

## Anonymised

### Incident at Local Road on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2008

#### REPORT

##### Brief background

The Council responded to the explosion at Local Road on the night of 7<sup>th</sup> May 2008, where one person died and two people were seriously injured. Three houses were totally destroyed, two houses were seriously damaged and many other properties within a 150-metre radius were damaged to varying degrees.

##### Key achievements

- Overall the Council responded very effectively to the incident
- The Police, Fire Brigade and other responders were pleased with our assistance
- Local residents were cared for and accommodated that night, no one slept in a rest centre
- The Council's Major Incident Plan was tested under live conditions
- Good communication were maintained from the Council to residents and media

##### Key lessons learnt

- The Council needs a permanent Borough Emergency Command Centre (BECC) in line with the other London Boroughs (draft Minimum Standard for London)
- More trained Emergency Response Officers (ERO) are required
- More staff on duty Out Of Hours (OOH) in housing and social services. On call staff are required from communications, finance and IT
- Clarification is required on housing and social services policies on what will and wont be provided during an emergency/ major incident
- Departmental emergency plans/ contact lists/ duty rotas need to be updated so that they reflect the resources that are available

#### BACKGROUND

##### Structured response

The council's emergency response to the incident continued for 9 days. The council's Major Incident Plan was invoked and the Borough Emergency Command Centre (BECC) was opened.

The Duty Director and the Emergency Planning Officer attended meetings with the Police Borough Commander and other emergency responders at the Police Station. At these "Gold" meetings policy and strategy was decided.

In the Boardroom, regular "Silver" meetings were held each day to update heads of service on policy and strategy decisions, and to inform on tactical plans. From the Silver meetings, instructions were given to officers on the ground, at the "Bronze" or operational level.

There was some occasional blurring of roles between Gold level strategy and Silver/ Bronze operational work. In February 2008, a Strategic Emergency Management one day training session was arranged for Directors. This should be an annual training event to assist Directors keep up to date with emergency planning doctrine and strategic emergency management developments.

### Borough Emergency Command Centre

The BECC was staffed by the council's pool of 12 Emergency Response Officers (ERO). The EROs are middle managers that have been trained in incident management and liaison. The EROs also attend regular joint training with the Cabinet Office, London Fire Brigade and Metropolitan Police, on dealing with a major incident.

It became apparent after just 2 days that a pool of 12 EROs was insufficient for the council's needs. The BECC and deployed EROs were operating a shift system to provide cover 18 hours per day (6 am to 12 midnight).

Under the various statutory guidance and emergency services protocols, each London Borough is required to have a Borough Emergency Command Centre (BECC), to be used during a major incident.

Most of the London Boroughs have a permanent room that is set up as a BECC that can be used immediately after a major incident has been declared. The Council is in the unusual position of having a temporary BECC that can be set up in the Boardroom of the Civic Centre.

The BECC is set up according to a set format agreed by the London Resilience Forum and the Cabinet Office. The BECC consists of the following key positions, which are staffed by EROs:

- Incident Manager
- Information Co-ordinator
- Logistics Co-ordinator
- Operations Co-ordinator
- Welfare Co-ordinator
- Loggist
- Admin Officer

A pool of 12 Emergency Response Officers (ERO) were recruited in 2004 and currently perform a number of roles:

- Local Authority Liaison Officer (LALO)
- First point of contact and activation officer in major incidents
- Rest Centre Manager
- Borough Emergency Control Centre staff

We currently have 12 EROs within the council. This is adequate if an incident lasts for one day. However, this incident continued for 9 days, and we were unable to properly staff the BECC after the first 2 days.

The BECC and LALO roles require 6 EROs per shift. As we were running shifts to cover a 16-hour period, our resources were soon exhausted, and we were forced to reduce staffing levels to 2 EROs in the BECC per shift. This put additional strain on already tired colleagues, and would have been unworkable during a London-wide incident such as 7/7.

## Individual departmental emergency plans

Each individual department is required to have emergency plans in place that fit into the corporate Major Incident Plan. During the incident, it became apparent that some of these plans were out of date.

The following departments were directly involved in the emergency response:

- One Stop Shop
- Adults & Housing Directorate
- Adult Services
- Catering Services
- Children's Services
- Communications Team
- Community & Environment Directorate
- Emergency Planning Team
- Engineering Services
- Housing Department
- Public Realm Services

These departments called on staff to assist with the incident. Though much of this was based on goodwill. This placed additional strains on departments that were already running on minimum staffing levels, for example the housing and social services emergency duty team for nights and weekends.

