

Emergency Preparedness A Task Group Report

Chair, Cllr Ketan Sheth

Audit Committee, January 2018

Chair's Foreword

Over the spring and summer of 2017, terrorist incidents in Westminster, Manchester and London Bridge, and then the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in Kensington, rightly put Emergency Preparedness at the forefront of minds of public servants across the UK. While the terrorist incidents in London were managed by individual Local Authorities with minimal need for support from their neighbours, the scale of the Grenfell Tower disaster required a pan-London response.

Over 100 Brent staff answered the call for mutual aid. They covered roles as diverse as working at the Borough Emergency Control Centre, advising affected individuals at one of the two assistance centres, social workers supporting affected families longer term, and Brent's own Chief Executive being temporarily loaned into the "Head Office" of the Grenfell Fire Response Unit to head up the Humanitarian Assistance response.

In light of the number and scale of incidents in 2017, the Audit Advisory Committee agreed there was a need to reassure itself of Brent's own emergency preparedness. Given the cross-cutting nature of incident response, it was felt that a task group should be drawn from across all three scrutiny committees and the Audit Advisory Committee.

This report outlines a number of Brent's strengths in this area, along with nine recommendations, many of which will have been implemented by the time other members receive this report. While we all hope that the people of Brent are spared any major incident, they can feel reassured that a strong foundations are in place should the council be called upon to respond.

I would like to thank all the members who were part of this group and the officers who supported this work.

Cllr Ketan Sheth

Chair of Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

Context

Statutory Obligations

Local Authorities are required by the Civil Contingencies Act (2004) to undertake the following seven activities:

1. **Co-operate with other category one and two responders** – which is achieved via Brent Borough Resilience Forum (BRF). The BRF isn't a separate legal entity, and isn't a responder in itself, but is the principle mechanism for multi-agency co-operation and co-ordination.
2. **Share Information to enhance coordination** – also achieved through the BRF, in addition to standard operational channels.
3. **Undertake Risk Assessments** – these are regularly reviewed and updated to provide a comprehensive assessment of the risks facing the borough, which are then monitored or mitigated appropriately. Risk Management can help to ensure that planning work is carried out in proportion to the risk.
4. **Create emergency plans for response** - risk assessments are used to decide which plans need to be developed and what should be included within them. The Minimum Standards for London (MSL) framework is used to guide this work, and to provide a benchmark for measuring standards of service, and we self-assess against this framework on an annual basis.
5. **Create and maintain business continuity arrangements** – the council's Business Continuity Programme ensures resilience to disruptions, incidents and / or emergencies when they occur.
6. **Maintain arrangements to warn and inform the Public in the event of an emergency** – the council maintains an Emergency Communications Protocol that is reviewed annually, and outlines methods for communicating with the public during emergencies.
7. **Provide advice and support on business continuity to businesses and the voluntary sector** – A Promotion Strategy is in place to encourage business continuity management (BCM) by Brent businesses, and the Council's website contains useful information for businesses wishing to enhance their resilience as well as a contact point for further support.

Responding to incidents

When an incident occurs, generally the immediate response is coordinated by "blue light" services such as Police or Fire. If necessary, they would lead a multi-agency response, membership of which would depend on the nature of the incident, but would likely include agencies such as Local Authorities, Health, and Transport. Each agency leads on the elements of the response that sit within their normal remit; for local authorities this may be services such as social care, provision of emergency rehousing, management of the public realm. Authorities are often commonly asked to use their buying power to secure resources that the Police and Fire Brigade may not be able to source. A simple way of summarising this is that the Authority is asked to "deliver normal services under abnormal circumstances".

The command structure which is put in place within the local authority in order to achieve this differs dependent on the scale of the incident, and are attached at Appendix A.

During 2017, the Civil Contingencies team dealt with 22 separate incidents in total, of which 20 were relatively minor and only affect a handful of residents;

- 13 domestic house fires, floods, or explosions
- 4 incidents on industrial or commercial sites
- 3 localised issues such as power cuts, storms and burst water mains

The final two were Brent's support of the Grenfell Tower response, and the unexploded bomb in Brondesbury Park.

In most cases the incidents were dealt with by the Emergency Duty Officer within the Civil Contingencies team liaising with blue light agencies. The Emergency Duty Officer provided updates, and where necessary took instruction directly from the Chief Executive. In eight cases, the incidents were severe enough to require a Local Authority Liaison Officer to be dispatched in order to be the eyes and ears on the ground. A further five required establishment of a Rest Centre, though with the exception of the WW2 bomb this was small scale; less than ten residents. Seven required us to temporarily rehouse a small number of residents.

London-Wide Support for Emergency Planning

All London Councils are supported in their Emergency Planning functions by the London Resilience Group, which is hosted by London Fire Brigade, and jointly funded by the Brigade, local authorities and the Greater London Authority.

