



City of Westminster

Westminster Scrutiny Commission

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Title:	Emergency Preparedness Update
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Cabinet Member Portfolio	Leader of the Council
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	City for All
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1. Executive Summary

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

- Surface Water Flooding Response:
 - Review of the July 12th Flooding Response
 - Lessons learned and their implementation
- Key areas of ongoing work:
 - Overview of current core activity
 - Humanitarian Assistance
 - Cold Weather Planning
 - Resilience Standards for London

2. Introduction

2.1. An annual update has been provided to the Scrutiny Commission since 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. The previous annual report focused primarily on how the pandemic had tested our emergency preparedness and elements of the partnership response to it. Our response to Covid-19, for example ongoing work around vaccination, testing and outbreak management, transitioned away from emergency response arrangements in to a longer term 'business as usual' structure.
- 2.3. Previous reports have provided updates in relation to lessons learned from the Grenfell Tower fire and their implementation. There have been a number of changes to the timetable and phasing of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. As such, there have been no further reports relating to emergency preparedness since the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 Report. The recommendations of which were largely incorporated within the pan-London EP2020 standardisation programme.
- 2.4. The standardisation of response capabilities across Borough Emergency Control Centre (BECC) and Local Authority Liaison Officer (LALO) and the ways of working (Concept of Operations), roles and staff training, were implemented in Westminster ahead of 2020. The other elements of the standardisation programme, particularly those relating to Humanitarian Assistance, have been delayed significantly and have not yet been received by the Council.
- 2.5. The focus of this report is on the findings of the review of the response to the surface water flooding that took place in July of this year. This review also looked more broadly at the council's preparedness and emergency planning responses. Alongside this, updates are provided on key elements of core activity in relation to emergency planning and preparedness.

3. Review of the July 12th Flooding Response

- 3.1. On 12th July, over 4 inches of rain fell on several London Boroughs within a short space of time. This flash flooding had a significant and distressing impact particularly on those residents living in basement properties situated in the Maida Vale area of the City. The causes of or contributing factors to the flooding itself are outside of the scope of this report and are considered elsewhere, including through the statutory s19 flood review and an independent review commissioned by Thames Water.
- 3.2. It was recognised that the council's response to this major incident was not to the standard that would be expected of the council or to which the council should be looking to deliver. As a result, in the initial response phase, communication, reassurance and welfare support to impacted residents was insufficient.
- 3.3. In light of this, an external Emergency Planning Consultant was commissioned to conduct a review, the aim and objectives being to complete an urgent 'hot' review of emergency planning and preparedness to identify any urgent improvements that are required to improve confidence in the service.

- 3.4. The review took the form of interviews with officers from across the council who were either involved responding to the incident or the following day at the beginning of the recovery phase. An opportunity has also been provided for others employed within the council to contribute.
- 3.5. As this incident impacted multiple boroughs, a multi-agency debrief was held by the London Resilience Group on 6th August and representatives from Westminster's Emergency Planning Team participated. Draft recommendations have been circulated for partners to consider.

Lessons Learned and their Implementation

- 3.6. Several recommendations have emerged from the review which will help the borough's preparedness for future incidents, particularly flash flooding. Steps have already been taken to implement these recommendations and an action plan will follow in relation to the rest.
- 3.7. This report will not detail all of the recommendations, however, two of the key recommendations are below:

Establish a Strategic Board with oversight over a range of activities ensuring Resilience is Everyone's Business.

- 3.8. There are a range of issues highlighted in the report, including
 - A lack of volunteers to perform roles in the Borough Emergency Co-ordination Centre or Rest Centres,
 - Developing and maintaining plans and checklists;
 - Succession planning for Humanitarian Assistance
 - Monitoring and developing the Resilience Standards for London self-assessment
 - Improving and progressing business continuity plans.There is a need for strategic oversight by establishing a cross directorate board led by an Executive Director to drive forward these activities with a reporting line directly to the Chief Executive providing updates on progress and flagging any risks. This approach with oversight from the Board ensures resilience is everyone's business.

