

A report to Cabinet

From the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on
Personal Care

RESPONDING TO A MAJOR INCIDENT; THE HUMANITARIAN ASPECTS

Date: 21 June 2004

Chairman: Trevor Fowler

Contact Officer: Jackie Fisk (01296 382783)

Buckinghamshire **OSC**



**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
ON PERSONAL CARE**

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

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Introduction

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.

Background

2. The accepted definition of a major incident is:

“Any event or circumstance (happening with or without warning) that causes or threatens death or injury, disruption to the community, or damage to property or to the environment on such a scale that the effects cannot be dealt with by the emergency services, local authorities and other organisations as part of their normal day-to-day activities.” (Dealing with Disaster, 3rd edition)

3. The legislation under which local authority planning for civil emergencies is carried out is currently being updated with the passage through parliament of the Civil Contingencies Bill. The Bill will place specific duties on ‘core responder’ agencies, including local authorities, to plan, train and exercise jointly for major emergencies. The Cabinet Office has the lead in promoting emergency planning, or ‘resilience’ as it is now termed, at a central government level. Each of the Government Offices of the Regions has recently created a Regional Resilience Unit, each with a small team whose task it is to co-ordinate resilience planning within its region and act as a conduit between central and local responding agencies.
4. There is a Buckinghamshire Emergency Co-ordination Committee, chaired by the B.C.C. Emergency Planning Officer (EPO), with membership from the County Council, rotating representative of the 4 District Councils, Milton Keynes EPO, health agencies, the Military and a representative of the voluntary organisations. The Committee meets regularly with a remit to ensure there is a cohesive local emergency planning framework, signed up to by all partners.
5. Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire share a common police force. The Thames Valley Strategic Co-ordination Group (TVSCG) mirrored this geographic area and existed to look at wide area issues and to promote best practice. Its membership was similar to the Emergency Co-ordination Committee. Under the new, regional arrangements being promoted by the Civil Contingencies Bill, the TVSCG has now changed its name to ‘Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum’ (TVLRF) and is adjusting its terms of reference and membership in the light of the passing of the bill.
6. The County Council has a team of 3 emergency planning officers plus administrative support. Each of the 4 district councils employs an officer either

part-time, or with part-time responsibility. There is a nominated officer with a lead responsibility for emergency planning in Social Care, Schools and Transportation. Similar contacts exist within key district council services, such as housing and environmental health.

7. The policy guidelines for a co-ordinated County response to a major emergency, and the County Council's role in it, are laid down in the 'Buckinghamshire Emergency Plan.' This document details the arrangements for identifying roles for local authorities and those in other organisations, including voluntary bodies, when coping with a major emergency. It is based on an extension of the normal service delivery functions of local authority departments and departmental emergency procedures. The purpose of the plan is to mitigate the effect of an emergency on the people in the area affected and a return to normal service delivery as soon as possible.
8. The emergency planning service jointly provided by the County Council and District Councils underwent a Best Value Review, undertaken by the Audit Commission, in 2001. It was assessed as providing a 'Good' two-star service that was 'unlikely' to improve. Aspects of the service which inspectors considered needed further attention included communications with the public during incidents, monitoring of grants to voluntary agencies involved in emergency response work and maintaining a central training record to identify officers and councillors who need training or to share the existing skill pool. Inconsistencies in standards of service and level of performance between district councils was also noted.
9. The current consultation document from the Audit Commission on comprehensive performance assessment for 2005 includes civil protection for the first time, as part of the shared central and local government priorities around safer and stronger communities. The relevant section of the consultation document lists the 'overarching outcomes' as *'Civil protection which minimises the likelihood and impact of emergencies on the welfare of the community, and in particular vulnerable groups, and maximises the rate of recovery.'*

Focus of the Review

10. **The key question the Review addressed was "How robust are the arrangements for dealing with the humanitarian consequences of a major incident?"**
11. The remit of the investigation was to examine the role of the County Council and partner organisations in dealing with the damaging effects that a serious incident might have on the lives of victims. The review set out to consider the state of readiness of the County Council and other organisations, including the voluntary sector, in providing professional, caring and resource support during the recovery period after an incident and the return to normality. As such, the review was concerned with the humanitarian aspects of emergency planning after the initial response work of the emergency services was over.

Who did the Committee Speak to?

