will be established. The Team Manager will be based in the Lead Authority. Two teams of 2 fte will be based in Berkshire West and Berkshire East. It is proposed that no fixed base is established. The Team Manager will be responsible for deciding on work locations in liaison with the six unitary authorities. The budget for the service is set for the first year at £371k and apportioned to each unitary authority as an annual payment. The cost to WBC would be approximately £60k p.a.

In the process of seeking the 'sign up' of the 6 Berkshire Authorities, RBC has expressed a desire to continue with their current internal arrangements. The other 4 authorities have made a decision to join the shared arrangement. The Berkshire Wide arrangements will therefore need to be reworked on the basis of 5 Authorities, or 4 Authorities if WBC continues with the current shared arrangements with RBC. The impact of reducing the number of participants from 6 is not known at this stage.

(ii) RBC Shared Arrangement

The Emergency Planning functions covered by the Berkshire Wide proposal are currently discharged through a shared service agreement with RBC who have offered to extend this arrangement from May 2017 to May 2020. The current fee would not increase in year 1 and a Retail Price Index uplift would be applicable in years 2 and 3. The total Emergency Planning cost under this model, including an Out of Hours service, is approximately £52k p.a.

Analysis of Issues

Financial

The Berkshire Wide proposal is largely based on improved resilience and on creating a function which is felt to be better managed at a county level. Savings have therefore not been the driver. On its establishment, the new arrangements would cost the Council approximately £8k p.a. more than under the current arrangements with RBC. This is likely to increase when the arrangements are re-worked based on 5 Authorities.

Policy

There are no policy implications for the Council. It should be noted that the Berkshire Wide proposal is for West Berkshire Council to act as the Lead Authority.

Personnel

If the Berkshire Wide approved, up to three staff may be transferred under TUPE to West Berkshire Council. There would be no change under the existing commissioned arrangements with RBC.

Legal

The powers to share services arise from Sections 101 and 102 Local Government Act 1972 and Sections 9EA and 9EB Local Government Act 2000 (as amended) for executive functions. The legislation is supplemented by the Local Authorities (Arrangement for the Discharge of Functions) (England) Regulations 2012/1019. These Regulations specify who is authorised to agree the shared services arrangements.

Inter authority collaboration agreement will need to be put in place and agreed between the authorities prior to the new Berkshire Wide Shared Service starting, to set out what will be provided by the lead authority to others. Under the RBC arrangement, a 3 year continuation of service would be procured from them in the same way as the current arrangements with them were secured.

Risk Management

The new Berkshire wide model will bring greater overall resilience, and should provide stronger leadership at county level. There will however no longer be a dedicated emergency planning resource to each authority. Resources will be deployed to where they are needed. The operations of the new Berkshire wide model will need to be established and governed, to ensure the expectations of the relevant Authorities are managed and delivered upon. Under the RBC arrangement, supplementary agreements

with other Authorities can enhance resilience if and when this was considered necessary.

Conclusion

The proposal for a Shared Service for Emergency Planning across Berkshire has been put forward on two occasions and rejected. Resilience issues have prompted a third attempt and it is this proposal which is put forward in this paper. Significant savings have never been a realistic prospect although this paper proposes an 8% reduction in the current costs. The main driver behind this proposal is improved effectiveness through being able to allocate resources more effectively to where they are needed, reducing duplication of effort and providing more effective leadership across the county. This proposal will need to be reworked based on RBC’s decision to continue with their internal arrangements. This is likely to be an increase to the initially proposed £60k when based on 5 Authorities, but this is not known at this stage.

The RBC offer is a known arrangement as it has been in place for several years. The cost is approximately £8k p.a. cheaper than the Berkshire Wide offer based on the 6 Authorities. Costs are likely to increase when figures are reworked based on 5 Authorities. The Berkshire Wide proposal potentially provides greater resilience and a more integrated Berkshire Wide approach and presence at strategic Emergency Planning forums. However it also generates increased cost and relative uncertainty in terms of how the arrangements will work out in practice, particularly in the context of competing demands from the other partners in the arrangement. There may also be hidden costs associated with the Berkshire Wide arrangements, for example combining the current diverse IT infrastructure and associated technology.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£52k	Y	R
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£52k	Y	R
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£52k	Y	R

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

For comparison the figures for both shared service proposed arrangements ignore inflationary uplift.

Cross-Council Implications

The emergency response will continue to be discharged adopting a Council Wide approach when necessary.

List of Background Papers

A proposed Shared Emergency Planning Service for Berkshire – Supporting Information.
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Berkshire Wide proposal Equality Impact Assessment – stage 1.

Both the above have been produced by West Berkshire Council.
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