

FOREST HEATH DISTRICT COUNCIL
ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

WEST SUFFOLK JOINT EMERGENCY PLANNING PANEL

Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 16 February 2012 at 5.00 pm
in the Ground Floor Meeting Room (GFR14), West Suffolk House,
Western Way, Bury St Edmunds

PRESENT: Forest Heath District Council
 Councillor Drummond (Chairman)
 Councillor Bowman
 Councillor Roman

St Edmundsbury Borough Council
 Councillor Beckwith
 Councillor Cox

IN ATTENDANCE: A Points, District Emergency Planning Officer
 S Henthorn, Emergency Planning Officer
 A Claydon, Strategic Director (Resources) (FHDC)
 D Long, Committee Administrator (SEBC)

1. Substitutes

No substitutions were declared.

2. Election of Chairman: 2012/2013

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED:-

That Councillor A Drummond be elected Chairman.

3. Appointment of Vice-Chairman: 2012/2013

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED:-

That Councillor J Thorndyke be appointed Vice-Chairman.

4. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs Burt (Forest Heath District Council) and Thorndyke (St Edmundsbury Borough Council).

5. Declarations of Interests

Members' declarations of interests are recorded under the item to which the declaration relates.

6. Terms of Reference: West Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Panel

The Joint Panel considered Report C356 (previously circulated) which set out the Terms of Reference as approved by the full Council of Forest Heath District and the Cabinet of St Edmundsbury Borough Council.



RECOMMENDED:-

That the Terms of Reference detailed in Report C356 be approved, subject to Paragraph 6, frequency of meetings, to include every 6 months, 'or as appropriate'.

7. Business Continuity

The Joint Panel noted Report C357 (previously circulated) which informed Members that no business continuity incidents had occurred, and that an exercise had taken place at Forest Heath District Council based on a loss of ICT facilities scenario. Officers advised that whilst regular reviews of both authorities' Business Continuity Plans were taking place, the impact of the work on Shared Services was being taken into account. As a consequence, progress was being made at a slower pace than originally envisaged, and no further exercises or training was planned at the present time. It was being anticipated that, ultimately, the respective Business Continuity Plans would be merged.

8. Community Preparedness

The Joint Panel considered Report C358 (previously circulated) which advised that £2,000 had been allocated through the St Edmundsbury Borough Council (SEBC) Rural Action Plan to a project to increase the resilience of rural communities. The money would fund a basic Local Emergency Kit that would be given to parishes and community groups that had developed a Local Emergency Plan in conjunction with the Joint Emergency Planning Unit (JEPU). The same amount had been allocated from the Community Services budget at Forest Heath District Council (FHDC) to fund the same scheme in its area.

Initial workshops/meetings had been held in each area to explain what was involved with creating an Emergency Plan, and to gain feedback on the type of equipment that Parish Councils or community groups would find useful. Eleven communities within SEBC and seven within FHDC had attended these initial sessions. These workshops would continue on a regular basis so that the interested communities could share ideas and best practice.

Officers advised that the response to date had been pleasing, and that communities were at varying stages in producing Emergency Plans. To be eligible to receive the Local Emergency Kit, communities would have to meet the criteria set out in the Rural Action Plan. An example of the kit was displayed at the meeting. Details of parishes participating to date were reported, and lists were available from the District Emergency Planning Officer.



RECOMMENDED:-

That Members of both Councils promote the opportunity for communities to obtain the Local Emergency Kit by raising awareness of it at Town/Parish Council meetings attended by them with a view to encouraging greater participation.

9. Emergency Planning and Responses

The Joint Panel noted Report C359 (previously circulated) which listed emergency planning incidents occurring in both authorities and the responses which had been made. Information was also given on exercises which had taken place and were planned along with training courses which had been held.

In relation to the incident involving an Aluminium Chloride spillage at International Flavors and Fragrances (IFF) site in Haverhill, Councillor Cox raised a question about the effectiveness of the warning and notification process because of the proximity of schools nearby. Officers advised that the notification system had been put into effect on this occasion by the Suffolk County Council Communications Team. This involved notifying organisations in primary and secondary areas who might be affected, and included educational establishments and care homes. In this particular instance there had been difficulties of receiving an accurate assessment of the situation from the scene, and also it had been at a time when schools were closing for the day and pupils were dispersing. As a result a 'safety first' approach was adopted initially and all schools in the area were notified. Once the situation at the scene became clearer the advice to schools was updated. Councillor Cox drew attention to the need to take into account the new Clements Community Primary School which had opened in June 2011.

10. Joint Emergency Planning Unit Performance and Capability Assessment

The Joint Panel noted Report C360 (previously circulated) the purpose of which was to provide an analysis of Emergency Preparedness in the Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury areas. The document demonstrated performance against the mandatory requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and in addition demonstrated where excellence had been achieved. It also aimed to encourage good practice and support to Forest Heath District Council (FHDC) and St Edmundsbury Borough Council (SEBC) in continuing to develop their capabilities in civil contingencies and emergency preparedness, including some areas of response and recovery.

Appendix A (Forest Heath) and Appendix B (St Edmundsbury) to the Report were each in two parts and measured current performance and capability, against the previous quarter. The format utilised a Red, Amber, Green system (RAG Status) for a summary status of each component and an overall assessment. This process had been aligned across all of Suffolk to enable Senior Officers to compare themselves on a like for like basis with other boroughs and districts and enable a county-wide picture to be built that readily identified strengths, weaknesses and trends. The issue of the Suffolk Joint Emergency Response Plan (JERP) to replace individual authorities' Response Plans in November 2011 had moved a significant number of the ratings from amber to green.

The Joint Panel discussed how items given a red ranking could be improved, and whether a timescale could be imposed to achieve this, as follows:-

- (i) Item C16/17 - Incorporating Business Continuity Management into Job Descriptions (both Councils)

Officers advised that there were employment issues involved in implementing this objective, and as a consequence it would have to be a longer term objective. In the short term it may be possible to readily include such provision in job descriptions for Joint Senior Management posts to be created under the Shared Services Agreement or for new staff appointed under shared services arrangements but this was something the Councils would need to decide upon.

- (ii) Item D24 – Media involvement in exercises (St Edmundsbury)

Members asked that officers, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Joint Panel, discuss with the media the possibility of reporters and journalists being present at the next exercise.

- (iii) Capability Assessment Section – Elected Members in civil contingencies - Forest Heath: Red and St Edmundsbury: Amber.

Officers advised that the current ratings reflected the attendance levels at briefing sessions arranged for Members. There had been a situation when neither the Leader of Council or the relevant Portfolio Holder at St Edmundsbury had been available to attend a training session.

In addition, officers reported that there had been a decrease in the number of volunteers from respective staff for emergency planning roles because of the implications of Shared Services and increased workloads. This was not giving rise to concern at present and it was anticipated that momentum would be given to recruiting more volunteers at a more appropriate time. It was also anticipated that it would be possible to pool volunteers from both Councils.

In conclusion officers advised that in future it was intended to combine the Performance and Capability Assessments within a single document.

11. Dates of Future Meetings

The Joint Panel agreed the following dates for future meetings:-

Tuesday 9 October 2012;
Tuesday 12 February 2013; and
Monday 14 October 2013.

All meetings to commence at 5.00 pm. Officers were asked, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Joint Panel to arrange the venues of meetings on an alternating basis.

The meeting concluded at 5.40 pm.

CHAIRMAN