12. The Committee gathered a wide range of evidence from people and organisations with an interest in the human aspects of emergency planning. These included:

- B.C.C. Emergency Planning Officer
- District Councils
- Officers from Social Care, Youth and Community and Education
- Hertfordshire County Council
- Thames Valley Police
- Chiltern and South Bucks P.C.T.
- External Consultant and Chair of Emergency Planning Society 'Human Aspects' Working Party
- Voluntary Organisations including W.R.V.S., British Red Cross and The Radio Amateurs' Emergency Network
- The Coroner
- Local radio stations

Narrative

The Human Aspects

13. The Committee learned that those affected by a disaster include not only those directly involved in an incident, but also relatives and friends of the primary victims, rescue and recovery personnel and the wider community including those who offer help, who share the grief and loss or who are, or feel they are, directly or indirectly responsible. Other people who may be affected are those whose emotional equilibrium is such that, even though they are not directly involved in the disaster, they may become distressed or disturbed. Finally, there are those people who, but for chance, would have been primary victims themselves. It is evident, therefore, that no single agency could deal with the needs of all the above groups. A number of agencies, professions and disciplines need to work together to meet the needs of those affected.

14. Experts on disaster planning describe disasters as 'people centred' for which a collective and co-ordinated response to complex and diverse personal and community needs is required. Research shows that, nationally, while the physical priorities of rescue, evacuation and medical care are often dealt with effectively, there is often no such comparable provision for emotional or psychological support. The Committee heard evidence of the need for joint training and the further development of inter-agency co-operation to guarantee a coherent, planned and fully negotiated approach.

15. Since there is no statutory duty on a local authority to make plans for dealing with the psychological and emotional aftermath of disasters, nationally the degree to which local authorities has responded in terms of resources and emphasis is variable. There is an understanding following the 1991 Allen Report that Social Services has a lead role in the welfare response, with additional roles for other local authority agencies, Health, Education, voluntary organisations and the clergy.

16. The Committee noted that responding organisations, including voluntary bodies, are independent entities, each with their own organisational structure and emergency planning arrangements. There is currently no quality assurance mechanism to ensure consistency of approach across the UK. Mutual aid arrangements could be severely tested in times of widespread disruption and prioritisation of limited resources would be a key issue.
17. Another aspect of a humanitarian response is consideration of the needs of staff, both in terms of training to understand how to handle stressful situations and developing coping skills, and the longer-term issues of trauma support for staff who have been involved in incidents.

Emergency Planning Unit

18. The County Council Emergency Planning Unit is a small team of Emergency Planning Officers (EPOs) and administration support which, in partnership with District Council EPOs, writes plans, organises training and exercising for local authority staff and voluntary agencies, maintains continuous liaison with partner agencies and, when called upon, initiates the operational response to emergencies. A part of the EPU role is to ensure all portfolios are able and prepared to respond to a major incident.
19. A recent initiative has been the publication of a public advice leaflet entitled "Major Emergencies – and You!". This is a joint initiative by the County and District Councils aimed at raising awareness of the need to take some basic measures in preparation for the unexpected. There are also emergency planning pages on the County Council website which give advice and links to other relevant sites.
20. The Committee considered that the Unit demonstrated professionalism, energy and enthusiasm for maintaining and exercising emergency plans. The Unit works hard at maintaining good working relationships with all those engaged in emergency response work, and there is strength in particular in the direct relationships with Social Care, District Council EPOs and voluntary organisations. The Committee considered that it was very important that the humanitarian response to emergency incidents should not be considered the prime responsibility of the Emergency Planning Unit at a County Council level. The Unit is a small team which can effectively co-ordinate plans and responses, but there needs to be a clear message that emergency planning requires a much wider ownership of responsibility throughout service areas.

District Councils

21. The Committee met with representatives of three of the four district councils. The meetings were attended by the relevant Emergency Planning Officer in all instances, a District Council Elected Member in one instance and an officer who was head of housing in another. In all cases, contributors described a strong working relationship between the County Emergency Planning Unit, the District Councils and the other authorities and organisations involved in an emergency response. The Committee heard that the EPOs worked harmoniously and to an agreed common purpose. There was a recognition that each authority's role was

about planning to carry on with normal services under extraordinary conditions, that their job was restitution, not rescue.