There is a need to review departmental emergency plans, contact lists and duty rotas; some of which appeared to be out of date. Consideration should also be given to payment for on call duty personnel to be able to respond to Out Of Hours incidents.

## Information Technology

There were some IT issues within the BECC set up, concerning access to drives, sharing data and formatting of laptops. Some of these issues were not resolved until Day 6 of the incident.

If the incident had been on a larger scale, perhaps multi site across some neighbouring boroughs, this would have caused severe problems for the corporate incident management team in communicating with other boroughs and central government.

The Emergency Planning Department recently took part in a London-wide exercise – Exercise Safer City 2008. The temporary BECC set up and inadequate IT set up adversely affected our participation in this important annual government sponsored event.

## Policy on accommodation and social care response

There was some confusion over what level of accommodation was to be provided for residents who were evacuated and had nowhere to go. This identified a need for a clear hierarchy of options within the policy on temporary accommodation – in other words, friends/ relatives are first port of call, anything provided by insurer is second, and accommodation provided by Council third.

There was also some confusion on the issuing of cash packets to displaced residents without clothes or toiletries. There needs to be a review of policy on dealing with residents who have

been affected by an emergency/ major incident; and a clarification of the communication channels so that officers on the ground are made aware of policy decisions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Annual one day training event on Strategic Emergency Management for Directors
- A permanent Borough Emergency Command Centre (BECC) to be established, rather than a temporary BECC set up in the Boardroom
- A review of departmental emergency plans to include duty personnel and contact phone numbers. The need for Out Of Hours (OOH) duty personnel in all departments with on call payments for duty personnel as required
- A review of departmental policy guidelines during a major incident for homelessness and welfare to include the issue of cash packets, food, drinks, clothes and toiletries for displaced residents
- Directorates to provide more volunteer Emergency Response Officers (ERO). Currently there is a pool of 12 officers. Increase this number to 36 EROs
- Review of IT for major incidents. The current IT set up did not work properly. Require a central drive/ secure intranet/ secure website for all ERO documents to facilitate information sharing and shift handovers

## ACTION PLAN

Recommendation	Action by	Due by
Establish a permanent BECC	Facilities Management	28 <sup>th</sup> November 2008
Review departmental emergency plans	Directors	30 <sup>th</sup> January 2009
Review of housing and social services policies on major incidents	Housing Department Adult Services Children's Services	31 <sup>st</sup> October 2008
Increase number of EROs to 36. Each Directorate to nominate 5 managers to be EROs	Directors	31 <sup>st</sup> October 2008
Improvement of IT set up for the BECC	IT Service	28 <sup>th</sup> November 2008

Progress against these actions is covered in the covering report.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Council's overall response to the incident at Local Road was very effective and positive. However, the incident and response highlighted some shortcomings and room for improvement.

This incident was located on one site with 66 residents evacuated. The Council needs to be prepared for the possibility of an incident on multi sites, such as the 7/7 bombings, or the possibility of an incident involving large-scale evacuation, such as unexploded ordnance or acetylene cylinders.

This extra resilience and preparedness can be achieved by establishing a permanent BECC, increasing the number of trained EROs and updating departmental emergency plans.

### Contact

Emergency Planning Officer

### Background papers

Appendix 1: Incident timeline – key events

Appendix 2: Feedback reports from individual departments

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## **Appendix 1: Incident timeline – key events**

### **Wed 7<sup>th</sup> May**

On Wed night the council's Duty Emergency Response Officer (ERO) received a call from the Police at 9:30 pm

Council colleagues and the Duty Director were called out at 10 pm and worked through the night till 4 am making sure residents were looked after in a temporary rest centre with our partner organisation the Royal British Legion

More council colleagues were called out to provide emergency transport and catering services to support our efforts at the rest centre. Colleagues came in late Wednesday night and the early hours of Thursday morning to arrange temporary hotel accommodation for displaced residents and to transport them to the hotels

The council deployed a LALO (Local Authority Liaison Officer) to the site of the incident to assist residents and liaise with the emergency services at their Silver Meetings

