



City of Westminster

Westminster Scrutiny Commission

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Cabinet Member Portfolio	Leader of the Council
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1. Executive Summary

1.1. This report provides an update for the Westminster Scrutiny Commission on the following items:

- Covid-19 Pandemic Response:
 - how the pandemic has tested the council's emergency preparedness
 - Partnership working in response to the pandemic
 - Lessons learned and their implementation
- Key areas of ongoing work:
 - Overview of current core activity
 - Implementation of standardisation programme for emergency response capabilities in London
 - Resilience Standards for London

2. Introduction

2.1. An update was provided to the Scrutiny Commission in 2018 providing an update of the council's current activity in relation to emergency preparedness and resilience. The report also addressed specific areas of interest to the Commission.

- 2.2. Alongside updates on key elements of core activity in relation to emergency planning and preparedness, the report provides an update on how the Covid-19 pandemic has tested the Council's emergency preparedness and the lessons learned as a result. The report also details how the Council has worked in partnership in response to the pandemic.

4. How the pandemic has tested the council's emergency preparedness

- 4.1 As an emergency, the COVID-19 pandemic presented an unusual challenge. Westminster's Major Incident and Emergency Plan, in line with other local authorities and services, is primarily designed to manage the response to an acute problem which may have long-term consequences. Command and control structures were not principally designed to manage a chronic problem with acute phases. This, combined with the scope and scale of the impact on both Council services and our communities, created organisational challenges, including inconsistency in member and staff engagement.
- 4.2 The pandemic has shown how resilience across the organisation is mixed, as is awareness of command and control arrangements. One lesson learned is that resilience needs to be embedded in all service delivery. It is key to the organisation that processes and structures are in place that are not reliant on individuals but in which a range of staff can deliver.
- 4.3 Arrangements were made to ensure that the Council was prepared to respond to a secondary major incident or emergency. This included redrafting the Emergency Centre plans to allow for social distancing, infected and clinically extremely vulnerable persons and retaining resilience in terms of the technical, staffing and other capacity. Whilst it was fortunate there was not a secondary incident of significant scale, the Council demonstrated its ability to respond to concurrent major incidents and emergencies, to the usual standard.
- 4.4 A challenge throughout the pandemic was that it was rare for the Council to receive notification of Government guidance or decisions ahead of their publication or announcement. It was not unusual for initiatives to be publicly announced or guidance published shortly before their implementation. This created pressure on the Council to respond very rapidly.
- 4.5 Capacity in both the homecare and reablement markets has been a challenge, added to by staff sickness and self-isolation. However, the Council has been able to sustain prompt discharge. Winter will bring further pressure and the Council is working closely with its partners to ensure that services are in place to support timely and effective discharges.
- 4.6 The Council has a relatively small number of dedicated community engagement professionals and these are often roles focused on engagement relating to specific areas of Council activity. A pre-existing dedicated team or professional network would have assisted in gathering community intelligence

and in extending the Council's reach beyond core communications channels. Work on establishing a community engagement hub is underway.

- 4.7 Often caused by late-notice changes in guidance or short-notice announcements, there were a number of occasions where the Council was insufficiently prepared for situations that were foreseeable, resulting in the need for a rushed and reactive response. In order to address this in future a greater and more consistent focus on short to medium term horizon scanning is required. Work is underway to establish processes for requesting and capturing future risks and opportunities from services should be established. This should be combined with embedding the regular review of strategic objectives and tactical plans in to meeting structures.