London Resilience is a centre of excellence, which provides a secretariat function to regional forums, supports local authority emergency planning and response, and supports pan-London arrangements if there is major incident in the capital. They also coordinate the annual self-assessment of all local authorities against the Minimum Standards for London criteria.

Best practice and review

London Resilience also support the Local Authorities Panel, which last year collectively reviewed Emergency Planning capabilities across London, and generated a series of recommendations for implementation both at Regional and Local level in order to ensure collective capabilities and resilience remains fit for purpose into the 2020s. The full copy of this report is attached at appendix B.

Many of the recommendations are strategic in nature, and applicable to the regional level, and will be implemented through London Resilience and the various regional structures. Of those that were applicable at the local level, many had already been implemented by Brent.

Summary of recommendation	Brent's position
Emergency Planning Teams should be placed within a central / corporate directorate	The Civil Contingencies team sits within the Resources directorate, alongside other corporate services
Business Continuity should be incorporated into Emergency Planning Teams	Brent has always combined these two functions
Enhance cooperation at sub-regional level to ensure an equal contribution by individual boroughs to regional planning	Brent has always contributed to regional work, being a lead borough for LALO2 training across London and being a member of the Mass Fatalities Coordinating Group by virtue of our mortuary being a designated disaster mortuary for the North Coronial area. Additional elements of regional work have been agreed at sub regional level and the West London sub regional

	grouping of boroughs has agreed a work plan to reflect this.
Chief Executives must ensure they are prepared to assume the London Local Authority Gold (LLAG) role	Carolyn Downs has been on the LLAG on-call rota on a number of occasions, and assumed a deputy Gold role at the Grenfell Tower Response Unit. In addition, members of the support team are trained and on-call rotas are put in place for Brent's periods of LLAG duty
Chief Executives to continue to support and monitor the effectiveness of MSL as the assessment criteria of London's collective preparedness	Council Management Team is responsible for approving the annual self-assessment against MSL before it is submitted

In addition to the Local Authorities Panel report, the panel has also commissioned a peer review of London Local Government's Collective Resilience Arrangements. The report will be submitted to the Local Authority Panel and the London Councils Leaders' Committee in early 2018.

The areas of focus will be London local government's collective arrangements, working with other partners, to support London's overall resilience. It will consider this in the context of the EP2020 Prospectus and the degree to which, given the experience of a range of incidents during 2017, that continues to provide assurance about London local government's collective work. It will not focus on the performance of any individual authority, nor will it seek to cover the same territory that is being examined by specifically constituted debriefing exercises and inquiries into particular incidents.

Methodology

Given that the task and finish group's work crossed the remits of the council's Audit Advisory Committee, and the overview and scrutiny committees, its membership was drawn from all of these as they stood at the time of the group's inception. This was as follows:

- Councillor Ketan Sheth (Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee) – Chair
- Councillor Rita Conneely (Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee)
- Councillor Patricia Harrison (Housing Scrutiny Committee)
- Councillor Reg Colwill (Housing Scrutiny Committee)
- Councillor Ernest Ezeajughi (Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee)
- Councillor Neil Nerva – (Audit Advisory Committee)

The group was supported by the Chief Executive and the Strategic Director for Resources, as well as officers from their departments, including expert advice from the Civil Contingencies Manager. It met four times from September to November 2017, and considered a range of evidence, including key local emergency planning documents; information on rest centre provision; examples of the role members could play in the event of a civil emergency; and relevant training opportunities for members and officers.

The group also heard from the council's Head of Digital Services about the resilience of its IT systems; and from the London Resilience Forum's Deputy Head of Emergency Planning, on the Minimum Standards for London, how Brent had assessed itself against these and how it compared with other London boroughs.

In addition, the group received updates on meetings of the council's Senior Managers Group, and the council's partners in Wembley Park, on plans and readiness for civil emergencies. Members further took part in a number of fictional emergency scenarios to discuss appropriate responses, as well as having the opportunity to visit the Control Room in the Civic Centre, which is used as the Borough Emergency Control Centre in an emergency.

Findings

Brent has much to be proud of in terms of its emergency preparedness. It is one of only a handful of London boroughs to have a dedicated facility set up to run an incident response; all the necessary plans are in place and subject to regular review, annual assessments against other London-wide criteria are positive, and the Authority has a strong reputation for dealing effectively with low level incidents.

On the few occasions Brent has been tested by larger incidents, such as the unexploded bombs found in Wembley and Brondesbury Park in recent years, the response has been well coordinated, and residents of the borough have been kept safe and reassured. The task group also heard that in some areas, such as identifying vulnerable residents in an emergency, Brent is seen as an example of best practice, and is often called upon to demonstrate its methodology to other boroughs.

There is recognition that there is always room for improvement, and the task group have reviewed best practice, and considered advice from a variety of sources in coming to the recommendations laid out in this report.