### **Thu 8<sup>th</sup> May**

The BECC (Borough Emergency Command Centre) was opened in the Boardroom. This is the LESLP (London Emergency Services Liaison Panel) approved set up for dealing with a major incident and includes specific statutory procedures for the co-ordination of the response

The council's emergency response consisted of five distinct teams:

Incident Management – Duty Director, EPO, and EROs in the BECC, and LALO on site

Welfare – housing, adult social care and children's services

Operations – building structures, highways and access

Logistics – transport and catering

Communications – both internal and external

Contact was made with the PCT to arrange for a duty doctor to attend the rest centre and provide any medication that may have been left behind following the evacuation such as insulin for diabetics

66 residents were evacuated. The council sent housing officers to the hotels and site to assist displaced residents and book them further hotel accommodation and meals

Emergency money packages were arranged to give to displaced residents to assist with essential purchases of food and clothing

A twenty-four helpline was set up at the One Stop Shop and staffed by volunteers through the day and night to help residents

The Police cordon initially covered a wide area including Local Road, Second Road and Third Road. This meant that residents and businesses were unable to access their properties or possessions due to the forensic search of the blast area

Council structural engineers attended the site to check properties and assist the London Fire Brigade and Police to access them safely. They also assisted residents retrieve some of their personal possessions

Displaced residents were visited by the council's customer services director and a Police inspector to update them on a regular basis. Letters were delivered to residents on a regular basis to keep them informed of the situation

The council provided portable flood lights to provide security and assist the police with their fingertip forensic search of the blast area

### **Fri 9<sup>th</sup> May**

A LALO was sent to liaise with businesses, to keep them apprised of the situation and to arrange for some temporary access to facilitate their business needs

The LALO accompanied by a Police Inspector spoke to business people on a regular basis to see if the Police cordon could be adjusted to assist businesses to trade. The LALO also gave advice on insurance issues

The council arranged for a representative from the Association of British Insurers to visit and speak to business people and offer advice

At the Police Gold Meeting the Duty Director pressed for access to Local Road by midday on Saturday

Schools were alerted that children from the area may be in shock

### **Sat 10<sup>th</sup> May**

The 24 hour helpline was staffed throughout the weekend to assist displaced residents

38 homes were returned to residents on Sat by 1930 hrs, a great achievement, with the Police cordon being significantly reduced, and residents being transported from their hotels by council staff

The council worked with the London Fire Brigade to have fire fighters on hand to check people's gas was safe and assist them to reoccupy their properties

The EDT (Emergency Duty Team) for housing and social services were on duty 24/7 throughout the weekend to assist residents

The council assisted residents by removing loose and damaged tiles from their roofs

### **Sun 11<sup>th</sup> May**

The Police cordon was further reduced and Third Road was returned with 12 homes returned to residents on Sun

The council also tried to facilitate other means of access for businesses by negotiating with the Police for limited access for larger vehicles through half of Local Road

Ongoing social care for children and adults by Children's Services and Adults & Housing Departments

Cordon collapsed to vicinity of properties



**Mon 12<sup>th</sup> May**

A special refuse collection was arranged to empty all the bins. Daily refuse collection was arranged to assist residents with their clear up

Meeting arranged for residents who still remained within the cordon at the civic centre so they could meet the Leader of the Council and the Police Borough Commander

A team of dedicated officers have been set up to look after the longer term housing, social services and children's needs

Council workers have been clearing away rubble and debris and the Police have reduced their cordon and allowed the council access to most of the site

**Tue 13<sup>th</sup> May**

The council has been working with police to arrange greater access to Local Road so that residents and businesses can start to return to a degree of normality

The council was in contact with Royal Mail to assist in the resumption of postal deliveries to residents and businesses

Council workers have been cleaning the street

**Wed 14<sup>th</sup> May**

The council has offered free boarding up of any houses that have not yet taken up the council's offer

A total of 150 council officers have been involved in the emergency response to this incident

**Thu 15<sup>th</sup> May**

The BECC (Borough Emergency Command Centre) was closed as the emergency response phase came to an end and we moved into the recovery phase

Long term housing, social services and highways issues were handed over to individual departments

Officers remained on standby during the weekend in case they were required to reinstate the BECC

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## **Appendix 2: Feedback reports from individual departments**

### **One Stop Shop**

(1) Introductory paragraph on what your department does

The One Stop Shop went live in 2006 in order to centralise customer contact, introduce new systems to manage all interactions with customers and to both transition and up skill existing staff to provide re-engineered services.

