

EMERGENCY PLANNING SERVICE UPDATE

Cabinet - 18 March 2021

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive & Chief Officer, Finance & Trading

Status: For Consideration

Also considered by:

Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee - 16 March 2021

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: This report updates the Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee about service delivery updates from the last 12 months.

This report supports the Key Aim of: Making Sevenoaks to be a safer place to live, work and travel.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Cllr. Margot McArthur

Contact Officer: Adrian Rowbotham, Ext. 7153

Trevor Kennett, Ext. 7407

Recommendation to Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee:

That the report be noted.

Recommendation to Cabinet:

That the report be noted.

Reason for recommendation: This is an information and update report and requires no further actions

Introduction

- 1 The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 identifies all district councils as Category 1 Responders. Duties placed upon the Council include Emergency Planning and response. The Council has in place appropriate emergency plans, which have been tested with multi-agency partners and effectively used in real situations.
- 2 Over the past 12 months Sevenoaks District Council has responded to unprecedented levels on response and recovery pressures relating to the

National Covid-19 pandemic and all of the associated implications on our residents and businesses, Brexit/EU transition, the closure of the French border over the Christmas period and the usual requirements around winter preparedness.

- 3 It is safe to say our resources, knowledge and expertise around emergency planning and incident management have been tested to their limits.
- 4 Along with these pressures our officers have also been involved in local emergency planning incidents, which have included severe weather episodes of flooding, a World War 2 incendiary bomb and the potential evacuation of several hundred passengers when a train hit a branch on the track at Swanley.
- 5 As a consequence of this unprecedented demand on emergency planning resources we have taken the opportunity to review, develop and update a number of our plans and strategies to ensure we learn from these experiences and make sure our plans are robust enough to manage the emergency, while remaining agile in our approach as a category 1 responder.

Brexit/EU transition

- 6 Our Council is an active member of the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) where we worked with multi-agencies across Kent and wider central Government in the preparation of a range of potential outcomes for our transition from the EU. A range of contingency plans have been developed, including the overarching Operation Fennel Traffic Management Plan. This plan details how to keep the M20 open and minimise the disruption to Kent residents, businesses and other road users when there are flow problems at the Port of Dover and Euro Tunnel.
- 7 Part of our involvement was to help at the initial the planning stage, so that the closure of the M26, which could impact the traffic in and around the Sevenoaks could be avoided. The final Operation Fennell plan excluded the closing of the M26.
- 8 As part of the Council's preparedness and planning process for the EU transition the Council's Business Continuity Plan was completely reviewed to ensure that services could continue with minimum disruption.
- 9 The UK formally exited the European Union on 31 January 2020 and entered a transition period, which ended on the 31 December 2020. On the 20 December 2020 France closed it border to the UK due to concerns about the spread of Covid-19 as a precaution.

- 10 Officers have attended a large number of virtual multi-agency meetings at a tactical and strategic level to ensure our Council is up to date and prepared on any Kent wide actions or plans and to assist, by mutual aid other district and county council services, particularly in East Kent.
- 11 Although reduced over time there are still potential threats and impact on the District, which include:
- Major disruption to the local and county road network;
 - Disruption to health and social care delivery, especially within our remoter communities;
 - Potential disruption to supply chains e.g. Fuel distribution;
 - Long-term detrimental impact on the County's economic competitive and attractiveness;
 - Risk of increased community tensions aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic;
 - Adverse winter weather conditions e.g. snow and flooding intensifying the impact of the above.

Severe Weather

- 12 The early parts of 2020, saw five storms that affected South East England and led to severe river and surface water flooding especially in Edenbridge, Sundridge and Swanley.
- 13 Our Incident Liaison Officers were active across the District monitoring conditions and sandbags were delivered as requested. Parish and Town Councils worked in conjunction with the Council to help the most affected households.
- 14 One of the worst flooding events took place along the A25 at Sundridge during Storm Dennis in February 2020. Local residents tried to slow cars down to help reduce and prevent flood wash entering their properties. A combined multiagency approach is being developed with the local Parish Council, to investigate how to best manage and possibly reduce the contributory factors along this stretch of roadway.
- 15 Prior to flooding season, staff including from some parish councils attended flood warden training delivered by the Kent Resilience Forum and the Environment Agency in readiness for the expected severe weather condition expected at the end of 2020 and early 2021.
- 16 The Council was represented at the Multi-Agency Flooding Debrief on 20 February 2020, where the worst affected areas, including Edenbridge were discussed.

- 17 The early part of 2021 saw continuing heavy and then snow, the Council were represented on the County-wide Severe Weather Group and the Tactical Coordination Group to ensure all responses were coordinated and the Council were prepared. Our stocks of sandbags and floodsax's remain high and Direct Services have delivered supplies when requested.

Covid-19

- 18 It is fair to say the current pandemic has tested our resilience over a prolonged period. Crucially, the Council achieved its objective of delivering a good service to protect and support vulnerable residents, which is a remarkable achievement.
- 19 Staff involved in the pandemic response were committed to delivering outcomes for customers while structures, including those for governance and decision-making, were robust in design. Communications and information flows up and down the organisation were good, with the Council defining its critical services in discussion with stakeholders and review of data shows that service standards were maintained during this period.

Current Reviews

- 20 The current priorities are to review and refresh the following emergency plans and procedures:
- Major Emergency & Incident Response Plan - this has been refreshed and updated mainly with staff and service changes;
 - Civic Protocol for the death of a senior national figure - these procedures have been reviewed and refreshed in accordance with County and national guidance. Council Officers have also practiced these procedures in a desktop exercise;
 - On-call Duty Emergency Activation Officer Procedure - This has been completely reviewed and developed into a more robust scheme, with a rota of trained officers on call should the Major Emergency or Incident Plan be instigated.
 - A full review is being undertaken by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development and the Head of Direct Services on training and development requirements to ensure we have the correct levels of resilience and preparedness around emergency planning and our response to any incident.
 - The District's Emergency Centre (DEC) handbook and procedure is currently being reviewed and improved following the learning from the Covid-19 pandemic and activation.

- A review of the district's Rest & Welfare centres is being completed to ensure the measures currently in place are up to date and work well.

Key Implications

Financial

The Council budget for Civil Protection largely comprises salary allocations for key staff responsibilities. Depending on the nature of an event and the response, any necessary funding would normally be found from Partner Agencies or existing Council budgets. In certain larger scale events, where expenditure exceeds a set limit, funding can be recovered from central Government (The Belwin Scheme).

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

The Council has statutory responsibilities as a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None

Adrian Rowbotham
Deputy Chief Executive
& Chief Officer, Finance and Trading