

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting:	Tuesday 25 July 2024
Classification:	General Release
Title:	Emergency Preparedness Update
Report of:	Frances Martin, Executive Director of Environment and Communities
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Leader of the Council
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	Fairer Westminster
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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an update for Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the following key areas of work:
- (a) The national resilience framework and national risk register;
 - (b) The City Councils preparedness, training and response planning;
 - (c) Major Events and Protests;
 - (d) Housing provider emergency protocol;
 - (e) Humanitarian Assistance;
 - (f) The London Local Authorities assurance process;
 - (g) Emergency Communication Strategies;

2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

- 2.1. As part of a regular cycle of assurance a biannual update is provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, giving an update of the council's current activity in relation to emergency preparedness and resilience.
- 2.2. The Committee are invited to make recommendations on the present arrangements and seek clarification on any matters within this report.

3. Background, including policy context

National Resilience Framework & National Risk Register

- 3.1. The UK Government Resilience Framework (UKGRF), published in December 2022, outlines the UK Government's strategic approach to resilience. This is based on three core principles, a shared understanding of risk, prevention rather than cure and resilience is a 'whole of society' endeavour.
- 3.2. The UKGRF places emphasis on preparation and prevention rather than solely dealing with the effects of an emergency, to strengthen the UK's resilience system.
- 3.3. A shared understanding of the risks we face is fundamental and must underpin preparation for and recovery from crises. The National Risk Register 2023 contained a number of changes in order to improve transparency and usability by resilience practitioners. These changes have been reflected in the London Risk Register 2024. The Borough Risk Register, which is informed by its national and regional counterparts, has been updated by the Westminster Borough Resilience Forum.

Stronger LRF's Programme

- 3.4. The strengthening of Local Resilience Forums' (LRF's) roles and responsibilities with a commitment to deliver a programme of reform across LRFs by 2030. The Local Resilience Form is a London-level body chaired by David Bellamy, Chief of Staff to the Mayor of London. The previous chair, Fiona Twycross, stood down in May 2024 following their appointment to the House of Lords.
- 3.5. London was chosen as one of eight successful LRFs to pilot the two-year Stronger LRF's programme. Stronger LRFs are intended to support the UK Government Resilience Framework principles of developing a shared understanding of risk, greater emphasis on preparation and prevention, and a whole of society contribution to resilience. The programme will focus on leadership, accountability and integration while working with partners and Borough Resilience Forums.
- 3.6. The LRF submitted final draft delivery plans were submitted to the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) earlier this year and, following Government approval, funding for the programme was expected to be released to the LRF in June 2024.

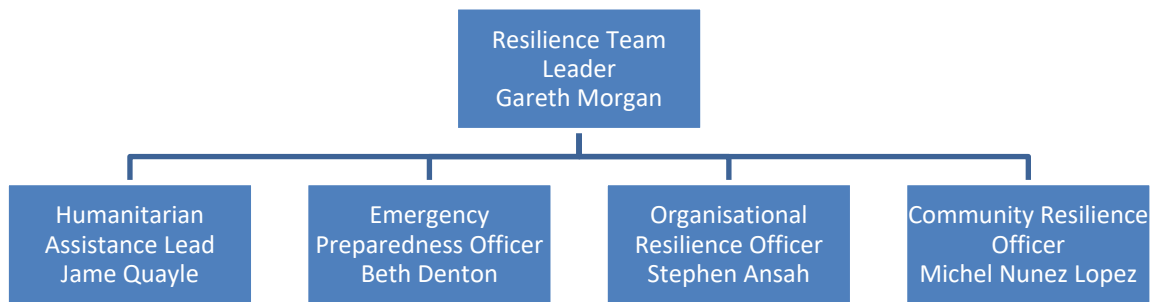
- 3.7. Following the announcement on the 22 May that the General Election will be held on 4 July, work on the Stronger LRF programme has been paused until after the General Election.