One Stop Shop currently handles 80,000 customer contacts each month.

(2) Summary of the actions your department took during the emergency response to the incident

Set up and man the emergency hotline

To feed information from residents into the Gold Command Team

To relay information from the Gold Command Team to the residents calling the emergency hotline

(3) Positive highlights of things that went well

Staff response to assist – late night and weekend working

(4) Issues that need to be addressed/ could have been done better

See recommendations below

(5) Any recommendations to improve our service

#### Telephony

Emergency telephone number to be reserved for future unplanned events (in place)

Investigate the routing of the telephone line through IPCC to ensure availability of:

- voicemail
- suite of MI
- call queuing facility

#### Operational

Emergency line to be based in the 'Control Room' to ensure continuous flow of information

An FAQ sheet to be in place to handle the most common questions

A pack of correspondence sent to residents available for reference

A reference point of useful contact numbers to be collated including:

- insurance companies
- key internal staff
- hotels/accommodation where residents are based

A template to capture resident details and to update information. Use of SAP to be investigated.

## **Adults & Housing Directorate**

Overall, I think our response was a success. The areas we should reflect on are:

- \* ensuring staff have taken responsibility to hold the relevant contact lists at the onset of an emergency
- \* I think it felt like there were two cultures in the incident room or even an inner circle and outer group.
- \* It felt like a number of people were dealing with accommodation rather than going through agreed procedures. (or maybe procedures weren't agreed).
- \* We had conflict on how we handled affected families either give them everything they want or support them to look after themselves where appropriate.
- \* I think we had moments when behaviour between colleagues lacked respect.
- \* Resident complaints were handled very differently to normal business. There seemed to be an assumption that someone had made a mistake rather than an attempt to figure out what had happened.
- \* Member involvement was too operational in managing the incident.
- \* I'm not clear we had a proper silver and gold distinction and we did not give the Duty Director as much rest as we should have.

## **Adult Services**

1. Adult Services provides Social Care assessment and support services to vulnerable adults in combination with partner agencies in the Voluntary Sector and the NHS. It specifically works with persons and their carers who suffer from a Learning Disability, Physical Disability, problems of Old Age, people suffering from Mental Ill Health are assisted through services provided by our colleagues in the Local Mental Health NHS Trust.

2. Senior Officers in the Department were contacted early in the morning of the day of the incident and started planning actions needed later that morning particularly in respect of making alternative arrangements for the 130+ clients with a Learning Disability who attend the Local Day Centre on a daily basis. Senior Officers discussed the matter early in the morning and based themselves at the Civic Centre from 07.30 that morning to make the necessary arrangements with the day centre working with the staff to contact carers of clients who normally attend the centre to make them aware of the situation and offer alternative forms of care. This meant staff having to be redeployed at residential care settings and working with individuals in the community. Staff also checked the database to establish who was known to the Department in the effected area. A member of the Senior Management Team represented Adult Care Management at the Silver meetings. A team was established with representatives from all client group areas to be able to respond to identified need from the effected area and the re-located residents. Assistance was provided to vulnerable residents in their relocation and obtaining possessions from their property. Assistance was also provided subsequently in the

return of residents to their property. Contact was made with the Psychology Team at Local Hospital. In one case the link was established for assistance for one resident of the area. A number of cases were discussed between the Psychology Team and one of the Senior Officers.

3. It provided a good opportunity for different Departments of the Council to work together with a clear objective to minimize negative impact on people affected. It was in particular the close working between Housing/ Adult Social Care and Children's Services staff that was a very positive experience.

4. There was a definite 'inner' and 'outer' group at the silver meetings. Insiders who did use a language of their own and as a non-member of this inner group I had a very uncomfortable feeling at times. For the 'inner' group the provision of the rest of the Council's services appeared to be irrelevant. While I have some understanding for this it is very different for those services that had to continue providing uninterrupted services for the rest of the borough residents. There has been a lot of turn over of staff and it is necessary to re-establish and re-evaluate who needs to be members of the emergency/ disaster team to ensure that all relevant Council services are represented. We need to establish what assistance is appropriate and should be provided by this Council in what circumstances. We are still under pressure of people who were given unrealistic expectations about what the Council would/ could provide for them. Inappropriate judgements were made by officers and communicated in an unacceptable manner.

