



Audit and Standards Advisory Committee

6 February 2024

Report from the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources

**Lead Member – Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform
(Councillor Shama Tatler)**

Emergency Planning & Resilience Service Update

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Non-key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
List of Appendices:	One Appendix 1: External Review of Council's Emergency Planning Service - Recommendations
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Melissa Brackley Emergency Planning & Resilience Manager melissa.brackley@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 This report continues the cycle of annual updates that the Emergency Planning team has shared with the Audit and Standards Advisory Committee since 2018. The report provides the Committee with an update on the work and priorities of the team since the last report in September 2022, focusing on the continuous improvement within the Council's Emergency Planning and Resilience service.

1.2 Following some personnel changes within the team and some significant Emergency Planning incidents in 2023, a key milestone in the current annual cycle has been the commissioning of an external review of the Council's Emergency Planning. The review has been completed and identifies a number of key areas of focus for 2024, which include increasing the capacity of the team, a greater focus on training and development and the use of simulated events/exercises that involve multi-agency response(s).

2.0 Recommendation(s)

2.1 The Committee is asked to consider and note the information contained in this report, in particular the external service review which has recently been undertaken and the training sessions and exercises proposed to improve our organisational readiness.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

3.1.1 The service updates provided in this report align with the following relevant priorities and outcomes within the Borough Plan:

- Prosperity and Stability in Brent - Building stronger partnerships with local organisations and supporting our community in the context of Emergency Planning and Resilience.
- Thriving Communities - Helping to support the creation of a safer borough through proactively planned interventions to reduce exposure to Emergency Planning and Resilience related risk.

3.1.2 The service updates provided in this report align with the following key corporate strategic documents:

- The Brent Borough Risk Register.
- Corporate Business Continuity Plan and Brent Recovery Plan.

3.2 External Service Review

3.2.1 An external review of the Council's Emergency Planning and Resilience capabilities was undertaken in October 2023. The review was undertaken by an external consultant and considered the extent and nature of compliance to the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the Council's existing command and control structures and those key plans necessary for the Council to discharge its legal obligations effectively.

3.2.2 The report recognised the arrangements Brent Council has in place provide a good foundation, with regular experience of dealing with a variety of incidents. The report highlighted the range of plans in place to meet the known key risks, stating "*these plans are thorough and include effective procedures*". It also highlighted the "*positive willingness to support emergency preparedness activities across the council*".

3.2.3 The report made a series of recommendations designed to help the council build on the existing arrangement. These can be found in Appendix 1.

3.2.4 The recommendations were RAG rated in terms of priority and included 6 rated as red, that must be addressed in the short term and must be completed within the next 6 months. These are detailed below and updates on the progress against these so far are included in within this report.

No.	Recommendation	Grading
1	I would recommend the local multi-agency Borough Resilience Forum formally risk assesses the site- specific risks or locations in the Borough, and they are included in the Borough Risk Register.	Red
5	I would recommend a short generic guide to provide guidance to all staff responding to a major emergency, ensuring a consistent approach to incident management.	Red
8	I would recommend that Gold/Strategic refresher training is delivered annually.	Red
9	I would recommend that Silver/Tactical Command refresher training is delivered annually.	Red
16	I would recommend the Council's Emergency Planning Team should comprise: a Service Manager; three Emergency Planning and Response Officers.	Red
18	I would recommend the Council's Emergency Planning team leader be graded at a higher level (minimum PO/7/8).	Red

3.3 Emergency Planning and Resilience Team – Recruitment

3.3.1 Since the last update, the previous Emergency Planning & Resilience Manager has left the team and moved into the Health & Safety team. The Emergency Planning and Resilience Manager role has since been resourced on an interim basis. A permanent recruitment process is now underway and is expected to complete in February 2024.

3.3.2 The external service review made some recommendations about the team structure required to support this service. These recommendations are being looked at currently, with some benchmarking against other boroughs. In the interim, an additional officer is being recruited on a temporary basis. Recent experience and from feedback from other London Boroughs have shown that recruitment into this area is currently a challenge.

