



## Buckinghamshire County Council

# Report

## Cabinet

AGENDA ITEM: 6

**Title:** Responding to a Major Incident;  
the Humanitarian Aspects

**Date:** 21 June 2004

**Author:** The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee on Personal Care

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**Electoral Divisions Affected:** None

### Summary

1. The act of terrorism in New York on September 11th 2001 and incidents such as the very recent bombings in Madrid have highlighted to the public the importance and relevance of emergency planning. Yet there are many other types and severity of incidents, such as rail crashes, flooding and the foot and mouth outbreak, which require an effective response from agencies to support those affected. Whilst the prevention of terrorism and the immediate response by the emergency services have received much publicity, the local response to the support needed by people in the aftermath of an incident is less widely debated. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Personal Care considered that the topic of the humanitarian aspects of responding to a major incident was a suitable subject for its investigation.
2. The key question the Review addresses is "How robust are the arrangements for dealing with the humanitarian consequences of a major incident? This summary report sets out the key findings and recommendations. More details can be found in the attached full report. The backdrop to the review is the passage through parliament of the Civil Contingencies Bill which is updating the legislation under which local authority planning for civil emergencies is carried out.
3. The Committee concludes that the present arrangements for responding to the human aspects of major emergencies in Buckinghamshire are satisfactory in the context of the standards presently observed across the country and for the scale of emergency suffered in the county to date. Indeed, Buckinghamshire has a good reputation for its emergency planning and strong expertise in its work in post-disaster support by the Social Care team and Emergency Planning Unit, in partnership with the many other agencies involved in emergency response work. However, the Committee's view is that the arrangements could and should be strengthened.

## Key Findings

4. **Capacity:** The Committee questions the capacity of many of the organisations involved in emergency planning in Buckinghamshire to respond effectively to a large-scale incident. Recognition of the limitations of capacity is not a criticism of the current arrangements, but an acknowledgement that a more resilient approach would be prudent. The Committee sees strength in drawing more extensively on the skills and expertise of local people who could be mobilised quickly and effectively. It considers that a modern response team is a concept with some merit that should be considered at a local level. The Crisis Support Team which is being recruited from with Social Care staff is an example of a way in which expertise and commitment can be usefully harnessed.
5. **Communications:** The Committee concludes that communications regarding resilience need to be reconsidered because it is unconvinced that the present arrangements are comprehensive or engage effectively with all sections of the community. It considers that an Emergency Planning Communications Strategy should be established which considers the needs of all customers, both internal and external. This should encompass the requirements of staff, communication with external organisations and those directly affected by an incident as well as the wider community. It should consider all appropriate means of communication including local media, website and communications via local voluntary bodies and contacts via community safety and other groups. Mechanisms for feedback would enable an evaluation of effectiveness to take place.
6. **Community Leadership:** The Committee considers that the challenge of engaging with local communities is one where the County Council's community leadership role should be utilised. It is of the view that the current arrangements do not link up all parts of the community and more work could be done to use established groups and partnerships to both feed into emergency plans and provide the conduit for information in the event of an incident.
7. **Training:** The Committee considers that training needs to be made available to a wider range of staff, across portfolios, and more advanced training linked to initiatives such as the Crisis Support Team. Training should be made part of the mainstream programme whereby the skills and competencies required to be effective in an emergency response are developed. The Committee considers that training should commence at induction, with a clear continuing professional development path. Part of this training should include an awareness raising of the effects of trauma. Joint training with other agencies is evidently beneficial, and the Committee seeks to promote this wherever possible. The Committee questions whether training to date has tested true capacity and would welcome more extensive exercises which test cross-boundary capabilities.
8. **Corporate Management:** The Committee considers that the responsibility for an effective humanitarian response to emergency incidents should have a much wider ownership of responsibility throughout service areas. The Committee highlights Education, both within Schools and Children and Young People portfolios, as needing to become more involved with emergency planning issues. The Committee's view is that the corporate management structure within the County Council is not sufficiently sensitive to effectively mobilising sufficient resources outside the normal service area. The Committee concludes that to improve the humanitarian response to a major incident, the County Council needs to ensure that emergency planning is actively promoted, with consistency of response across portfolios championed and monitored by an active lead officer in each service area.

## Recommendations

9. The Committee recommends that Cabinet:

- a. **Calls on the Cabinet Member for Community Services to work as lead member in co-ordinating an Action Plan to implement the recommendations listed below and to report progress to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Personal Care in January 2005. The Action Plan should have clear accountabilities identified.**
- b. **Extends recruitment to the Crisis Support Team to a wider range of County Council staff and reviews the incentives and support available to those who volunteer.**
- c. **Explores the feasibility of the establishment of a local emergency support team.**
- d. **Establishes an Emergency Planning Communications Strategy which includes mechanisms for feedback and evaluation of its effectiveness.**
- e. **Utilises the County Council's Community Leadership role to promote involvement with emergency planning with all sections of the community.**
- f. **Reviews the way in which emergency planning training is provided to make it part of mainstream training which emphasises the development of key transferable skills and provides a clear continuing professional development path.**
- g. **Extends the quality and quantity of opportunities for joint training with partner organisations.**
- h. **Reviews the way in which emergency planning is promoted and co-ordinated across the County Council and appoints a lead officer in each service area to champion emergency planning issues.**

## Conclusion

**10.** The Committee set out to establish how robust the arrangements are for dealing with the humanitarian consequences of a major incident. It concludes that there are satisfactory arrangements which provide the residents of Buckinghamshire with the reassurance that there are solid plans in place in the very unlikely event of a major incident. However, the Committee concludes that there are areas in which the County Council and its partners could benefit from a different approach, or with more focus on specific areas. It considers that the recommendations it has set out, in the areas of improving capacity to respond, improving communications, engaging with all sections of the community, training, and corporate management, will strengthen the existing arrangements and offer the residents of Buckinghamshire a robust framework for an effective humanitarian response in the unfortunate event of a major incident.

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## **Background Papers**

A Report to Cabinet from The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Personal Care: 'Responding to a Major Incident; The Humanitarian Aspects', 21 June 2004

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### ***Your questions and views***

*If you have any questions about the matters contained in this paper please get in touch with the Contact Officer whose telephone number is given at the head of the paper.*

*If you have any views on this paper that you would like the Cabinet Member to consider, or if you wish to object to the proposed decision, please inform the Democratic Services Team by Friday 18 June 2004. This can be done by telephone (to 01296 383604 or 383610), Fax (to 01296 382538), or e-mail to [cabinet@buckscc.gov.uk](mailto:cabinet@buckscc.gov.uk)*