22. The current district council statutory duties are to deal with the provision of accommodation to house homeless persons after an incident, environmental health issues, building controls (dealing with dangerous structures) and waste collection. Contributors saw their involvement as an expansion of normal roles, but with responsibility remaining within normal roles. There was, therefore, for example, a clear understanding of the district councils' housing responsibility and the County Council's transport responsibility in the event of an incident. The plans drawn up and utilised by each of the district councils are complementary to both adjacent district councils and the County Council.
23. All district council emergency planning officer roles are undertaken on a part-time basis, either as a distinct role or as part of wider duties. The EPOs meet together regularly, take part in meetings of the Buckinghamshire Emergency Coordination Committee, and are represented at the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum.
24. The District Councils indicated that there is ongoing training for staff covering such functions as reception rest centre management, local authority liaison officer training and call handling training with district staff as well as those from partner organisations such as housing associations.
25. The Committee questioned the capacity of the District Councils to deal with incidents which went beyond small, localised emergencies. The District Councils are involved in the multi-agency planning for mass evacuation, as are all local authorities in the Home Counties, but recognise that their ability to deal with a large incident depended on the limited resources and staffing at their disposal. Their relationship with the County Council and other partner organisations offered some reassurance that further resources would be made available, should those partners not be affected by the same incident. One council responded that in the event of a catastrophic incident, it would not cope for the first 7 hours because there is no response task force which could step in. It concluded that for significant improvements in the local capacity to respond to major incidents to take place, a task force of this nature would be required.
26. The Committee asked whether there were any issues around getting staff to be involved in the event of an incident. One district council replied that its housing staff had some emergency response responsibilities included in their job descriptions, but this was not so for other staff. There is a reliance on the goodwill of staff to respond in an emergency. The councils indicated that experience shows that people will respond in the event of a real incident, but are less inclined to react positively to training exercises or a contractual commitment.
27. The Committee was interested to understand how the District Councils communicated with their residents. Local radio and the local press were mentioned as appropriate mechanisms for communicating, as were local places of worship if appropriate. There are arrangements to gain the assistance of interpreters, if required, and use of a Language Line as well as accessing County's arrangements for providing interpreters. One council mentioned that it was looking at the future use of other signs and information boards in order to communicate more effectively with some groups.

28. As far as cultural and religious sensitivities were concerned, the councils noted training in cultural awareness amongst staff. One council noted that in the event of an emergency, it would be necessary to gather those affected together first, take stock and then consider cultural sensitivities in terms of locating people etc. Another council noted that it had a broad mix of people within its team, and so could draw on staff for knowledge. During a recent audit of rest centres, consideration had been given to the provision of 'faith rooms' in a variety of settings, including churches. However, there had not been any direct consultation with the communities it is envisaged would use these rooms as to whether a faith room in another religious setting would be acceptable.
29. The district councils were all very aware of the passage of the Civil Contingencies Bill and the challenges this would bring to the current arrangements, notably in the change of the district council to a Category 1 responder (the same as the County Council) and the resulting increase in responsibilities for business continuity and emergency planning. There was a feeling that the strong links with County and other district councils meant that the challenge to working arrangements was not as great as for some other authorities. Nevertheless, it presents challenges in terms of the regional organisation and the apparent lack of funding for the increased local authority responsibilities.

Voluntary Organisations

30. The Committee noted the arrangements to call on a wide range of voluntary organisations with different types of expertise and experience. A representative of the W.R.V.S. spoke to the committee, and written responses were received from The Radio Amateurs' Emergency Network and British Red Cross. The work of all the voluntary organisations was highly valued by the emergency planning staff who gave evidence to the committee.
31. The British Red Cross noted that it is difficult to gauge actual capabilities in the event of an emergency, but that from experience, the quality of response to any incident is far better than that imagined. The British Red Cross would welcome more simulated exercises involving the voluntary sector in order to test response capabilities and to ensure continuing commitment from volunteers.
32. The W.R.V.S. has a service level agreement with the County Council to provide registration and refreshments in the event of an emergency, including support at rest and reception centres. During 2003 the Mid Shires region, covering Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire, was called out on 11 occasions. The W.R.V.S. spoke of the professionalism and determination of its volunteers but agreed that enrolling new volunteers was challenging. Its capacity to respond to a catastrophic incident was, therefore, limited to the strictly limited number of volunteers it could call on coupled with the understandably strict guidelines on the length of time a volunteer could be engaged.
33. The Committee was very impressed with the level of commitment demonstrated by the voluntary agencies it spoke to. It considered that there was no doubt about the professionalism and determination displayed. It noted that the benefits that accrued from the activities of the voluntary organisations were substantial, and the funding provided to the organisations produced a return of much greater value. It noted that some voluntary bodies were part of national organisations and may be able to draw on help from outside local boundaries. However,

overall, the Committee questioned the capacity of the voluntary organisations to respond to larger incidents than have occurred in Buckinghamshire to date.