Preparedness - Build community resilience in response to future major incidents

- 3.9. A significant percentage of staff employed by Westminster reside outside the area. As with many other inner London boroughs, this presents difficulties ensuring there are sufficient staffing resources available to respond to major incidents, such as the flooding, not only outside normal office hours and weekends but also as a result of a number of staff working from home.
- 3.10. As indicated in the borough's Resilient Standards for London self-assessment, there is a need to identify a means, such as using social media, of both engaging and deploying local voluntary and community groups to help provide coordinated support during the initial response and subsequently during the

recovery operation. Westminster is fortunate enough to have a large network of volunteers through Westminster Connects which was originally established to support people who were vulnerable due to the pandemic and will be explored as a future means of providing support following major incidents.

3.11. An example of the implementation of learning from the July 12th flooding incident is provided in the response to a possible further flooding incident in October. Notification was received of a 'yellow' weather warning impacting London and the south-east – suggesting a *medium likelihood of low impacts*. Services were updated through the Business Continuity champions network so that they could implement any mitigation or business continuity arrangements. Communications messages were prepared and the call centre brought in additional staff and were advised of the escalation process should they receive calls relating to flooding. As a result, the Council was well placed to respond when the weather warning was upgraded to amber, suggesting a *medium likelihood of medium impacts*, at very short notice. Information was added to the Council's website and City Inspectors were deployed to check areas identified in the Multi-agency Flood Plan as 'Surface Water Flood Risk Hotspots'. Thankfully there was no significant impact on Westminster's communities. This approach has now been taken on a number of times since October.

4. Overview of current core activity

4.1 The table below highlights some of the core business as usual activity that the Emergency Planning team undertake. The Pandemic has continued to cause disruption to much of the team's core activity, resulting in changed demand. This includes planning for and testing ahead of large scale events, almost all of which have been cancelled.

4.2 The notable reduction in the number of major incidents and emergencies, reported to the Commission last year, continued in to the early part of 2021. The number has since increased to levels not dissimilar to pre-pandemic.

Performance Indicator	2020/21 Total	2021/22 Qtr 2 Update	Comments
External Business Continuity Engagement Events	8	4	Meetings with BIDs including Parliament Square, and Victoria BID.
External Business Continuity Engagement Event Attendees	200	Virtual meetings – details not recorded	Number of attendees is not known as the number of people attending virtual meetings was not recorded.
Incidents Responded to	18	14	Several large-scale incidents responded to, including recent flooding events, fuel shortages and support of Afghan settlement.
EP Tests or Exercises	8	9	A number of exercises linked to royal funeral arrangements and flooding.
Training Sessions Delivered	11	0	

Number of People Trained	55	0	<i>Strategic 'Gold' & Tactical 'Silver' command and coordination training sessions delivered. Training delivery plan in development for Q3/4.</i>
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- 4.3 The nature and extent of protests in the City continue to place additional demand on the emergency planning team and on the command team out of hours. During the pandemic, there was an additional requirement that Covid-19 health and safety risk assessments which needed to be reviewed at short notice by the Council.
- 4.4 There was an extended period of Extinction Rebellion protest in August/September of this year. The direct impact on Westminster was less than has been seen previously. As a result, the Borough Emergency Control Centre was not activated but contingencies were put in place for it to be stepped up at short notice. Instead, service co-ordination and information sharing took place through daily meetings with service leads throughout the protest period in order to manage and mitigate the impact of the protest on residents, businesses and council services.
- 4.5 Corporate business continuity arrangements were stepped up throughout the period of fuel supply disruption. Like many local authorities, the Council does not have its own bunkered fuel supply but many of our key contractors do. Daily situation reports were received from across Council services in order to ensure that critical services were able to continue and reports were produced for ELT on a daily basis. Some services activated business continuity plans, for example, by limiting vehicle use to essential activities only. Some delays and difficulties were experienced by school transport in the early part of the disruption. Adult day services transports were identified as being at risk if the disruption continued and contingencies for access to bunkered fuel were put in place through one of the Council's contractors. These contingencies did not need to be activated. The overall impact on council services was well-managed and therefore limited. In addition, a review was undertaken of the council's Designated Filling Station plan.
- 4.6 The majority of major events that emergency planning would typically be involved in the testing or plans for were either cancelled or scaled back significantly during this year. Support was provided through the tactical 'Silver' and the emergency planning team during the Euro 2020 games shown on Trafalgar Square and in liaising with partners where there were issues or disruption away from the screening. For example, information sharing and coordination of the cleansing response/recovery.

