

TITLE	Emergency Response Framework and Adverse Weather Plan
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 4 th March 2024
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Harry Williamson – Emergency Planning Manager
LEAD MEMBER	Councillor Ian Shenton

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The Council is required to write and maintain emergency plans under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. This report summarises the changes that have been made to two key emergency procedures – the Emergency Response Framework (previously known as the Major Incident Plan) and the Adverse Weather Plan following engagement with key stakeholders. This report is designed to ensure that there is sufficient governance and oversight of these two key plans.

The report also details work that has been completed and remains ongoing to improve the Council's overall preparedness and response to emergencies.

RECOMMENDATION

That:

1. Scrutiny Committee to review and comment on the Emergency Response Framework.
2. Scrutiny Committee to review and comment on the Adverse Weather Plan

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Emergency Response Framework and the Adverse Weather Plan serve as important documentation as part of the Council's Civil Contingencies Act 2004 duties to be prepared to respond to emergencies.

The Emergency Response Framework is replacing the existing Major Incident Plan, and the Adverse Weather Plan has been updated. The Emergency Planning team have brought these to this committee for consideration following internal liaison and consultation.

This is part of a programme of continual improvement works for the Councils Emergency Planning Team to ensure the Council is meeting its statutory Civil Contingencies Act 2004 duties, as well the National Resilience Standards.

Background

The Emergency Planning team comprises of a manager and an officer, who are tasked with preparing the Council to respond to emergencies, to co-ordinate emergency response, to promote community resilience, and to co-ordinate the Council's business continuity management. It should be noted that the Emergency Planning team plan for and coordinate responses to emergencies using internal resources – i.e. standing up services and responders via the Bronze, Silver and Gold system and by liaison with the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum on a regional basis.

The Council has duties as a Category 1 responder, as legislated in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for ensuring the local authority complies with this Act and that the Council can perform its critical functions during and after response.

The Emergency Planning team is in the Enforcement and Safety service, within the Place and Growth directorate. Up until the end of 2021, the Council ran a joint emergency planning service with Reading Borough Council.

Councillors should seek assurances from the Council that it is prepared to deal with emergencies and has appropriate plans and procedures in place to do so. For more information on the Council's responsibilities and the role of Councillor's within this Act, please refer to: [A councillor's guide to civil emergencies | Local Government Association](#).

A duty of the Act is for the Council to assess the risk of emergencies occurring and use this to inform contingency planning and put in place emergency plans. The Council does this by writing and maintaining its own emergency plans based on high risks. We also comply with this by working with the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum and partner agencies, such as Thames Valley Police, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Services and the Environment Agency on multi-agency plans to ensure coordinated response.

Plans should be reviewed every three years, and this report ensures that Plans are updated with appropriate approval. Amendments can be made outside of this period when required. For example, in the event of lessons identified following an incident or exercise, organisational change or a change in legislation. The Assistant Director for Environment and Safety will make the decision on the required consultation and approval process based on the level of these amendments.

The Major Incident Plan is the existing overarching document that sets out how the Council responds to a major incident. This was last updated in 2015, and the Emergency Response Framework has been written to replace the Major Incident Plan. Due to the strategic importance of this plan, it has been brought to this committee for review and comments.

The framework outlines the other supporting plans and procedures that are used to prepare and respond to emergencies, including the Adverse Weather Plan. This plan details the Council's response to adverse weather. As this is one of the Council's most important and frequently activated plans, it has been brought to this committee for review and comments.

Neither of these documents place any additional resource or financial demands on the Council. These documents are created, maintained and exercised by the Emergency Planning team as per the statutory duties placed upon it by the Civil Contingencies Act

2004. Services and contractors come together to respond to emergencies, as defined by their statutory duties, and contracted responsibilities.

Emergency Response Framework

The change from a Major Incident Plan to an Emergency Response Framework is to reflect how the Council should be responding to emergencies in a consistent and defined approach – that is flexible and scalable. This includes but is not limited to major incidents. This aligns us with other local authorities and partners in the Thames Valley.

Essentially, this framework demonstrates how services, contractors and other partners come together to respond to an emergency – within a defined command and control structure. For example, using Gold/Strategic, Silver/Tactical, and Bronze/Operational arrangements.

The framework is approved by the Chief Executive.