Westminster City Council's preparedness, training and response planning

- 3.8. The Executive Director of Environment and Communities provides the co-ordination and leadership input from the Executive Leadership Team. Operational leadership is provided by the Director of Public Protection and Licensing, and the Head of Community Safety and Specialist Services.
- 3.9. One key aspect of responding to a major incident or emergency, is the use of command and control arrangements to ensure strategic direction (Gold), tactical planning (Silver) and operational delivery (Bronze) across the organisation's response. All of the other statutory partners are operating equivalent structures that enable us to work effectively together.
- 3.10. At all times, the City Council maintains an on-call response structure. From May, the council adopted a rolling rota of leaders undertaking the gold and silver roles. This is to enable more equity among officers and to enable longer term forward planning.
- 3.11. Every member of the Gold/Silver team undertakes formal training with the emergency planning college and is supported by the council's resilience advisors.
- 3.12. Gold training was most recently delivered by the Emergency Planning College on the 13 May for all nine identified Gold officers. Five Gold officers undertook the training as a refresher with the four new Gold officers receiving the training for the first time. This core training is supplemented by additional training on the council's own arrangements.
- 3.13. Further Silver officers are being identified across council departments to increase the cohort from eight to eighteen. This will not only provide greater organisational resilience but also increase the diversity and experience of the cadre. Following this formal training will be arranged with the Emergency Planning College.
- 3.14. In the past six months the council's command team, made up of on call Gold and Silver officers supported by the resilience team, have responded to 5 major incidents or emergencies. These included 4 fires and one chemical leak. All incidents were relatively minor or small scale and the council undertook a timely and effective response to support impacted residents. This is a notable reduction in the number of incidents in previous years.

Service Development

- 3.15. The transition to a new Resilience Team has been completed with all roles recruited and officers in post. The new Resilience Team structure is below.



- 3.16. The roles within the Resilience Team align with core principles under the National Resilience Framework. The roles also enables officers to have clear ownership of workstreams whilst also working across the service and wider council under the unified title of Resilience Team.
- 3.17. The team aim is: *To prepare, protect and support the Council, our communities and visitors in the event of an emergency. Making resilience everyone's business.*
- 3.18. The team will continue to develop and deliver training for specific emergency response roles including Local Authority Liaison Officer, Emergency Centre Officer and Borough Emergency Control Centre Officers. The recruitment and training of volunteers will be an ongoing piece of work as staff progress, change roles or leave the organisation.

Major Events and Protests

- 3.19. There are many hundreds of events and protests that take place in the city throughout the year. The vast majority are low risk and medium to low impact and are managed through business as usual processes.
- 3.20. Event organisers are required to have plans for incidents that might take place within an event footprint. These are reviewed as part of the event planning process and, for large or very large events, are tested through a table-top exercise, which a member of the Resilience Team will also attend. The Council has plans in place in order to respond to a concurrent major incident or emergency during a major event.
- 3.21. For very large scale events, strategic and tactical leads are appointed to oversee the event from the planning phase through to delivery.
- 3.22. The management of protests within the public realm is the responsibility of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). The Council does not have the powers to influence the management of protests which by their nature are dynamic, with details of routes and plans often only shared a day or so in advance and numbers of attendees often not known until the day itself.

- 3.23. Council services are briefed on known protests at the earliest opportunity in order to facilitate their service planning.
- 3.24. Since October 2023 there have been 18 large Palestine Solidarity Campaign protests. Protests have occurred approximately every two to three weeks with numbers of protestors ranging from 10,000 – 300,000.