3.4 Brent Borough Risk Register

3.4.1 The Civic Contingencies Act 2004 ('The Act') places a legal duty on Category 1 responders, including Local Authorities, to produce a Risk Register. Additionally, the Act requires those Category 1 responders 'from time to time to assess the risk of an emergency occurring' and 'from time to time to assess the risk of an emergency making it necessary or expedient for Brent Council to perform its functions'.

3.4.2 The Brent Borough Risk Register has been reformatted to follow the layout of other Local Authorities such as the London Boroughs of Hackney and Camden. The Risk Register was reviewed in December 2023 and is due to be signed off by the Borough Resilience Forum in February 2024.

3.5 Business Continuity

3.5.1 The Council has in place an up-to-date a Business Continuity Policy Statement (Version 3, March 2023) outlining:

- The Council's commitment to effective Business Continuity Management.
- The management of the Business Continuity Management Programme, including the roles and responsibilities of those involved in delivery of the programme.

3.5.2 The Council has in place an up-to-date Corporate Business Continuity Plan (Version 5, February 2023). This plan sets out the Council's corporate approach to responding to and managing incidents disrupting delivery of services and functions.

3.5.3 The annual review of the service level Business Continuity Planning arrangements took place at the end of 2023. The final sign off for some plans is still being followed up and is expected to complete by the end of February 2024.

3.5.4 Further development of the Corporate Business Continuity Plan is planned in 2024, to incorporate a directorate level picture of service criticality. The Emergency Planning & Resilience Manager will be working with directorate leads imminently to progress this work in parallel with finalising the outstanding service level Business Continuity Plans.

3.6 Recovery Plan

3.6.1 The Brent Recovery Plan was one of the areas identified in the external review as needing further development. Work is underway to update the current version and incorporate the learning from the review and recent incidents. Once the plan has been updated and signed off, an exercise will be arranged to test and embed the revised plan.

3.7 Humanitarian Assistance

3.7.1 Humanitarian Assistance can be defined as those activities aimed at addressing the needs of people affected by emergencies: the provision of psychological and social aftercare and support in the short, medium and long term.

3.7.2 People need timely practical support with a sympathetic and understanding approach. This kind of support can be crucial to ensuring that people directly affected by a major emergency are able to recover both practically and psychologically.

3.7.3 Both the external review and recent exercises have highlighted the need for further work on the 'Humanitarian Assistance' element of the Council's response. At the end of 2023, officers from Emergency Planning and the Corporate Director of Children and Young People were able to attend London Humanitarian Assistance training. There are also briefings planned in January on the revised London HA framework. Further work is planned to enhance the Council's arrangements for this capability.

3.8 Training and Development

- 3.8.1 Further training in terms of strengthening Brent Officers' understanding of the Council's command and control structure was one of the key recommendations in the recent external service review. Therefore, a Strategic (Gold) refresher training has been arranged for the end of January 2024, whilst 2 sessions have been arranged in February for the Tactical (Silver) refresher training.
- 3.8.2 On completion of the above training and some of the ongoing plan reviews (Recovery Plan & Major Incident Plan), an internal exercise will be delivered (anticipated in summer 2024), to improve our organisational readiness, test the revised plans and identify additional training needs.
- 3.8.3 For all Bronze colleagues more commonly known as an Emergency Response Officers, a structured Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme will be developed. This programme will be rolled out in partnership with the London Resilience Training & Exercising Team and West London SRF Emergency Planning functions.
- 3.8.4 The Emergency Planning and Resilience Service, in partnership with Shared Technology Services (STS), are currently agreeing the scope for a table-top exercise and associated exercise dates for all three incumbent Councils to test organisational resilience to a cyber-attack. The objective of this exercise is to test the effectiveness of recovering IT infrastructure and IT services within an agreed timescale, commonly known as the business recovery time objective.
- 3.8.5 Upon completion of the cyber exercise and associated lessons identified process, the Corporate Business Continuity Plan will be further refreshed to reflect those lessons identified.