Health

34. The Committee met with Chiltern and South Bucks Primary Care Trust (PCT), which has lead responsibility for all the emergency planning responsibilities for PCTs in Buckinghamshire. When the PCTs were formed, the emergency planning role passed down to them from the Strategic Health Authority (SHA). The PCT has two main responsibilities, firstly an overall co-ordinating role between all health agencies and secondly a role in scrutinising the Acute Trusts to ensure they are equipped and have proper emergency procedures. The PCT role is one of partnership with other health agencies (e.g. ambulance response), District Councils and County Councils (e.g. evacuation, flooding) and with the Health Protection Agency (HPA). The HPA is part of the Department of Health and is an umbrella service which, in an emergency, advises on likely impact, health implications, evacuation, treatment advice etc. The HPA has both a regional strategic role which reports nationally through the Government Office of the South East, and a role in dealing with communicable diseases.
35. Each PCT has an Emergency Planning Liaison Officer (EPLO) with a lead EPLO from Chiltern and South Bucks representing all the PCTs at meetings across the Thames Valley. Due to the small size of the PCTs, there is limited management capacity so in the event of a major incident there would be sharing of management and staff. There is a list of on-call staff and a rota system, as well as arrangements to call on staff outside the rota system. At the first indication that an incident was sizeable, contact would be initiated with the SHA. If an incident went on for more than 24 hours, the PCT leading the incident would discuss with the SHA how resources could be shared across the Thames Valley to enable the incident to be managed and other business continued in the best possible way. The first links the PCT is likely to make is to one or more of four agencies; the Ambulance Service, HPA (who have a county-wide rota of public health doctors), the local Acute Trust and the District Councils.
36. In the event of an incident, the PCT's response may involve engaging many of its staff in the short-term. However, beyond 24 hours they would look to the SHA for resources across the Thames Valley. Since all staff are employees of the NHS and, due to the ability to call on the SHA, there is strength in the arrangements in terms of the PCT's ability to call on trained staff with transferable skills from a wide geographical area.
37. The Committee noted that establishing the role of the PCTs in emergency planning had entailed a steep learning curve, but that there was confidence expressed by the PCTs of their ability to respond, largely due to ongoing training. The Committee also noted the importance of partnerships to the PCTs in relation to responding to major incidents and the particular importance of maintaining a robust working relationship with Social Care.

Police

38. The Committee was interested to hear from the police about their involvement with the humanitarian aspects of emergency planning, rather than their direct

response to the incident itself. The Committee heard from The Family Liaison Co-ordinator for Thames Valley Police, who is a senior investigating officer not directly involved with family liaison work himself, and a Family Liaison Officer (FLO). The FLO role is a relatively new one within the police and was established initially to work with the families of murder victims and it is this arena that the work of the officers in the Thames Valley are still largely operational since there have been few examples of other types of incidents to work on. However, the officers described their involvement with those affected by the September 11 and Bali bombing incidents. Whilst the police are there to support the family, their remit is to protect evidence and facilitate the investigation with minimal distress to the bereaved.

39. The Committee was interested to hear of the training undertaken by Family Liaison Officers. Whilst these are roles taken on in addition to regular police duties, there is specific training for the role which is at present unable to meet the demand. This training prepares officers for the role and gives them an understanding of their own likely reactions to particular situations, an awareness of the effects of trauma. Whilst there is joint working between FLOs and other agencies involved in the response to an incident, in particular Social Care staff, the Committee noted that at present there are no joint training arrangements.

40. The Police benefit from the ability to call on staff from a wide geographical area who are trained and who operate within the same working practices.