Housing provider emergency protocol

- 3.25. The Housing Emergency Protocol for Local Authorities and Registered providers was developed by London Councils and G15, a group of London's largest housing providers.
- 3.26. The protocol sets out high-level principles for the response to a local housing emergency. These are Preparedness, Communication and Working collaboratively to identify and meet residents' needs.
 - Preparedness - ensuring local dialogue between councils and Registered Providers to identify risks and gaps in local capacity, information sharing and clarity on statutory requirements
 - Communication - ensuring emergency contact details are shared and that there are good local communication channels in place and consistent communication and messaging is put in place where there is an incident.
 - Working collaboratively to identify and meet residents' needs – working together to support residents for both short and long-term requirements.
- 3.27. Housing colleagues are undertaking a review of emergency protocols to ensure alignment with the principles and are meeting with all large Registered Providers within Westminster to ensure the protocol is adopted. It is the intention for both the City Council, and then partners to test and exercise their plans in the autumn of this year following their review.

Humanitarian Assistance

- 3.28. At the December meeting of Overview & Scrutiny Committee, members expressed an interest in having more details in relation to our work in relation to Humanitarian Assistance.
- 3.29. The Bi-Borough Humanitarian Assistance Board oversees the delivery of a range of workstreams relating to humanitarian assistance. This includes maintaining the Bi-Borough Humanitarian Assistance Plan and ensuring that the arrangements and capacity are in place to deliver it – including the leadership and co-ordination of the welfare response to emergencies, in both the immediate and long-term.
- 3.30. This year, training for the role of Humanitarian Assistance Lead Officer (HALO) has been expanded to Heads of Service from Adult Social Care (ASC&H) and Children's services (CS). A HALO is the strategic lead for welfare and humanitarian assistance appointed following a major incident or emergency. The role continues from emergency response into

recovery, as the services and support provided changes from immediate, and crisis support to ongoing and longer-term support and assistance. Seven directors and executive directors were trained in 2023. Establishing ability of managers across Senior and Executive leadership to fulfil the role is intended to build capabilities of responding to incidents of varying sizes with a full Humanitarian Assistance structure in place.

- 3.31. HALO training was organised and partially provided by the Bi-Borough Emergency Planning Manager (Humanitarian Assistance), in collaboration with the London Resilience Unit as part of a pan London HALO training offer.
- 3.32. There is a full rota of six ASC&H and CS managers on-call as Welfare Response Co-ordinators. The Welfare Response Co-ordinator is responsible for the welfare aspects of local incidents that do not need HALO leadership. This includes identifying and supporting vulnerable people affected by these incidents.
- 3.33. There are currently 20 Westminster staff who can provide support to people suffering critical effects of traumatic incidents in the immediate aftermath of the incident. Referred to as the Crisis Support Team, they receive training in trauma response and may be called out to provide general welfare support in less critical emergencies. Further training and recruitment of Crisis Support Team volunteers will take place in the second half of 2024.
- 3.34. Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea are taking part in a London regional pilot to develop the systems for recruiting, training and supporting staff from Council departments and other partner agencies who can be redeployed in a major incident to be keyworkers. Keyworkers provide one-to-one support for critically affected people. Work is ongoing to develop systems for recruitment, training, case management and supervision. Recruitment of a pool of keyworkers will take place in the second half 2024.
- 3.35. Work has begun on reviewing and improving the processes around the identification of vulnerable people. This includes opportunities for collaboration with Housing colleagues, adult and children's social care and NHS data to increase the number and accuracy of vulnerable people identified for support during an incident.
- 3.36. In the second half of 2024 the Humanitarian Assistance Lead will work with care homes and other locations that house vulnerable people to ensure that comprehensive plans are in place in the event of an evacuation. This follows learning identified after a care home evacuation in Brent that led to multiple people being admitted to A & E. This will also be used to update information around housing and care providers and the needs of their residents in the event of an incident/emergency.
- 3.37. Officers will also continue to develop links between local voluntary, community, and faith groups to engage them during an emergency to assist in providing information and support to vulnerable people to help them cope with extreme weather. This work will be coordinated with the new

Community Resilience role the Climate Emergency Team and Public Health, and have already led to closer engagement with front line Community Health and VCS services via the Westminster Octopus (a local NHS effort to connect front line services).