Leadership during an incident response

The task group reviewed the command structures for different types of incident (attached at Appendix A), and gained a better understanding of the roles of incident Gold, Silver, Local Authority Liaison Officers, and the role played by the Borough Emergency Control Centre (BECC) during an emergency.

They noted that the infrequency of major incidents in the borough, and the relative frequency of lower level incidents which are managed solely by the Civil Contingencies team in liaison with the Chief Executive directly, may have given rise to an inadvertent lack of visibility and ownership within the wider Senior Management Team. The handful of trained Silver Officers across the authority have thus far been sufficient to respond to the rare larger incidents. However during their debrief, London Resilience warned of the danger of reliance on voluntary resources. They advised that many boroughs have reviewed relevant job descriptions to ensure that the responsibility of managers to be part of an emergency response is explicit, and embedded throughout every part of the organisation.

Recommendation 1: On-call rotas should be put in place to formalise the arrangements for incident Gold and Silver, ensuring that suitable training is provided, and job descriptions and payment arrangements are updated accordingly.

The group noted that many boroughs commission bespoke training for all the senior managers who would be involved in a command structure from a branch of the Cabinet Office called the Emergency Planning College, and that feedback from those boroughs on the value and quality of this training has been very positive.

Recommendation 2: That the Emergency Planning College be commissioned to create a bespoke training package to be delivered to the Senior Management Team, specific to the various leadership roles in the command structure, with refresher training to be made available every two years.

The task group also gave consideration to the role of elected members during an emergency response, noting that while it was not the role of Councillors to get involved in the strategic, tactical or operational coordination and delivery of response or recovery, they had an

important role in providing highly visible community leadership, and in confidence building and engagement with affected individuals. In particular the group highlighted that the presence of local ward Councillors and the Leader of the Council at the rest centre during the unexploded bomb in Brondesbury had a very positive impact, and provided affected individuals with significant reassurance.

The group agreed that the LGA booklet “A Councillor’s guide to Civil Emergencies” (attached at Appendix C) reflected this well and should be used as the basis of improving understanding of the role with members outside of the task group.

Recommendation 3: There should be induction training for Councillors on their role in Emergency Response, which should include a visit to the BECC, and explanation of communications protocols so Councillors know how they will receive information during an incident. Refresher training should be made available every two years.

Operational readiness

The council is fully compliant with its statutory obligations. Where local versions of emergency plans are required by legislation, they are in place and are subject to regular review. However, the feedback from the Senior Manager’s Group session that was considered by the task group highlighted that in some areas, operational managers were not always sufficiently aware of their role. It was also noted that in isolated cases, the practical elements needed to enact those plans either weren’t in place, or that managers may not have been aware of them. Some examples of this might be questions over whether sufficiently flexible commissioning arrangements are in place to quickly decant a care home with a large number of residents with different vulnerabilities, or whether communications cascades were sufficiently up to date with staffing changes.

This was not felt to be a significant cause for concern, given that an emergency response is fundamentally the council “delivering normal services in abnormal circumstances”, but the group did agree that greater departmental ownership of plans would help to deliver greater consistency in understanding of plans and ensure regular review of the practical arrangements laid out within them.

Recommendation 4: That emergency plans are reviewed within the relevant departments, to ensure that the necessary operational arrangements are in place in order to be able to enact them quickly.

Recommendation 5: In order to ensure regular and detailed review at an operational level, existing arrangements for review and sign-off of all plans should be amended so that departments have full accountability for their relevant areas of responsibility.

The group also discussed the importance of exercises as a means of testing plans and ensuring operational readiness, and noted that the Civil Contingencies team regularly conduct two types of drills. The first type is an activation test, which alerts people to an incident and checks their theoretical response time. The second is an annual rest centre exercise which covered the aspects of setting up and running a centre. The latter requires significant resource to organise, and incurs significant cost if external bodies such as the Emergency Planning College are brought in to deliver it, and as such it was felt that table-top exercises and scenario testing were the most feasible way of testing readiness and highlighting issues.

Recommendation 6: That the Civil Contingencies team continue its existing arrangements for exercises, but through its existing training, expands the programme of table-top exercises

with both operational managers, and those that would form part of the command structure in a major incident.

One specific area of operational readiness that the group expressed some concern about was the provision of emergency shelter. While the group noted that the Civil Contingencies team has relationships with around 30 venues throughout the borough, and has never had a problem sourcing a rest centre within a reasonable locality of an incident, they still expressed concern that centres may become unavailable as a result of alternative bookings, or as a consequence of the significant amount of regeneration in the borough.

The group also considered that in certain circumstances, overnight accommodation within a rest centre environment may not be the most appropriate option, and that while there is no statutory obligation to provide it, hotel accommodation may be more suitable. It considered the specific issues around sourcing hotel accommodation in Wembley on event days, and heard that some boroughs had pre-existing contractual arrangements with hotel chains to facilitate mass placement of evacuated residents.