5. Partnership working in response to the pandemic

Regional and Sub-regional Governance Arrangements

- 5.1 From the outset of the Pandemic, a pan-London Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG) was established. The purpose of the SCG is to provide strategic co-ordination and direction across agencies in order to ensure an effective response across London. London local authorities were represented on this group by London Local Authority Gold. Shortly after this, sub-regional Chief Officer groups were established to provide an opportunity to co-ordinate approaches, discuss matters of concern and to provide a single point of escalation. Westminster was part of the Central London sub-group chaired by Stuart Love.
- 5.2 Whilst there were areas of weakness within the arrangements, detailed below, one strength of the arrangement was to provide a forum to discuss, challenge and co-ordinate local pandemic responses and to provide a more direct route of communication between local authority chief officers and the SCG.
- 5.3 Thematic SCG sub-groups were established covering areas including: Mortality Management, Food, Health & Social Care Oversight, Communications and Accommodation. The work of some of these sub-groups had significant benefit. For example, the faith cell provided key messages on very sensitive topics from a centralised point to support local authorities communicating consistent messages to residents during this time. They established good links to the Council's communications team and community engagement officers.
- 5.4 The London Local Authorities Co-ordination Centre was also opened in order to both collate information from and disseminate it to local authority Covid Borough Emergency Co-ordination Centres. Situation reports were required from the Council as frequently as daily in the height of the first wave of the pandemic.
- 5.5 Changes have since been made to pan-London governance and co-ordination arrangements and are detailed below.

Health & Public Health

- 5.6 Public health on a national level is directed by Public Health England (PHE) and their advice has been central to England's COVID response. They have also taken responsibility for the operational delivery of key components of the COVID response, including the testing regime and that of the national contact tracing programme. In London, PHE delivers its functions through the London Coronavirus Response Cell (LCRC).
- 5.7 LCRC supply a daily summary of all cases, exposures and outbreaks that have occurred in the City. Depending on the nature of an outbreak, LCRC will form an Incident Management Team, including the local authority Public Health department, particularly in the event of a Situation of Interest (SOI) or significant outbreak. Other outbreaks are managed by the local authority Public Health team, in line with the Council's Outbreak Management Plan.
- 5.8 PHE also holds weekly briefings with Directors of Public Health across North-west London and also regionally and nationally as well as other ad hoc meetings on matters of significance.
- 5.9 Coordination across Public Health and health and social care partners has been crucial to the Council's pandemic response. Directors of Public Health operate a London-wide network through the Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH). Through the network, the DPHs share regular daily and frequent information on best practice, intelligence and training.
- 5.10 The DPH is also in regular contact with other health partners, notably local CCG, NHS Trusts and the primary care network via regular sub-regional and pan-London meetings many of which are part of the formal governance structure for the London COVID response.
- 5.11 In line with national guidance a permanent discharge hub model is operating in all three of the acute sites across Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea and Hammersmith & Fulham. The 'discharge to assess' pathway is still preferred and the Council have been conducting the majority of our discharges through this pathway.
- 5.12 Planning has also been undertaken across the health and social care system to reduce the risk of avoidable hospital admissions and ensure timely, safe hospital discharge. As we head into the winter period it is highly likely that there will be increased admissions to care homes and pressures on community providers. Therefore, the plan focuses on ensuring the sustainability and resilience of these key services alongside robust infection control processes.

Emergency Planning

- 5.13 The Borough Resilience Forum, which brings together emergency planning professionals from across partner agencies has met with increased frequency

throughout the year. The core membership, including police, fire brigade and health partners were meeting as regularly as fortnightly in order to share information and coordinate local activity.

- 5.14 Partnership working with the business community was maintained throughout, with weekly pandemic conference calls held with operational representatives of landowners and Business Improvement Districts. Alongside updates on the Council's response and activity, updates were provided by public health and police colleagues. Feedback received was very positive, with stakeholders grateful for a forum to receive regular updates and ask questions.

Mortality Management

- 5.15 In our response to excess deaths the Council developed a new approach to delivery across the death management process, bringing together the five key services within the death management process, alongside Communications and Strategy and Intelligence, to ensure a single overall picture of flow through the process system and to identify any potential pinch points across each function. In addition, we have developed strong working relationships across the IWL coronial district, working in collaboration and unity with RBKC, Wandsworth and Merton leads.