Social Services

41. Emergency Planning (Social Care) includes two portfolios within the County Council – Adult Social Care and Children and Young People. There is a clear duty of care within Social Care's role which focuses on the vulnerable who may be at increased risk, or those people who become vulnerable as a result of an emergency. Social Care has a strong history of working hard to build up its emergency response function. Its primary responsibilities are production of Emergency Plan, training for all staff, assisting EPU with any evacuation including the provision of special transport, a service disaster recovery plan, an interpreter service and counselling and support services to the bereaved in partnership with other agencies. An Emergency Planning Conference is held each year which is aimed at raising awareness of the need to make basic preparation.

42. There is a well established Post Disaster Support Team which is lead by Social Care but involves many voluntary organisations. The planning and co-ordinating of counselling and training and liaison with other statutory and voluntary counselling agencies are its main responsibilities. The Team is equipped to be able to provide long term counselling support for people affected by a disaster.

43. Recently, Social Care has embarked on the recruitment of a Crisis Support Team. The team is being recruited from Social Care staff and includes Social Workers and administrative support. The team is intended to increase the pool of staff who have received more advanced training in responding to an emergency and who would be available to be called on in a major incident.

44. The Committee also noted a development which took place during the course of its review; in response to the wider-area focus of the Civil Contingencies Bill, Social Care has initiated a county-wide Humanitarian Aspects steering group. This group will explore, with a view to an agreed combined response, the following areas: humanitarian aspects, evacuation, vulnerable people, compatible emergency plans, support in situ, hospitals' role, widespread power cuts, temporary mortuaries, family liaison officers, special transport and joint training. The group comprises representation from Social Care, Health, Police, Fire, Ambulance, Voluntary Organisations, Housing and Emergency Planning Unit. Whilst the links to external organisations and the EPU are apparent, it is not so clear how Social Care links to Education.

Education

45. The Committee heard from an Education officer with responsibility for educational visits and an officer from the educational psychology service. There is an educational visits policy which underwent a review, in March 2002, following the death of a student during a school trip overseas. The procedures for officers following an incident are set out in a document entitled 'Grave Emergency Procedures for Schools' and the Committee understands that there is a similar document for the Youth Service.

46. The Committee noted the arrangements which are in place but was concerned that Education (both within the Schools portfolio and Children and Young People portfolio) was insufficiently pro-active in considering its emergency planning responsibilities. The Committee noted that whilst there are clear lines of communication to the Emergency Planning Unit, there appears to be a lack of clarity both within and between portfolios. This could be improved by strengthening the links between School Improvement and the Educational Psychology Service, as well as promoting the role of lead officer with responsibility for emergency planning as is the case in Social Care. All those with a role to play in an emergency should be clear about their responsibilities and confident that there is a uniform response. Whilst the Committee did not consider the plans in place to be faulty in any way, it seemed that opportunities are not being taken to promote the importance of emergency planning throughout these service areas. This leads to an inconsistent picture of emergency response capabilities across the services within the County Council's remit.

47. However, the Committee notes with interest the discussions which it understands are due to take place with regard to improving school governors' awareness of the issues through training sessions with EPU staff. It also notes that the Educational Psychology Service runs some courses for senior members of school staff for developing a policy for coping with a critical incident in school. The Committee would welcome any steps which raise awareness with governors, Headteachers and other relevant education staff. However, for this awareness-raising to be effective and on-going, the Committee considers that training should be cascaded through the service areas and not rely on the Emergency Planning Unit which can only act in a co-ordinating role due to its capacity.

Hertfordshire County Council

48. Hertfordshire has suffered 3 major rail crashes in 6 years; Watford, Hatfield and Potters Bar. There have also been minor flooding events and other incidents, such as a significant loss of electricity supply, which have triggered an

emergency response. De-briefing from these incidents has prompted changes to the way in which the aftercare, support and training for responses to such incidents is organised. Changes include smarter working in terms of casualty management and dealing with the media, recognition of the flexibility of using non-reception centres if more appropriate and presence from Social Care staff at the site of an incident. The Committee noted the pro-active approach taken by Hertfordshire, for example; while all social services have a remit to free up space in hospital wards by making arrangements for the care elsewhere of existing patients, Hertfordshire have planned this in some detail.