5. Establish telephone tree for responsible officers to be contacted.

Set clear standards for financial assistance.

Communication skills need to be addressed within the team that needs to operate with respect for each other and services represented.

Role of elected members in these events needs to be considered.

## **Catering Services**

(1)

The team of fifty – who are based in Day Centres, Schools, Civic Centre, Central Distribution Unit & Meals on Wheels

During the week, the department is responsible for supplying 23 schools with chilled packed lunches and three primary schools with a hot lunch service. They provide welfare catering to all of the Day and Resource Centres, and are also on call for any emergencies within the borough.

Local homebound residents are taken care of through the catering team's Meals on Wheels service, which operates 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

*The Special Needs Transport & Catering Management team operate a call-out rota for emergencies. Both these areas are fully able to provide transport vehicles & catering at the same time through this call-out system.*

(2)

The on call manager arranged for transport & catering staff to respond to the emergency. Catering & Transport staff normally respond to any emergency that involved the evacuation of residents in the borough that will also require feeding. We initially provide refreshments to residents & emergency staff if required. Sandwiches & snacks are also provided at this stage, later we will provide meals etc. The vehicles are provided to move residents from homes to the rest centres or to hotels etc.

(3)  
Catering & Transport staff responded well and were on site either at the Civic Staff Restaurant or Local Road by 11pm & then transported all the refreshment to Local Road, they all worked through to 3am.

(4)  
Better training for officers performing the Duty Manager's role, better forms of communication during events, possible radio system to be used on a closed channel.

(5)  
Improved controls on the additional resource's being deployed.

## **Children's Services**

Overall, from a Children's Services point of view, the positive highlights were as follows;

1. Positive opportunity to work closely with Housing and Adult Care.
2. Excellent electronic access to data about children and families in the Local Road area - good to have tested our electronic data bases (HOST/Fwi & EMS) in an emergency planning situation and this proved invaluable.
3. Availability and willingness of Children's social care workforce to assist with additional tasks when required.
4. Positive feedback from families that sought support (accommodation, financial and social care).
5. Positive acknowledgement and support provided by Children's Services partners, namely the Health PCT and local schools.
6. Positive input from EDT SW's who assisted with out of hours housing needs issues and the distribution of cash packets.

In terms of issues to be addressed;

### **1. Responsible Staff:**

We probably need to review the Emergency Response Officer (ERO) list and refresh individuals and their managers about their roles and responsibilities during an emergency planning situation.

### **2. Silver Group:**

Senior managerial leads for each key service area need to be agreed and notified as a matter of course in any emergency planning situation. I was only invited to the first Silver Group by chance and my arrival in the meeting was met with a very direct question about who I was rather than what services I had come to offer/ represent. It was difficult to feel part of the group at times although there a meaningful and purposeful relationship was struck up outside of the group with Housing and Adult Care. The structure and process of the group could have been tighter and the management of key messages between the Board Room and the site were not always well co-ordinated. The need to track residents and gather intelligence about their needs and circumstances was not acknowledged at the outset as a central need and information coming via Access Harrow was not assimilated quickly enough into the spreadsheet that Housing were compiling/ up-dating.

### **3. Homelessness Needs:**

There needs to be one agreed system and process for co-ordinating, assessing and meeting all

homelessness needs arising from emergency planning type situations. Requests need to go via the Housing Department, or via the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) if the emergency planning situation occurs out of hours. This is the local custom and practice and a departure from this way of working should only happen if agreed by the respective senior managers for Housing and EDT, in consultation with others, when justified as appropriate and/ or necessary.

There was unnecessary confusion, duplication and poor communication with residents as a result of some officers and members making promises, agreeing bookings and giving undertakings about housing needs without referring to the Housing Department first.

#### 4. Type of Temporary Accommodation:

As is the standard EDT procedure, all homelessness needs are met using the agreed preferred providers list of local B&B provision. In the heat of the crisis when the need to find alternative accommodation was a priority this list of preferred providers was used by EDT and the on-call Housing Manager.

During the course of the emergency planning situation a very strong criticism emerged about the type of accommodation used. There was a view that this type of accommodation was not of sufficient standard for displaced residents, although this is the standard of accommodation routinely used for all other people that are homeless. The critical manner in which this emerging view was expressed was unhelpful in that it showed a lack of respect and understanding for the good work that was being undertaken. This view also exposed the Council as having double standards towards those in need of our help and support. The Stanley Road displaced residents were apparently more deserving and therefore should be offered more expensive accommodation than would ordinarily be the case.

