

TO: THE EXECUTIVE  
19 OCTOBER 2010

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**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORT ON A REVIEW OF PREPAREDNESS FOR  
PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES  
(Director of Adult Social Care and Health &  
Director of Environment, Culture and Communities)**

**1 PURPOSE OF DECISION**

- 1.1 This report sets out the Executive's response to the recommendations in the report by the Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel's Working Group on preparedness for Public Health Emergencies.
- 1.2 The report from the Working Group was completed earlier in the financial year, prior to the current information about public sector finances. As a consequence of this, whilst the Executive is supportive of the recommendations, any which require further financial support will out of necessity be considered part of the overall strategic approach of the Council in responding to the current financial climate.
- 1.3 In addition to this, the new coalition has produced a White Paper on the NHS, with changing responsibilities for Local Authorities. This involves Local Authorities being responsible for Health Improvement and Public Health.

**2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

**It is recommended that:-**

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission be thanked for its work and for generating constructive recommendations;**
- 2.2 The Executive endorse the responses to the recommendation which are highlighted in the main body of the report; and**
- 2.3 The Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing writes to the South Central Ambulance Service asking it to review its contingency arrangements with other strategic health authorities to ensure that sufficient resources are available on demand when required to respond to public health emergencies.**

**3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 Having met on two instances to agree the theme and scope of the review, the Working Group met on six further occasions to gather information from representatives of organisations identified as playing a significant role in emergency preparedness and response in Bracknell Forest.
- 3.2 The recommendations above are supported within available resources. There was a further recommendation on the role of the Armed Forces which is covered by national arrangements. This should have been communicated to the Working Group. If support is required from the Military; this is known as MACC (Military Aid to the Civil

Community). This is the provision of unarmed military assistance to the public at large including support to a major incident or natural disaster. The request to mobilise has to be made via the Gold Strategic Coordinating Group. It is likely that in the event of a public health emergency requiring armed forces assistance, this is the way in which a response would happen.

#### **4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

Not applicable.

#### **5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 5.1 The Working Group have recognised that existing emergency preparedness arrangements are robust. The recommendations put forward are intended to maintain good practice or secure improvements.
- 5.2 The Working Group made 8 recommendations within its report.. The remainder of this section provides a commentary on the recommendations and sets out the current position.
- 5.3 Good hygiene campaigns and practices be encouraged at all times

##### **Agreed, within available resources**

The need for promoting good hygiene is a core function of Environmental Health. Preventing the spread of disease is a duty of the Council arising from a range of statutory provisions. Much is done on a day to day basis as part of the inspection/enforcement process. The ability to run campaigns is directly related to capacity. In recent years as capacity has reduced so has the promotional aspects of the work. There is little prospect of doing more within available resources.

- 5.4 The Thames Valley emergency preparedness advice booklet, 'Are You Ready?', be continued and updated as appropriate and distributed as widely as costs allow

##### **Agreed**

A new booklet entitled 'Are You Ready' has been designed, printed and distributed across the Thames Valley by the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum. Our share of this booklet was delivered to us on the 23 July and in order for us to meet our warning and informing duties imposed by the Civil Contingency Act, we are arranging to distribute this via a variety of means across the borough. We will not be delivering door to door but have arranged distribution via schools, libraries and corporate buildings, through Parish Councils and citizen packs. The booklet has been advertised in the summer edition of Town & Country and members of the public are able to request a copy. It is also available electronically at <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/are-you-ready-booklet.pdf>

- 5.5 More engagement with residential care homes be undertaken to mitigate the risks to their vulnerable clients posed by high food poisoning risk rating, possible source of Legionnaire's Disease and threat of the Winter Vomiting virus

##### **Agreed in part**

In Environmental Health terms, residential care homes are inspected according to a national risk rating scheme. This scheme means that the highest risk premises are visited twice a year. There is little resource to be more proactive in respect of these or other premises. Site management and property services also have a key role in ensuring the continued safety of residential homes and these have appropriate training and inspection systems in place. These actions are all felt to be adequate and no additional resource is felt to be required, although more could always be done

- 5.6 As the Voluntary Sector's resources fluctuate, its capacity to provide support during public health emergencies be monitored by the Council and its partners at the time of need depending on the situation

**Agreed in part**

Links with the voluntary sector are maintained by the Council's Emergency Planning function who are in regular contact through a variety of networking groups. Through this networking the capacity within the voluntary sector would be monitored and responded to albeit in an informal way. Any perceived changes or deficiencies would be built into our emergency response as required. In the event of a civil emergency public health or otherwise, the Council would use these existing channels to mobilise support. Availability and capacity of voluntary organisations would depend on whether other agencies had requested their support. This monitoring would be a part of any 'post emergency' review and lessons drawn out for all organisations. It is recognised that the Council cannot commit resources of other organisations to be part of the monitoring, although it is unlikely they would refuse.

- 5.7 Communication systems between the Council and its partners be reinforced to ensure that all agencies are made aware promptly of all public health threats and emergencies to prevent incidents such as the Health Protection Agency being uninformed of situations from re-occurring

**Agreed**

The general links with the Health Protection Unit (HPU) are established via the Environmental Health function. In addition, the Council appoints a Proper Officer for the control of Communicable Disease who is authorised to act under the Council's authority in respect of a range of powers to ensure the protection of public health. Not all civil emergencies have public health implications but where they do, our Civil Emergency Plan clearly establishes the role of Environmental Health in respect of the protection of public health. They work with the HPU and others in that regard.

- 5.8 The Council communicates its plans for the potential use of its community centres as rest centres in an emergency scenario to the lessees and keyholders of the community centres

**Agreed**

The Emergency Planning function has contacted potential rest centre venues to request facility details and advise that they may be used in an emergency scenario.

- 5.9 The South Central Ambulance Service ensures that it has adequate contingency arrangements with other strategic health authorities to ensure that sufficient resources are available on demand when required to respond to public health emergencies

## **Agreed**

The Executive Member for Adult Services, Health & Housing, subject to Executive approval, will write to South Central Ambulance Service drawing their attention to the report and this specific recommendation.

- 5.10 As the Army is not integral to any emergency response mechanism, the Council and its partners seek to identify the parameters within which military aid may be available

## **Already known**

This recommendation is covered by national arrangements. This should have been communicated to the Working Group if support is required from the Military; this is known as MACC (Military Aid to the Civil Community). This is the provision of unarmed military assistance to the public at large including support to a major incident or natural disaster. The request to mobilise would need to be made via the Gold Strategic Coordinating Group.

## **6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS**

### Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 The relevant legal provisions are contained within the main body of the report.

### Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 Should any financial implications arise from this report, they will need to be considered through the Council's normal budget setting process.

### Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 Not applicable

### Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 Ensuring that the Council meets its statutory obligations in civil emergencies and that it is a part of the Strategic Risk Register. Actions agreed in the report will add to ensuring the Council fulfils these responsibilities.

### Other Officers

- 6.5 Not applicable

## **7 CONSULTATION**

### Principal Groups Consulted

7.1 None

### Method of Consultation

7.2 None

### Representations Received

7.3 None

### Background Papers

A Review of Preparedness for Public Health Emergencies

### Contact for further information

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