5. Humanitarian Assistance

- 5.1 The bi-borough Humanitarian Assistance Board was refreshed and agreed 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 information sharing agreements. It also

has responsibility for overseeing other plans which have a Humanitarian Assistance element. The Board meets twice yearly. If a Strategic Board is established, the Humanitarian Assistance Board would report to that Board in Westminster as it does to the RBKC Contingency Planning Assurance Group. The current areas of work of the Humanitarian Assistance Board that are particularly relevant to this update are outlined below.

- 5.2 Succession planning for the retirement of the Bi-borough Emergency Planning Manager (Humanitarian Assistance) is ongoing, including arrangements to increase capacity in emergency planning and incident response activities so that the welfare response to incidents occurring at the same time in both boroughs can be managed adequately. It has been agreed that the Emergency Planning Manager will return to work with reduced hours after his retirement to transfer expertise in Humanitarian Assistance to other staff and to fulfil the role of Humanitarian Assistance Advisor (one of the standardised London Resilience roles) in the event of a major incident.
- 5.3 The current Emergency Planning Manager has been contributing significantly to the development of the London Humanitarian Assistance Framework. This has included training for Social Care directors in the role of Humanitarian Lead Officer; developing London guidance on providing comprehensive support to people critically affected by major incidents and development of a London Information Sharing Agreement to support local agreements between responding agencies. All of these London developments will be adapted for inclusion in the Bi-borough Humanitarian Assistance Plan.
- 5.4 A bi-borough Social Care database is being developed so that it becomes easier to identify our service users in basement accommodation in areas affected by flooding.

6. Cold Weather Planning

- 6.1 There is a London Severe Weather and Natural Hazards Response Framework. This is a regional framework which outlines the multi-agency approach to responding to any severe weather or natural hazard, from high winds and snow to drought and wildfires. The winter weather arrangements include elements to keep things running, which primarily fall to local authorities, and plans to respond to winter weather service pressures, led by UK Health Security Agency (UK HSA).
- 6.2 There are four levels of severity identified in the Cold Weather Plan for England. Service plans include levels of preparedness and response commensurate with each of those levels.
- 6.3 Individual services develop and maintain plans to respond to adverse winter weather plans. The 'Winter Service Plan', which gives a hierarchy of priorities for the treatment of roads and pavements, describes the type and levels of operations to deliver such treatments, defines the roles and responsibilities of contractor and Council staff, provides for management and communication

through designated contacts covering each 24 hour period, and provides a weather forecasting service from MetDesk. The plan is routinely in effect from 1 November each year and there are four levels of mobilisation.

- 6.4 From a health and social care perspective, cold weather advice for all care providers and partner agencies, derived from the National NHS Cold Weather Plan, is sent out at the beginning of the winter season and again whenever there is a severe cold weather warning from the Met Office. A system is in place for the purchase of heating equipment or blankets for vulnerable people whose heating has failed and where there is not a social landlord responsible for dealing with that. Our Hospital Social Work Service takes part in enhanced admission prevention and hospital discharge activity with Hospital Trusts and the wider Health and Social Care network during the Winter Pressures period.
- 6.5 All schools are invited to apply to the Council's Winter Service Team for supplies of gritting salt to make safe essential pathways around and within the schools' boundaries. The Winter Service Plan also has details of establishments such as care homes and sheltered schemes so that pavements outside those buildings can get an enhanced gritting treatment to reduce the risk of falls for vulnerable people.
- 6.6 The Emergency Planning receive cold weather alerts from the MetOffice and UK HSA. On receipt of these, information is briefed out to services through the Business Continuity Champions network.

7. Resilience Standards for London

- 7.1 The Resilience Standards for London (RSL) were launched in 2019. These are the way in which the organisation is assessed for resilience and preparedness around Emergency Planning. 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.
- 7.2 The assurance process involves an annual self-assessment, followed by a sub-regional challenge process. In addition, 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 self-assessment process for 2020 was replaced by an interim assurance process specifically related to Covid-19. The external peer review process was similarly delayed.
- 7.3 A further interim process has been put in place for London Local Authorities for 2021. This Assurance Checklist includes a combined assurance process considering learning from the Grenfell Tower Fire (based on recommendations

from the Phase 1 Inquiry Report) and winter preparedness (based on Resilience Standards for London). Details of this process have only just been received and the deadline for submission is in January 2022.

- 7.4 The Council undertook the RSL self-assessment at the beginning of 2020 but this has not been reviewed since. These standards should be subject of a further review, with strategic oversight and with an intention of progressing these themes to achieve advanced status.

**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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BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A