If this is the case for future emergency planning situations a clear policy decision needs to be made so that officers know what type of accommodation to offer. This accommodation needs to be included in an alternative list of preferred providers for use in emergency planning situations of this nature.

#### 5. Social Care & Housing Support:

The underlying philosophy of meeting social care and housing needs is to work in partnership with users to meet our statutory obligations and build capacity to help users help themselves in the longer term. There were some confusing messages whereby Housing was expected to approach residents to change arrangements that they had already made. In some cases residents had already made other appropriate arrangements, via their own insurance companies and/ or with the support of friends and family, which the Housing Department were then asked to change. These messages of support were confusing for officers and residents. There needs to be a clearer statement about what the Council's responsibilities are going to be in an emergency planning situation if the standard of support is expected to be greater than that which we would ordinarily provide.

#### 6. Complaints:

Reports that a resident was unhappy or complaining was often accepted as evidence that an officer had failed to behave appropriately and had done something wrong. This created an unhelpful blame culture. We must embrace the approach of analysing to learn rather than investigating to blame.

There were a couple of families that were critical about the support provided. On some occasions the way that they voiced their dissatisfaction was challenging and difficult to deal with. I think we need to appreciate that this type and level of challenge is often symptomatic of the distress and trauma felt. In a future emergency planning situation this type of reaction may

need to be acknowledged and better understood in order to identify those residents that may need a different kind of intervention.

#### 7. Cash Packets:

It would be helpful to agree some standard daily rates for adults and children, with and without meals, so that these can be offered consistently in the future.

### **Communications Team**

#### (1) Introductory paragraph on what your department does

The communications department is the first port of call for external media enquiries. The team comprises of media, marketing and internal marketing officers who devise media opportunities, put together releases for papers, TV and radio, and market the authority both externally to our own staff. It is led by a head of communications.

#### (2) Summary of the actions your department took during the emergency response to the incident

A media officer went to Local Road shortly after midnight and dealt with reporters present. Throughout the next seven days, the communications office updated TV, radio and newspapers on a running basis, set up briefings for the weekly newspapers, helped with direct communications to residents and updated our website. Councillors and the council's own staff were also regularly updated.

#### (3) Positive highlights of things that went well

Throughout the weekend of 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> May BBC and ITV, both on TV and online, reported Harrow's proactive role in housing those made temporarily homeless. National and regional newspapers also reflected the positive side of the council's work. That message was underlined by radio interviews on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> May on BBC London and LBC set up by the communications office. Extracts of a three-page list of positive actions taken by the Council were used in the Local Observer on May 15.

#### (4) Issues that need to be addressed/ could have been done better

Journalists doorstepped the homeless at hotels in the borough and also made persistent attempts to unearth backgrounder detail about the victim. On reflection, we should have offered to broker conversations between those made homeless and the media at an early stage - that way, anyone who wanted to talk to the press could have done so quickly while we would indicate to the others that doorstepping would be fruitless and counter-productive. We should also have anticipated earlier that interest in the victim would lead to journalists cold-calling to find more information.

#### (5) Any recommendations to improve our service

There is currently no way to update our website externally. This is technically possible but needs senior managerial approval to make it happen. The other question is who updates the website. Ownership of the website has been devolved across the building but in practice this has created a confusing picture. I would suggest that a number of members of the silver group are trained in uploading simple documents to our website. While the comms department can advise on the tone of those messages, it is more important that key people from any department



are able to able to upload basic information, from home if necessary.

It would also be helpful if a senior member of the comms team could be present at Gold meetings. Pressure from media outlets becomes constant when major stories are unfolding, and the sooner the Council is able to update the media, the more it will be able to be in control of the message.

## **Community & Environment Directorate**

### Lessons learnt – Initial Summary

#### Context

The Police, Council and Fire Brigade senior management, are content that the response to the incident - in which one person died, two people were quite seriously injured, three houses were totally destroyed, two other houses seriously damaged and many other properties within 150 metre radius were damaged to varying degrees - was good, resulting in a successful outcome, including release of the Police cordon in double-quick time.