49. Hertfordshire approaches the training for staff for dealing with emergency incidents as part of mainstream training. All Social Care staff undergo the basic training as part of induction. Managers undergo further training and there is a 3rd tier of training available for those who are expected to act as coordinators in the event of an incident. Training builds on the skills staff are required to use in their everyday roles, and demonstrates how to use these skills in particular ways. Social Care staff are used to dealing with people in stress or crisis, and the skills they have developed in this area are utilised and built on for the emergency planning aspects. There are plans to incorporate police Family Liaison Officers in future joint training. Hertfordshire supports staff through training, regular de-briefing during incidents and a link to a counselling/staff support service.
50. The major rail incidents in Hertfordshire demonstrated that there was sufficient capacity within the responding agencies to cope with the level of demand, with some spare capacity. However, Hertfordshire considered that it was hard to predict whether services would be able to cope in response to a catastrophic incident.
51. Hertfordshire recognises the difficulties inherent in effective communication. One example of good practice was the public meeting held three days after the Potter's Bar crash which was very well received by the public. The County Council makes available basic guidance in different languages and there are links with Community Safety Officers who work within the community. There are plans to strengthen links with voluntary agencies that work in the community so that it is evident whom to call on within the community in the event of an emergency.
52. The committee heard that the Chief Executive of Hertfordshire C.C. strongly endorses the work of the emergency planning staff and encourages cross-portfolio working so that corporate management is perceived to be robust. The Committee considered that this strong corporate promotion of the human aspects of emergency planning, whilst understandable in the light of Hertfordshire's experiences, demonstrated a level of awareness from which Buckinghamshire could learn.

Findings and Recommendations

53. Major incidents are, thankfully, very rare and Buckinghamshire has been fortunate in not suffering such an incident. The Committee concluded 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.
54. However, the Committee's view is that the arrangements could be strengthened and should be strengthened in the light of the type and intensity of incident, which recent events at an international level have demonstrated to be possible. The Committee welcomes the introduction of the Civil Contingencies Bill and the increased awareness of the importance of 'resilience building' that this highlights. Whilst the Committee is aware that there are issues around resourcing which the Bill leaves unresolved, there are aspects that it considers should be addressed at a local level to improve the capability to provide an effective welfare support.
55. In order for its recommendations to be implemented effectively, the Committee firstly 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.**

Capacity

56. The Committee questioned the capacity of many of the organisations involved in emergency planning in Buckinghamshire to respond effectively to a large-scale incident. Some contributors acknowledged the limitations of their response capability. This was reflected on a national scale recently when the Chairman of the Emergency Planning Society claimed that Britain was ill-prepared to cope with an atrocity on the scale of the Madrid bombings.
57. The Committee considered that 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. One of the strengths of the police and health response is the ability to mobilise a larger response force than under local command. The Committee heard evidence of arrangements to call for the assistance of neighbouring authorities, but considered that these were unlikely to offer sufficient flexibility, or compatibility of practices, to satisfy the demand.
58. The Committee welcomes the wider-area response called for under the Civil Contingencies Bill. However, it sees strength in drawing more extensively on the skills and expertise of local people who could be mobilised quickly and effectively. Whilst this operates already, to a limited extent, through calling on voluntary organisations such as Bucks Search and Rescue, the Committee

considers that the arrangements are not robust enough, or tested sufficiently rigorously, to withstand close scrutiny.

59. Some contributors and the Committee itself mooted the development of a major emergency voluntary force. This might be developed with the possibility of a wider role than at present carried out by the voluntary agencies. Its recruitment could be broader based, seeking those with professional and practical skills. This idea is, of course, not without history in the UK where civilians have been used in times of conflict and also in the U.S.A. 's National Guard. However, the Committee understands that this concept was considered and rejected at a national level during the consultation period for the Civil Contingencies Bill and therefore the Committee does not consider that this concept can be fruitfully pursued further at a national level at this time.
60. However, the Committee considered that a modern response team is a concept with some merit that could be considered at a more local level. The Crisis Support Team which is being recruited from within Social Care staff is an example of a way in which expertise and commitment can be usefully harnessed. The Committee therefore recommends that Cabinet:
- 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.**

Communications

61. The Committee concluded that communications regarding resilience need to be reconsidered because it was unconvinced that the present arrangements engaged effectively with all sections of the community. New technologies offer opportunities to receive international news within moments of an incident occurring, yet our ability to extend effective communication to the most local level appears much more challenging.
62. The Committee noted that the term 'communications' covered both warning and informing the public prior to and during an incident, and the technical aspects of communications covering specialist methods of communication that can be utilised during an emergency.
63. The Committee considered that the way in which communication with the community is undertaken could be improved. It welcomed the leaflet recently distributed on simple ways of preparing for an incident, and was very aware of the fine balance between awareness-raising and scare-mongering. But the Committee was concerned that all sections of the community should be in a position to contribute to the arrangements for an emergency response, and be included in the audience for dissemination of information in the event of an incident. The Committee understood that reasonable measures have been undertaken to promote awareness of the issues with arrangements in place for the dissemination of information, but still considered that there was room for improvement.

