

SOUTH HAMS DISTRICT COUNCIL CORPORATE MAJOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE POLICY

Introduction

- 1.1 This document explains the Council's policy for responding to major emergencies e.g. coastal pollution, flooding, major fire, chemical incident etc.
- 1.2 This policy supports the Council's aim to improve the well-being of the people of the South Hams and supports the Council's Corporate Priority CP4 'Maintain the district's distinctive environment whilst enabling access and sensitive development'.
- 1.3 The Council provides an emergency planning service due to the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 placing the following statutory duties on all local authorities to:
 - Assess the risk of an emergency occurring;
 - Put in place emergency plans;
 - Put in place Business Continuity Management arrangements;
 - Provide advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about business continuity management;
 - Put in place arrangements to inform the public about civil protection matters and be able to warn, inform and advise them in the event of an emergency;
 - Share information, and co-operate with other local responders to enhance co-ordination and efficiency;
- 1.4 Apart from the statutory duties, there is also an expectation and perception by residents that the Council will provide support in a major emergency situation. This document aims to:
 - Detail the Council's policy, and the actions that will be taken by the Council;
 - Ensure all stakeholders involved in emergency response are aware of the Council's policy in relation to their own strategies and policies;
 - Provide broad guidance to managers and employees about the Council's role in a major emergency. Detailed procedures are set out in the Council's Major Emergency Response Guide 2007, and related supporting documents setting out actions in response to specific major emergencies e.g. coastal pollution
 - Meet part of the Home Office requirement in 'Standards for Civil Protection in England and Wales' which indicates that the Council should have a public statement that sets out its policy.

Planning for a civil emergency

- 2.1 It is the aim of this Council to ensure that it (the local authority) carries out proactive, continual development of an integrated, flexible emergency management capability enabling the local authority to deal effectively with a major or minor emergency, whether foreseen or unforeseen.

2.2 South Hams District Council will endeavour to be ready and able to react to major emergency situations which occur within the district by:-

- maintaining and annually updating its Major Emergency Response Guide and associated response plans to incidents such as coastal pollution;
- having specialist resource available in the form of an Emergency Planning Officer;
- ensuring that a member of the Strategic Management Team takes overall responsibility for responding to emergencies;
- providing an 'out of hours' call out service;
- having appropriate cascade and communication systems in place;
- ensuring that key personnel receive adequate training and support to effectively carry out their duties;
- liaising with Category 1 and 2 responders to ensure a co-ordinated approach to the planning and delivery of an emergency response;
- participating in emergency planning exercises, in order to reduce the impact of natural and man-made disasters on the residents, employers and visitors to the South Hams. The Council's priority for action will be on meeting the immediate needs of the victims to aid recovery to normality as soon as possible in the event of an incident.

2.3 To enable emergency responders access to vital plant equipment enabling an effective and sustained response in the safest manner possible given the circumstances, South Hams District Council will identify and/or provide the locations, quantities and quality of resources, (other than emergency services equipment), required to reduce the impact of an emergency as far as is reasonably practicable.

Strategy

3.1 Although Devon County Council leads on specific emergency planning with partners e.g. flood response, rest centres, temporary mortuaries etc. there are a number of statutory duties the Council has been charged with as detailed in paragraph 1.3. This policy provides the strategic framework for future reviews of the following major emergency response plans: -

- South Hams District Council Major Emergency Response Guide;
- South Hams Coastal Pollution Plan;
- Calor Gas, Lee Mill, COMAH off-site plan.
- Devon County Council Major Emergency Plan;
- Devon Flood Warning and Response Plan

Reacting to an general emergency

4.1 An emergency is defined by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 as an event or situation, which threatens serious damage to;

- Human welfare in a place in the United Kingdom
- The environment of a place in the United Kingdom
- The security of the United Kingdom or a place in the United Kingdom

Serious damage to human welfare involves, causes or 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 an electronic or other system of communication
- Disruption of facilities for transport
- Disruption of services relating to health

Serious damage to the environment involves causes or may cause:-

- Contamination of land, water or air with biological, chemical or radio-active matter
- Disruption or destruction of plant life or animal life

4.2 The Council's general approach to responding to Civil Emergencies is detailed in the South Hams Major Emergency Response Guide 2007, which:

- defines the District Council's responsibilities
- co-ordinates the response of the District Council, together with other appropriate organisations
- specifies arrangements for the call-out of local authority services
- establishes lines of communication for providing assistance to the emergency and utility services
- provides guidance for mobilising resources needed to deal with a major emergency
- prevents duplication of effort between agencies.