During any incident the demand for information is insatiable, in particular from:-

The many media organisations and related individuals;  
Residents and relatives of those directly involved;  
Residents living within the cordon;  
Local residents in the same and adjoining streets;  
Businesses directly affected by the incident and/or the cordon;  
Council leadership – the Administration and Opposition groups;  
Local MP(s);  
GLA member;  
Ward Councillors;  
Community faith and resident groups;  
The wider community.

Information takes time to capture, verify, consolidate and package for appropriate dissemination.

### Lessons learnt – Elected Member involvement

The role of Elected Members during any “Critical or Major Incident” needs to be clearly defined, in particular for :-

The Council Leader and Deputy,  
Relevant Portfolio Holder;  
Ward Councillors.

The Council Leader and Cabinet Members should receive “Emergency Planning” training – this should be mandatory.

All Ward Councillors should be briefed on the Emergency Plan, the approach to incident response and the role of Ward Councillors during any incident.

Two-way communications with, and the engagement and deployment of Elected Members during any incident needs to be recognised as a benefit and including as a key element of the Emergency Response Plan.

Elected Members, however, must understand and accept the critical importance of “command and control” in any incident situation, in particular during the initial response phase, which can last a few days, and must participate in a proactive and positive way, accepting that “business as usual conventions” will often be overridden.

There is a clear expectation, on the part of residents affected by an incident, that their Councillors will act as advocates in respect of issues which may be relevant only to specific individuals or households. Managing resident expectation through each phase of the incident response must be undertaken proactively by the Councillor receiving requests.

The sovereignty of the Police cordons, inner and outer, must be respected by Councillors, who must also act proactively and positively with residents to support the need and purpose of the cordons.

The incident management arrangements, both within the Council and within the Gold and Silver joint incident command and control arrangements, must provide a platform for effective two-way communications with Elected Members.

The Gold Command Group is comprised of senior management of the responding agencies and Elected Members and other Community representatives must accept that they do not have a role at this Forum. There needs to be a clear protocol agreed between the Police, Council and Fire Brigade regarding the operation and scope of the Gold Group.

Media messages are a critical element of the “reassurance work stream”. The dissemination of information to the media, during any incident situation, must, therefore, be most carefully managed and co-ordinated through the Gold and Silver command structure.

There needs to be a clear format and process to enable Elected Members to capture information from residents and businesses, and to feed this into the incident management.

Officers deployed in response to any incident work on a shift rota. The same approach needs to be established for Elected Members, in particular the Leader and Deputy.

Some residents will want to maintain some contact with Council some time after the incident; it is likely that the advocacy role of Elected Members will be even more important at this stage. Preparing Members to deal with these contacts needs to be taken forward.

## **Emergency Planning Team**

### Lessons learnt – Incident Management and Response

- A permanent Borough Emergency Command Centre (BECC) to be established, rather than a temporary BECC set up the next day in the Boardroom.
- A review of Social Services' phone numbers/ duty managers/ duty officers in the Contact Directory.
- Access to Electoral Register, Council Tax, and Housing Benefit records out of hours.

- The need for Out Of Hours (OOH) contacts/ duty personnel in all departments, e.g. IT Service, Finance. With on-call payments for duty personnel.
- Improve communications with local Primary Care Trust (PCT). NHS procedure of initial communication from London Ambulance Service (LAS), to NHS London, then to PCT is too slow.
- Separate briefing for lead Members following Gold Meetings for operational officers.
- Policy guidelines for the issue of cash packets, food, drinks, clothes, toiletries for displaced residents.
- Review of standard homelessness policy compared to homelessness following a major incident.
- Improvement required regarding contact with the Civic Centre. One Stop Shop moved from 9 am – 5 pm, to 24-hour hotline during the response period to the incident.
- Need more volunteer Emergency Response Officers (ERO). Currently there is a rota of 12 officers, who have full-time jobs within the Council. Increase this number to 30 x EROs. We were unable to fully staff the BECC. By Day 3 of the incident we were short of staff.
- The need for payment for On-Call and Duty personnel. The EROs and departmental duty officers should be properly paid for being on call in line with other Councils. At present there is a heavy reliance on goodwill.
- Equipment for Local Authority Liaison Officers (LALO). LALOs were deployed at Local Road to deal with residents and businesses. They require better equipment – mobile phones, laptops, Hi-Vis vests with a “LALO” logo to identify themselves to the Police and public.
- Review of log keeping arrangements. Current IT set up did not work. Created a backlog due to lack of EROs and admin staff in the BECC
- Review of IT for major incidents. Require a central drive/ secure intranet/ secure website for all ERO documents to facilitate information sharing and shift handovers.
- Emergency laptops to be regularly checked by IT Service and updated as necessary.
- Improve communication from Gold Meeting to Silver and Bronze Commanders on the ground, e.g. movement of Police Cordon, control of limited access for residents and businesses.
- Recognition of the importance of the Duty Director Rota.