64. The Committee was concerned about the mechanisms for widescale dissemination of information in the event of an incident. It noted with interest the BBC's 'Connecting in a Crisis' guide to working with the BBC and considered that the use of local radio was one of the most efficient ways of communicating widely during an emergency which was corroborated by a positive response to the Committee from one local station. The Committee noted that there are working relationships between local media and the EPU but was mindful that there is no strong public understanding of where to turn to in an emergency. The Committee considered that work should be undertaken to send out a clear message to residents about how they would receive information in the event of an incident, and this requires a clear protocol between the local authority and local media.
65. The Committee considered that an Emergency Planning Communications Strategy should be established which considers the needs of all customers, both internal and external. It should encompass the requirements of staff who need to be prepared for how to deal with an incident, as well as knowing how to communicate during an incident. It should cover communication with external organisations, including voluntary bodies 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.
66. The Committee was interested to note the approach adopted by four Humber councils who have drawn up a communication strategy: *"Communication is fundamental to all our activities. Effective communication is a two-way process to ensure that any information, instruction or response given is both appropriate and understood. As a public organisation we are required to be open, informative, accessible and accountable....Emergency planning is like any other council service...It is all about getting feedback from your users and communicating your message. That is the only way to start delivering a service people want and value."* The Committee noted with interest the annual satisfaction survey distributed by these councils as a way of getting feedback from users and considers that a similar mechanism for engaging customers of the Emergency Planning Unit in Buckinghamshire could be useful. As well as external 'customers', the Emergency Planning Unit has internal customers i.e. County Council staff. A targeted survey of staff could usefully establish whether the degree of awareness of emergency procedures and awareness of reactions in the face of an incident are sufficiently robust. Such measures would also enable the EPU to evaluate its own effectiveness and that of emergency planning functions within service areas. The Committee recommends that Cabinet:
- d. Establishes an Emergency Planning Communications Strategy which includes mechanisms for feedback and evaluation of its effectiveness.**

Community Leadership

67. The Committee considered that the challenge of engaging with local communities is one where the County Council's community leadership role should be utilised. Local groups, including local strategic partnerships, neighbourhood watch etc., provide a forum for debate between local people and providers of welfare support in the event of an emergency. The Committee was 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. This is

particularly important for sections of the community who do not find the current means of information sharing accessible. At present, it is not possible to be confident that the arrangements are robust enough to serve all residents of Buckinghamshire. Local community leaders are not necessarily aware of the arrangements or how their communities could be affected in an incident. The expertise within the County Council of engaging with local communities, in partnership with other agencies and voluntary groups, should be utilised to build resilience within communities and foster a confidence that appropriate and customised arrangements are in place to respond in the event of an incident. The Committee therefore recommends that Cabinet:

- e. Utilises the County Council's Community Leadership role to promote involvement with emergency planning with all sections of the community.**

Training

68. The Committee noted Hertfordshire County Council's approach to training whereby all Social Care staff have emergency planning training included as part of induction. Further levels of training are thereafter available to individuals depending on their specific role. Whilst there is much evidence of training within Buckinghamshire, the Committee considered that, to be a truly resilient authority, the issue of training needs to be reviewed. Firstly 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. Secondly, training should be made part of the mainstream programme whereby the skills and competencies required to be effective in an emergency response are developed. These skills are transferable skills, which staff will use in many different ways, including in the response to an emergency. Since these skills overlap with many other aspects of 'the day job', such training should be viewed as a part of career development and not sidelined as a non-essential exercise. Thirdly, the Committee considered that training should commence at induction, with a clear continuing professional development path then evident to staff. Part of this training should include an awareness raising of the effects of trauma.
69. Joint training with other agencies was evidently beneficial, and the Committee sought to promote joint training wherever possible. Present arrangements offer some opportunities to benefit from the expertise of colleagues from other disciplines, e.g. from voluntary bodies, but the Committee considered that a more formalised approach to joint training would be appropriate. Whilst there were indications of plans for future training with Police Family Liaison Officers which the Committee welcomed, it considered that these plans needed to be quantified and given a clear timeframe if the robustness of the training arrangements were to be improved.
70. As well as the quantity and type of training available, the Committee questioned whether training to date has tested true capacity. It would welcome more extensive exercises which tested cross-boundary capabilities and which, on occasions, were not led by the emergency planners but were more on-the-spot checks of responses by all concerned.