3.9 Wembley National Stadium – Multi-Agency Exercise

- 3.9.1 The annual Wembley National Stadium multi-agency exercise took place on 17th January 2024. 'Players' taking part in the tabletop exercise ranged from a delegation of UEFA Champions League representatives and The FA through to local Borough Resilience partners, such as voluntary and faith groups.
- 3.9.2 An internal team are now in the process of reviewing their learning from the exercise and a multi-agency debrief is also planned in February.
- 3.9.3 The exercise focused on the initial response and the first few days following the incident. The Council would like to develop the scenario used and consider the longer-term recovery aspects as part of the ongoing development of our multi-agency relationships, systems and communications.

3.10 Community Resilience Fund

- 3.10.1 The Emergency Planning Service, in partnership with the Borough's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), has been successful in their application to secure a grant of up to £5,000 from the Community Resilience Fund.

3.10.2 The fund will support local Brent projects that will focus on the following outcomes:

- Increased community preparedness for emergencies.
- Improved relationships between VCS and statutory agencies.
- Improved communications channels for responding to emergencies.
- Improved data and insight into community preparedness.

3.10.3 A 'Voluntary and Community Sector Forum' will be established as a sub-group of the Borough Resilience Forum (BRF) and will work to establish close working relationships with our Voluntary, Community and Faith Groups in preparing for and responding to any incidents or emergencies within the Borough.

3.11 Incidents

3.11.1 Wembley Brook (August 2023) Flooding: Continuous heavy rain coupled with the blockage of a culvert flowing resulted in a number of properties suffering flooding.

3.11.2 Kilburn Tower Block (September 2023) Fire: A fire originating on the 13th floor of a 20-storey tower block necessitated the full evacuation of the entire complex.

3.11.3 Kilburn Sink Hole (January 2024): Approximately 190 properties were evacuated on 4th January following a gas leak. It was later discovered that damage to the sewer had caused a large sink hole, which had subsequently caused damage to the gas mains. While the initial cordon was reduced on 5th January, some residents were unable to access their homes until 8th/9th January. 43 of those properties were then without gas until 15th January. The situation is ongoing (at the time of writing) while work to repair the utilities and fill the sink hole is completed, with some residents unable to access their vehicles due to the location of the sink hole.

3.11.4 Learning from all these incidents will be factored into the plan reviews and training sessions being delivered this year.

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

4.1 There are no implications from a stakeholder/ward member consultation and engagement perspective.

5.0 Financial Considerations

5.1 There are no specific financial implications leading from this report.

6.0 Legal Considerations

6.1 The Act provides the primary framework for dealing with large-scale emergencies under UK law and, Part 1 concerns the responsibility of various public bodies and certain private bodies (e.g., energy suppliers or

telecommunications providers) to undertake contingency planning for emergencies.

6.2 The Act recognises an emergency as an event or situation that threatens damage to human welfare for the purposes of The Act only if it may cause:

- loss of human life
- human illness or injury
- homelessness
- damage to property
- disruption of a supply of money, food, water, energy or fuel
- disruption of a system of communication
- disruption of facilities for transport, or
- disruption of services relating to health

6.3 It is apparent that the definition of 'emergency' under the Act is capable of covering an extremely broad range of circumstances, ranging from disasters that are life-threatening and large-scale (e.g., a hurricane, major earthquake or nuclear attack), to relatively small-scale, discrete events that cause 'disruption' rather than outright damage a fuel strike or power failure affecting telephone lines.

6.4 Emergency planning should aim where possible to prevent emergencies occurring, and when they do occur, good planning should reduce, control or mitigate the effects of the emergency. It is a systematic and ongoing process which should evolve as lessons are learnt and circumstances change.

6.5 According to the Cabinet Office guidance, Category 1 responders are required to:

- Put in place emergency plans business continuity management arrangements informed by risk assessment.
- Put in place arrangements to make information available to the public concerning civil protection matters and maintain arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public in the event of an emergency.
- Co-operate and share information with other local responders to enhance co-ordination and efficiency.

6.6 Local authorities are also expected to provide advice and assistance about business continuity management to businesses and voluntary organisations.

7.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

7.1 There are no implications from an EDI perspective.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 There are no implications from a Climate Change and Environmental perspective.

9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

9.1 There are no implications from a Human Resources/Property perspective.

10.0 Communication Considerations

10.1 There are no implications from a communications perspective.

Report sign off:

Minesh Patel

Corporate Director of Finance & Resources