## **Engineering Services**

(1)

Engineering Services manage and maintain the public realm including Roads, Footways,

lighting, drainage, Structures and watercourses.

As assets of the Council and valued at over 750 million, management is a complex task and some 12 - 14 million pounds a year is invested in renewal and maintenance.

Part of our role is ensuring public safety. We have a detailed and well documented emergency service plan with engineers on call 24 / 7 for any incident of any size. This is part of the corporate emergency plan and we are part of a London wide consortium in dealing with the delegation under the Highways act. The consortium makes use of a wide range of services under a supply chain agreement with our partner organisations.

(2)

On the night of the incident, a call was made to the duty engineer, who attended the site with 10 minutes. An assessment was made of the situation, and our partners were instructed to attend site with personnel and equipment urgently.

Council Engineers remained on site throughout the incident and continued to orchestrate operations and will keep running the operation until final clearance later this week.

(3)

Engineering process worked well

Service resourced to completion

Consortium partnership worked very well

Good site comms with emergency services / stat undertakers / Health and Safety.

Organisation of site operations

rate of return of residents

First contact with insurers, loss adjusters and their engineers

speed of opening Local Road and Second Road

(4)

Confusing chain of communications

Clarity of instructions

briefing LALOs and EROs

Feed back from Gold meetings and decisions made at Gold meetings

one person on site needs to be in charge - supported by others

Mess facilities - had to rely on others for simple things such as water etc.

PPE required for all who visited site

(5)

Site Person in charge needs full control (incident director) - supported by others

dedicated project team

Site office for large scale incidents

LALO and ERO training - i.e. health and safety course / site awareness /etc

Council attendance log

## **Housing Department**

There were very many good points in responding to the recent emergency.  
I will not list those.

The incident at Local Road is much more typical than Alpha Road fire on 15th February 2008.

## People

There needs to be a capacity building approach to emergency planning.

- get the people away from the centre of the incident, provide toilets and hot drinks and warmth,
- leave the centre of the event to Police, Fire Brigade utilities and LA etc.
- provide respite with telephones and facilities for people to solve their own problems,
- Make sure record keeping is fast and accurate (we are still trying to find out who stayed in which hotel and agree the bills) There were some free loaders.
- housing options staff should be part of an emergency planning team and should be ready to mobilise, forms for capturing contact details and requirements, key fobs, telephones with long life etc
- provide support including cash in accordance with needs of people,
- agree communication lines with people directly affected.

## Data

- it took time and effort to collate data about the area and who might be living, working or operating a business from the area ,
- data needs to be available and up dated at regular intervals,

## Communication

- need to improve on the site communication between response organisations to avoid duplication,
- need to avoid telling the local papers we are handing out cash,
- need more on site than in the office,
- need to agree roles with response organisations,
- do not hold public meetings they will feed on the negative and not the positive
- gold meetings to be limited to top dogs only,
- need to give attention to translation requirements

Note the effect on continuing to provide normal services whilst attention is given to the emergency. Will need to prioritise and make clear effect on normal service.

## Public Realm Services

### General

- Out of hours management attendance on the night of the explosion
- Head of Service and Service Manager liaison both in work hours and out of hours
- Daily contact between operational management and MIRA officers

### Street Cleansing

- Staff deployed from the first day of the incident
- Initial focus on surrounding roads to clear dust and broken glass – this included out of hours work with staff and mechanics on 10 May 2008
- As the police cordon was moved, operational management liaised with the site supervisor and conducted a deep clean of pavements, carriageways and pathways to each of the houses

- Fly tips from the private alleyway at the bottom of Local Road were removed enable residents to gain access to the road
- Staff and management had a presence everyday until the clear up was completed

#### Waste Management

- Refuse attended site and emptied all household bins on site
- Trade Refuse was checked to ensure bins were not overflowing
- All bins were assessed to ensure that there were no potential H&S issues