71. The Committee recommends that Cabinet:

- 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.**

Corporate Management

72. The Committee concluded that a broader approach was required than building expertise in particular service areas alone. Whilst it welcomed the evidence of strong work of an effective welfare response in some areas, the Committee was concerned that the corporate management structure within the County Council was not sufficiently sensitive to effectively mobilising sufficient resources outside the normal service area. The Committee was particularly concerned that Education was not sufficiently involved in the emergency planning arena and should be encouraged to engage more proactively in promoting the importance of a resilient approach.

73. The Committee noted the importance of the Civil Contingencies Bill and questioned whether its implications have been fully realised by all parties, and specifically by all those within the County Council who will be touched by it. The Improvement and Development Agency's (IDeA) webpages on Civil Contingencies notes "*The Civil Contingencies Bill called on councils to adopt a more integrated approach by taking into account how they can support their individual region. But this is an area councils have been traditionally weak on. Audit Commission officer Gill Green says local government often struggles to look beyond its own remit when it comes to emergency planning.*"

74. The Committee considered that Buckinghamshire has moved some way to embracing the challenges in the Bill, and understood that its full implications cannot be realised without confirmation of the associated regulations and guidance, as well as clarification on the funding issues. The present working arrangements between County and District level are a sound basis on which to move regional arrangements forward. The Committee welcomed the initiation by Social Care of a county-wide steering group to consider humanitarian aspects but considered this should be rolled out to a regional arrangement. Also, the Committee cautioned against the group being seen to represent one service more strongly than another, and wished to see engagement by Education in the group.

75. The Committee also noted with interest the IDeA comments on who is affected "*Although the bill is about resilience in the face of emergencies, it is not just about emergency planners and their work. The bill promotes an authority-wide and agency-wide approach. Members and senior officers need to be aware of the new bill and the changes it promotes. Effective emergency planning and business continuity planning is a corporate issue. Effective cooperation for emergency planning will support, and be supported by, other partnership work in related areas, particularly crime and disorder partnerships and local strategic partnerships.*"

76. The Committee concluded 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. The Committee recommends that Cabinet:

- 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

77. The Civil Contingencies Bill puts emergency planning under the spotlight and promotes the importance of building resilience within communities. At a local level, it is an opportunity for all responders to take stock and make some fundamental choices about the way in which we can build resilience in Buckinghamshire.

78. The Committee set out to establish how robust the arrangements are for dealing with the humanitarian consequences of a major incident. It concluded 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. The Committee considered that one of the difficulties of testing the current arrangements was that it is difficult to evaluate the plans for something which has not taken place, and equally difficult to measure progress in improving these arrangements. However, the Committee concluded that there were areas in which the County Council and its partners could benefit from a different approach, or with more focus on specific areas.

79. The Committee 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, would 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.

Background Papers

Buckinghamshire Emergency Plan

Dealing with Disaster, Revised Third Edition, Cabinet Office

Minutes of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Personal Care, 10 December 2003, 14 January 2004, 1 February 2004, 10 March 2004

'Responding to a major incident; the humanitarian aspects' , report of Dai Brogden, County Emergency Planning Officer, to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Personal Care, 10 December 2003.

'The Human Aspects of a Disaster Response', a report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Personal Care, by Rosie Murray, Chairman of the Emergency Planning Society, Working Party on Human Aspects, 11 February 2004.

'Responding to a major incident; the humanitarian aspects (Social Care), a report to The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Personal Care by Dwina Wheatley, Business and Strategy Manager Older People, 14 January 2004.

Acknowledgements

The Committee would like to thank all those who contributed to the review, in particular the Emergency Planning Officers at County and District Councils.