London Local Authorities Assurance Process

- 3.38. There is a London Local Authorities Assurance process, in which local authorities assess themselves against the 11 Resilience Standards for London. The 2023/24 London Local Authorities Assurance process, by which local authorities assess themselves against the 11 Resilience Standards, was completed in early 2024.
- 3.39. Resilience standards are assessed across three descriptors. Developing, Established and Advanced. The self-assessment criteria for each resilience standard does differ but can broadly be defined as; Developing – standard is in development and is being actively enhanced; Established – standard is developed, embedded and well established within the authority; Advanced – standard is leading, fully embedded and forms part of the authorities routine activity.
- 3.40. Following the self-assessment, Westminster City Council was assessed as ‘Established’ across nine of the Resilience Standards with two areas assessed as ‘Developing’.
- 3.41. The Council recognises that resilience and emergency preparedness are areas that require continuous improvement and there are areas for development identified against all standards. These are incorporated in to work programmes for the coming year.
- 3.42. The table reflects the self assessment ratings, based on the following descriptors:

Resilience Standard	Rating
Risk Assessment	Established
Political Leadership	Established
Managerial Leadership	Established
Organisational Engagement	Established
Capabilities Plans and Procedures	Established
Resources, Roles and Responsibilities	Established
Partnerships	Established
Training, Exercising and Evaluation	Established
Business Continuity	Established
Community Resilience	Developing
Recovery Management	Developing

Emergency Communication Strategies

- 3.43. The scrutiny committee, held on 14 December 2023, recommended that; ‘communication strategies are refined as much as possible to ensure

promptness, clarity and consistency in all channels, and that Councillors are included in the strategy to recognise the key role they play in disseminating information.’ Following this recommendation the Westminster Resilience Team has undertaken the following actions.

- 3.44. The Resilience Team has reviewed the current processes for communication following a Major Incident or Emergency, in conjunction with the Council’s Media and Communications team. Added emphasis will be placed on early communications in the Council’s emergency response, and will be reflected in the advice and guidance to the council’s command team during such a response. This will include both internal (including Leader, portfolio holders and impacted ward councillors) and external (media and social media) communications considerations.
- 3.45. The Communications team will be regularly reviewing pre-prepared communications lines for use in Major Incidents and Emergencies, ensuring that they can be used during the initial onset of an emergency where information is limited, in order to provide reassurance that the council is responding and working with emergency services and partners to support our affected communities. This will be emphasised in training for resilience advisors, media officers and officers within the council’s command team. During an emergency response the duty Gold officer approves all communications in relation to the council’s emergency response. Training has been arranged for ‘Gold’ officers in May 2024 and an emphasis will be placed on prompt, clear and consistent messaging.
- 3.46. During incidents where other agencies (typically the Metropolitan Police Service or London Fire Brigade) are the lead responding agency and have primacy over emergency communications, the Communications team will continue to echo appropriate emergency response messaging from the appropriate lead agency. Additionally, the Resilience Team will be working with partner agencies and in order to highlight the importance of public communications during an emergency.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1. There are no financial implications for this report.

5. Legal and Governance Implications

- 5.1. Section 2 of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 places a duty of the council to assess, plan and advise in relation to the risk of an emergency occurring. The activity update in this report is aimed at ensuring the council meets its emergency preparedness and resilience duties under this act.

6. Carbon Impact

- 6.1. There is no carbon impact in relation to the contents of this paper.

7. Equalities Impact

7.1. There is no equalities impact in relation to the contents of this paper.

8. Consultation and Engagement

8.1. There are no decisions within this paper that require consultation and engagement.

8.2. The newly appointed Community Resilience Officer will work to build community resilience across Westminster's diverse communities, faith and voluntary sector. This engagement activity will also be used to inform and improve the wider resilience work of the team.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers please contact Mark Chalmers 07817054759 mchalmers@westminster.gov.uk or Gareth Morgan 07753578051 gmorgan@westminster.gov.uk

APPENDICES:

N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A