

NOTES of a Meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee's Informal Member Group on the Emergency Planning Unit Business Plan held on Friday, 6 January 2006.

PRESENT: Mr R J E Parker (Chairman), Mr R A Marsh and Mr D S Daley.

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P M Hill OBE, Cabinet Member for Community Services; Mrs E Tweed, Lead Member; and Mr N Rowe, County Emergency Planning Officer.

OFFICER: Mr S C Ballard, Head of Democratic Services.

1. Emergency Planning Unit Business Plan 2005/06

Terms of Reference

- (1) The Informal Member Group had been established by Cabinet Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 29 June 2005 to examine the Emergency Planning Unit Business Plan.

Introduction

- (2) Mr Rowe circulated a staffing structure chart for his unit and the detailed Budget and Business Plan document. He explained the various tasks carried out by his staff and gave a progress report on the projects, developments and key actions set out in the detailed Business Plan.
- (3) Mr Rowe explained that both the County Council and the District Councils had statutory responsibilities for emergency planning. In relation to the District Councils' responsibilities, 11 out of the 12 Kent Districts had entered into a SLA whereby, in return for a financial contribution, the County Council provided the emergency planning service on their behalf. Sevenoaks, as was its right, had chosen to continue to run its own emergency planning service. As a unitary authority, Medway also ran its own emergency planning service, although other important agencies such as Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue Service and Kent Ambulance Service covered the whole of the Kent and Medway area.
- (4) Following further discussion, Mr Hill said that he would pursue on a political level, the possibility of combining the emergency planning services of Sevenoaks and Medway with those of Kent.

Members' Questions

- (5) How is the response to emergencies co-ordinated?

Mr Rowe said that his unit was responsible for making plans with emphasis on dealing with the repercussions of emergencies (eg temporary housing for displaced people) rather than the actual emergencies themselves. In the case of an emergency occurring, all the first-responder agencies (KCC, the District Council or

Councils affected, Police, Fire, Ambulance, possibly the military and other agencies) would agree to set up 'Gold Control' at Kent Police HQ to co-ordinate the response to the emergency by all the agencies involved.

Regular exercises took place to refine the co-ordination and communication arrangements between the various agencies in order to ensure that they worked well if an emergency did occur.

- (6) Are EPU staff trained generically or do they specialise in particular areas?

Mr Rowe said that EPU staff were trained generically. Because his was a small unit it would be unwise for staff to be too specialised. However, some staff had, through experience, developed particular expertise in certain areas.

- (7) Business Continuity

Mr Rowe explained that two of his staff were dedicated to Business Continuity. This was about ensuring that KCC was able to continue functioning even if the organisation suffered a major emergency (eg a fire in one of the headquarters offices). In Mr Rowe's view, KCC's Business Continuity arrangements were not yet sufficiently robust. They were being worked on within Directorates but progress was faster in some Directorates than in others.

- (8) How and when is advice on how to cope with emergencies given to the public?

Mr Rowe said that it was necessary to strike a balance so that advice was given to the public in a timely fashion, but without causing undue alarm. Different media would always be used in order to get the advice to as many people as possible, but the actual media to be used would depend on the nature of the advice being given.

Conclusions

- (9) The IMG:-

- (a) thanked Mr Hill, Mrs Tweed and Mr Rowe for the information they had provided;
- (b) welcomed the Cabinet Member for Community Services' intention to pursue on a political level the possibility of combining the emergency planning services of Sevenoaks and Medway with those of KCC;
- (c) **recommends to the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee that it should suggest to the Chief Officer Group that greater emphasis should be given to the need for the County Council to have robust business continuity arrangements in place as quickly as possible.**