6. Lessons learned and their implementation

- 6.1 The Covid-19 pandemic requires an ongoing response to a long-term crisis and lessons have been, and will continue to be, learned throughout, by individual services and by the Council as a whole. Some of the key lessons learned are below.
- 6.2 The need to have *accurate and meaningful data* on a regular basis was integral to being able to make the right decisions. The need to capture this information led to the creation of the Gold Dashboard, which reflected the key metrics that drive decision making. This ensured that there was a 'single version of the truth' upon which decisions were based.
- 6.3 Co-ordination between chief executives and the integration with the Strategic Co-ordination Group was limited, resulting in a feeling that the SCG was too removed as an entity. London Local Authorities, whilst being the mechanism for much of the local delivery of the response to COVID-19, were often not afforded the time required to escalate, discuss and resolve issues they encountered. In light of this, a pan-London Delivery Co-ordination Group has been established to develop plans to deliver the SCG's objectives; facilitate collaboration and mutual support and to take a collective approach to resolving multi-agency risks and issues, escalating these where appropriate.
- 6.4 Pan-London situation reporting was typified by frequent and short-notice changes to information requests which placed a significant burden on Council services. Whilst providing a useful opportunity to benchmark Westminster

against other local authorities, the utility of the information collected was not always proportionate to the demands on services.

- 6.5 A full lessons learned exercise was completed for the Council's temporary body storage facility at Horseferry Road. Improvements in co-ordination of death management processes across Council services and the coronial district will be retained. There is also greater confidence in the Council's ability to identify risks and possible blockages in the death management process. Work worked across the Coronial district to develop more accurate trigger points for escalation than were available in March. Work was delivered ahead of an anticipated second wave to establish closer working relationships with the Funeral Directors in Westminster to ensure they can meet future demand.

7. Overview of current core activity

- 7.1 The table below highlights some of the core business as usual activity that the Emergency Planning team undertake. The Pandemic has caused disruption to much of the team's core activity, as a result of both staff abstractions and changed demand. This includes planning for and testing ahead of large scale events, almost all of which have been cancelled.
- 7.2 Alongside this, there has been a notable reduction in the number of major incidents and emergencies, compared to previous years. The majority of these have been small in scale.

Performance Indicator	2019/20 Total	2020/21 Qtr 2 Update	Comments
External Business Continuity Engagement Events	32	0	<i>Sessions delivered with businesses or BIDs, typically done in conjunction with MPS colleagues.</i>
External Business Continuity Engagement Event Attendees	1042	0	
Incidents Responded to	40	8	<i>This represents a significant reduction on the usual number of incidents.</i>
EP Tests or Exercises	19	8	<i>Outbreak Management test exercises</i>
Training Sessions Delivered	23	0	<i>Since the end of Quarter 2, 5 training sessions have been held with a further 5 booked.</i>
Number of People Trained	124	0	<i>This includes 'Gold' and 'Silver' training sessions to be held.</i>

- 7.3 The nature and extent of protests in the City continue to place additional demand on the emergency planning team. The Borough Emergency Control Centre was initially activated for the extended period of Extinction Rebellion protest, but was scaled back as the impact of the protest was significantly lower than previously.
- 7.4 The bi-borough Humanitarian Assistance Board was refreshed and agreed a new terms of reference in late 2019. The Board has direct responsibility for the bi-borough Humanitarian Assistance Plan; the extreme weather plans; the

identification of vulnerable people and also information sharing agreements. It also has responsibility for overseeing other plans which have a humanitarian assistance element. The Board typically meets twice yearly, but owing to recent work pressures, is scheduled to meet for the first time this year in early December.

- 7.5 The Council's emergency centre (typically rest or reception centres) plans have been reviewed in light of the requirements for social distancing and the protecting the health of clinically extremely vulnerable individuals. This has significantly reduced capacities across the identified rest/reception centre locations. As part of this, personal protective equipment has been included in the emergency centre kits. These were tested following a gas leak in October. While the feedback received has been positive, the team have identified and implemented further improvements.

8. Westminster EP2020 Implementation

- 8.1 Previously, the Scrutiny Commission was updated on the implementation of EP2020. The aim of EP2020 is to standardise LLA response capabilities across six areas of work: Borough Emergency Control Centre (BECC); Local Authority Liaison Officer (LALO); Rest Centres; Friends and Family Reception Centres; Survivor Reception Centres and wider Humanitarian Assistance. This includes standardising ways of working (Concept of Operations), roles and staff training.
- 8.2 Elements of the standardisation programme, particularly those relating to Humanitarian Assistance, have been delayed significantly but are anticipated to be received by the Council in 2021.