Noticeable changes from the Major Incident Plan to the Emergency Response Framework include:

- A scalable framework not limited to major incidents
- Updated lexicon
- Lessons identified from recent incidents and exercises
- Incident levels to ensure a defined and proportionate response
- Greater detail in notification, internal command and control and multi-agency structures
- How we communicate in an emergency
- How we can work with the voluntary sector
- The process of requesting mutual aid from our partners
- A defined debrief process
- Adopting of the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum's Recovery Plan and removal of our own
- How we use and share vulnerable data with partners
- In the appendix – a list of the roles and responsibility of Council services in a emergency

Consultation of this plan has taken place with all Council services and duty officers who have emergency response responsibilities. This in addition to Assistant Directors, Directors and the Chief Executive who have responsibilities as Silver and Gold responders respectively.

Once approved, familiarisation training of the new framework will be undertaken for duty officers, key responding services and all borough Councillors. Additionally, the Emergency Planning team will attend a future Big Chat to ensure wider organisational understanding of the framework.

Once approved, a redacted version of the plan will be available on the Council's website.

Adverse Weather Plan

This plan details the Council's initial actions and response structures to specific adverse weather triggers. This includes flood alerts and warnings from the Environment Agency,

severe weather warnings from the Met Office and heat-health alerts from UKHSA and the Met Office. This plan is internally approved by the Assistant Director for Environment and Safety, who has requested that Scrutiny review and comment as appropriate to ensure sufficient governance of the plan

The Adverse Weather Plan has been regularly reviewed and updated since 2012. The last formal review was completed in September 2023, with some amendments following recent exercises and incidents.

Changes include:

- Updated lexicon
- Inclusion of new UKHSA heat-health alert definitions and triggers
- Amendments to adverse weather meeting attendance list and agenda following lessons identified
- The addition of a Snow Response Actions appendix

Consultation of this plan has taken place with services that have responsibilities in adverse weather, such as Highways, Public Health, Environmental Services (including Drainage, Countryside, and Tree Management), Customer Services and the Communications team.

This plan has been recently activated during a multi-agency flooding exercise (Blue Nimbus October 2023) and in response to recent storms including Storm Ciaran (October 2023), Storm Henk and recent flooding (January 2024).

Please note there is a separate Flood Plan that contains more detailed information on flooding hotspots, history and actions that is due for review in February 2024.

Emergency Planning – continual improvement

The above is part of a programme of works to improve the Council's overall resilience, preparedness, and response to emergencies, and ensure compliance with legislation.

This includes:

- An Emergency Planning portfolio holder (Cllr Ian Shenton) specific 6 weekly briefing on emergency planning
- development of an annual delivery plan presented to Scrutiny to demonstrate activity and achievements of the previous year and to detail a work plan for the forthcoming year.
- development of a training plan for Gold, Silver and Bronze responders
- development of an improvement plan facilitated by a review conducted by Oxfordshire County Council with the Chief Executive, Director for Place and Growth, Assistant Director for Environment and Safety and one of the Silver Duty Officers.
- a new business continuity programme
- lessons identified from recent exercises (AWE and flooding) and incidents.
- creating a Silver Duty Officer rota, comprised of Assistant Directors (in place since Summer 2023)
- a programme of annual member training (last held 31st October 2023)

Emergency Planning look forward to bringing future information to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the near future, including the new corporate business continuity plan, further emergency plans, a revision of the sandbag policy and the annual delivery plan for review.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

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

Other Financial Information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
n/a

Cross-Council Implications
These are corporate emergency plans and therefore are relevant to the whole Council. Consultations of services and key staff has taken place for both documents (as detailed in the main body of the report). Familiarisation training and exercising of these plans will take place as part of the business as usual work of the Emergency Planning team.

Public Sector Equality Duty
<p>A Stage 1 Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for both documents, with support from the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion and signed off by the Assistant Director for Environment and Safety.</p> <p>The assessment concluded that the creation, maintenance and activation of these plans have a positive impact on our communities, especially those who are most vulnerable. This is because they are disproportionately impacted by emergencies, and without effective and robust plans, they would be at even greater risk.</p> <p>Additionally, individual services retain responsibility for their activities including the deployment of staff and resources as part of the council's emergency response and recovery. These actions follow existing arrangements and procedures, which relate to our statutory duties and are expected to be legislatively compliant. This includes the Equality Duty.</p>

Climate Emergency

The Emergency Planning team work with the Climate Emergency service, due to the connectivity between climate change and the increase in frequency and intensity of climate related emergencies. Having effective and robust emergency plans and procedures in place provide part of the mitigation needed for current and future climate risks.

Reasons for considering the report in Closed Session
None

List of Background Papers
Emergency Response Framework
Adverse Weather Plan

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Date: 22/02/2024	Version No. 1