Recommendation 7: That the rest centre list be reviewed and refreshed with input from members and their community contacts, and that arrangements be put in place with hotels within the borough to ensure that block bookings could be secured at short notice if needed.

Working with partners

Brent is home to three sites that are classed as high-risk by national counter terrorism police; Wembley Stadium, the SSE Arena, and Neasden Temple. Given that any incident affecting the stadium or arena would also affect the Civic Centre, it was felt that the additional complexity of this made close relationships with partners in Wembley particularly important.

The task group received an update on a recent meeting with all the Wembley park partners and blue light services at a strategic level, and was in support of their joint decision to undertake a two-hour table top exercise to discuss potential scenarios specific to Wembley. It also noted that strong relationships also existed through the Civil Contingencies team at an operational level, and that all organisations had committed to continuing to maintain and update the lists of key contacts that were shared between them all.

The task group considered issues such as dispersal from the Wembley area following an incident, but noted that the Council had no statutory obligations in this respect, but could potentially assist with traffic management, sheltering affected individuals until transport could be arranged, and liaison with emergency services partners and transport operators.

Recommendation 8: That close relationships be maintained at a strategic and operational level with the Wembley park partners, and that an update on the table-top exercise be included within the report to the audit committee. That contact is made with Neasden Temple to ensure that the relevant contacts are in place.

Monitoring & Evaluation

The group felt that while the risks around emergency preparedness appeared to be well managed, that the impact of any mishandling of an emergency response was sufficiently great that it ought to suggest that the Audit Advisory Committee undertake an annual review of emergency preparedness. It noted that the Audit Committee could obtain objective and

independence assurance on the effectiveness of the council's Emergency Planning Framework, and any training that had been conducted throughout the year, through the Internal Audit team, and that the Head of Internal Audit would be proposing inclusion of a review within the 2018/19 internal audit plan. The group also felt that given the wide-reaching nature of any such incident within the borough, an update should then be provided to Full Council in such a way that it enabled debate to take place.

Recommendation 9: That Internal Audit carry out a full review of Emergency Planning 2018/19, with a follow up report in 19/20 as per the usual audit protocol, after which the Audit Committee should give thought to how regularly the function needs to be reviewed going forward. Following the Audit report, an update will be provided to full council in order to enable debate.

Action Plan & Progress to Date

This task group has been running concurrently with a number of internal activities, and as such significant progress has already been made over recent months towards achievement of some of the recommendations outlined within this report.

- (1) **On call rotas:** 15 senior managers have been trained as incident Silver, and an on-call rota has been in place since 20 November 2017. It has been established that there is not a need to update job descriptions for those on Chief Officer terms, who currently make up the rotas for the command structure.
- (2) **Training:** The Emergency Planning College have been contacted and are due to provide an overview of their training proposals in January.
- (3) **Member Training:** Member induction content has been revised, and has been included within the brief for the Emergency Planning College as well.
- (4) **Departmental Review of operational plans:** Plan owners within each department will work with the Civil Contingencies team to bring together the relevant services to review how each would be delivered. For the most important plans, this exercise will be complete by the end of February.
- (5) **Ownership of Plans:** a revised matrix setting out ownership and review of the various plans was agreed by Council Management Team on 5 October 2017. Closely aligned to recommendations 4 and 6, the series of planned exercises will further embed this.
- (6) **Table top exercises:** As mentioned above, familiarization sessions and table top exercises will commence in 2018, and will be regularly repeated going forward as part of the existing programme of training and reviews. A specific session with blue light services and Wembley park partners is scheduled for 30 January 2018.
- (7) **Emergency Accommodation:** Members have been encouraged to feed suggestions and contacts in to the Civil Contingencies team via the Member's Bulletin, and additional Rest Centres have been identified in areas where there were gaps in geographical coverage that have been added to our list. Five hotel chains have been identified as preferred providers, and officers have met individually with them to discuss our requirements. All are keen to assist, not only with accommodation, but also any other facilities or services that are required, such as emergency shelter, food and drink etc.
- (8) **Wembley Park partnerships:** The multi-agency contact list is regularly updated and a table top exercise is scheduled for 30th January 2018.
- (9) **Monitoring:** This report will be discussed at Audit Committee on 10 January 2017, and at Full Council on 22 January 2017. The topic has been added to the annual audit plan and will be carried out in 2018/19, after which point the Audit committee can discuss how regularly the function ought to be reviewed.

Background Documents

Appendix A – Different types of incident and their command structure

Appendix B – Draft Emergency Planning 2020 Review (Local Authorities Panel)

Appendix C – ‘A Councillor’s guide to civil emergencies’ (LGA Guidance)