9. Resilience Standards for London

- 9.1 Work at a pan-London level to enhance the assurance of London local authorities' preparedness and capability to provide a response in support of members of the public to, and lead the recovery of the community from, emergencies, has been completed. Following this the new Resilience Standards for London were launched in 2019 and will be the way in which the organisation is assessed for resilience and preparedness around Emergency Planning for the foreseeable future.
- 9.2 The eleven standards are designed to both provide assurance and also to drive continuous improvement across the full range of this area of work: from senior leadership and organisational culture to emergency response to recovery and building community resilience. The Council's Executive Leadership Team are the accountable body for these standards and good practice is that appropriate services, departments and teams take ownership of standards that are most relevant to them.

- 9.3 The assurance process itself involves a self-assessment, which was completed in December 2019, followed by a sub-regional challenge process early in the new year. Of the eleven resilience standards the Council assessed itself as 'Established' in nine areas, 'Advanced' in one area and 'developing' in one area. Appendix A shows the eleven standards and the self-assessment against those standards. A full copy of the Resilience Standards for London is available on request. The self-assessment process this year has been replaced by an interim assurance process specifically related to Covid-19.
- 9.4 The pandemic has led to a number of developments, such as the Council's capacity to support convergent community volunteering, that will result in changes to the above self-assessment. An external review has been urgently commissioned in order to review our preparedness against the Resilience Standards.
- 9.5 A Local Government Association led peer challenge process, involving an external panel of reviewers interviewing staff and reviewing evidence over a three day, is expected every three years. The date for Westminster's peer challenge has not yet been set.

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the
Background Papers please contact Mark Chalmers x6032
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APPENDIX A: Overview of Resilience Standards for London Self-Assessment

The table below gives an overview of each standard, the council's self-assessment response and the summary classification. A brief summary of the outcome aim is provided under each standard for reference.

	Standard	Good Practice	Leading Practice	Summary
1	Risk Assessment	Yes	No	Established
	<i>Outcome: The council has a robust and collectively understood assessment of the most significant risks to the local area.</i>			
2	Political Leadership	Yes	No	Established
	<i>Outcome: The council operates with effective political governance enabling the organization to meet their duties under the Civil Contingencies Act.</i>			
3	Managerial Leadership	Yes	No	Established
	<i>Outcome: The council that operates with managerial leadership driving the emergency planning and resilience agenda across the organisation.</i>			
4	Organisational Engagement	Yes	No	Established
	<i>Outcome: The council has a positive organisational culture towards Emergency Planning which is seen as 'everyone's business'. Capacity and resilience are developed across the organisation.</i>			
5	Capabilities Plans and Procedures	Yes	No	Established
	<i>Outcome: The council has risk-based emergency plans which are easy to use and have clear arrangements to reduce, control or mitigate the effect of emergencies in response and recovery.</i>			
6	Resources, Roles and Responsibilities	Yes	Yes	Advanced
	<i>Outcome: The council has sufficient resources to support emergency planning and resilience arrangements. The council is able to maintain the delivery of business critical services during a response.</i>			
7	Partnerships	Yes	No	Established
	<i>Outcome: The council demonstrates a high level of partnership working and interoperability between itself and all emergency responder and supporting organisations.</i>			
8	Training, Exercising and Evaluation	Yes	No	Established
	<i>Outcome: Members and officers across the organisation are competent to fulfil their roles in an emergency. The council develops and assures their resilience through a risk-based exercise programme.</i>			
9	Business Continuity	Yes	No	Established
	<i>Outcome: The council is able to demonstrate a high level of resilience in their priority functions and emergency response and recovery capabilities.</i>			
10	Community Resilience	No	No	Developing
	<i>Outcome: The council has a strategic and coordinated approach to activity that enables individuals, businesses, community networks and voluntary organisations to behave in a resilient way.</i>			
11	Recovery Management	Yes	No	Established
	<i>Outcome: The council has robust recovery management arrangements in place to support the rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitation of the community following an emergency.</i>			

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Resilience Standards for London Local Government, 2019. Unpublished. *Copy available on request.*