4.3 In the early stages of a major emergency, the Council will operate in support of the emergency services.

4.4 The Council will also assist other councils where requested during an emergency in line with the 'Local authority co-operation in Devon during an emergency' agreed by the County and District Chief Executives which is contained in pages 2-9 to 2-15 of the South Hams District Major Emergency Response Guide 2007.

4.5 In the event of a major emergency a strategic Gold Control, may be set up at Police Headquarters, Middlemoor, Exeter. In this event, a member of the Senior Management Team or nominated senior District Council Officer, will attend the Gold Control as the local authority Gold Control Liaison Officer. In every major emergency, a police Incident Control Post (Silver Control) will be set up near the scene of the emergency which will be attended by a senior District Council officer acting as the Local Authority Liaison Officer (LALO).

4.6 In appropriate circumstances an Emergency Management Team (EMT) will be set up. EMT will be a management cell with supporting staff convened to manage and process information concerning the major emergency. They will control and co-ordinate the District Council's actions in support of the emergency services and subsequently in recovery operations. The EMT will be convened by the lead officer, normally the Chief

Executive and will include the Head of Environmental Health, the Chief Finance Officer and the Solicitor to the Council. Other officers may be co-opted as necessary.

- 4.7 When the District Council is called upon to respond to a major emergency, consideration will be given to opening the Emergency Centre (EC) in the Leaders office at Follaton House, Totnes. This decision will be made by the Chief Executive or in their absence by a nominated member of the Senior Management Team or senior officer. The EC will enable Council services to be appropriately co-ordinated, particularly in the case of a Coastal Pollution incident, which will be lead by the District Council.

Reacting to coastal pollution incidents

- 5.1 Where a maritime incident occurs that affects the coast of the South Hams, then the Council will respond according to its 'South Hams Coastal Pollution Plan' in cooperation and coordination with other agencies including the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and Devon County Council.

Reacting to Emergency Flooding Incidents

- 6.1 Although there is no statutory duty for the Council to provide relief from flooding, there is an expectation by the public that the Council will help to alleviate the worst effects of flooding wherever possible. The Council receives weather warnings through the Met. Office and Flood Alerts are received from the Environment Agency. Generally, adequate warning is given for flood alerts and the well-known areas for flooding will be targeted for action before flooding actually occurs.
- 6.2 The current practice is that sandbags will be made available free of charge to householders. Where an area is in danger of flooding, sandbags will be delivered by the Council to a suitable communal collection point and householders will need to make their own protection arrangements in relation to their property. In the cases of elderly, disabled and vulnerable groups of people, sandbags will be delivered to their homes, provided the Council is made aware of their particular circumstances in advance.
- 6.3 In most circumstances, householders will also be able to come to the depots to collect sandbags if they have suitable transport. In addition, the Council will provide skips close to the incident to enable householders to dispose of ruined carpets, furniture etc. as quickly as possible. However, the Council is not able to become involved in detailed aspects of property protection and recovery such as drying out carpets or supplying gas heaters and/or dehumidifiers because of the potential insurance implications.

Monitoring

- 7.1 Following an incident appropriate Council staff will hold a de-brief to consider important lessons from the response, and identify amendments to the relevant emergency plan.

Business continuity

- 8.1 In order to ensure that the Council is able to effectively respond to a civil emergency that also has an impact on its own operations, The Council has produced its own 'Business Continuity Plan' setting out how it will prioritise and deliver key services during an emergency. This plan will be tested and reviewed.
- The Council will also provide businesses with general advice on how to prepare for and respond to emergencies that may affect their business operations.

A copy of this policy will be posted on the South Hams District Council website. Further publicity relating to the Council's actions will be given through the publication of leaflets relating to specific issues and via articles in the South Hams Magazine.

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