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To: Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee - 14 January 2026

Subject: Resilience update

Classification: Unrestricted

Electoral Division: All - Countywide

Summary: This report updates the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee of the work undertaken by the Resilience and Emergency Planning Service in the Council in planning for, responding to, and recovering from incidents across the county over the past six months.

Recommendation(s):

The Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee is asked to NOTE the report.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Resilience & Emergency Planning Service is responsible for ensuring Kent County Council (KCC) meets its duties under the Civil Contingencies Act (2004). As a Category 1 responder, KCC has seven duties to fulfil, spanning planning for, responding to, and recovering from incidents and emergencies affecting KCC and other responding agencies in the Kent and Medway Resilience Forum (of which KCC is a member).
- 1.2 As outlined in the [LGA Councillors Guide to Civil Resilience](#), officers must develop the operational expertise to manage crises effectively. For councillors, this means stepping confidently into a political leadership role – before, during, and after emergencies. Officers and councillors have distinct roles, but they are most effective when they complement each other.
- 1.3 The Local Government Association (LGA) guidance also offers specific guidance for senior councillors with executive responsibilities, including cabinet members and committee chairs on their role in supporting civil resilience.

2. Recent Incidents

- 2.1 KCC operates a number of on-call incident response roles, coordinated by the Duty Emergency Planning Officer (DEPO). The DEPO is the single point of contact for other agencies to request KCC involvement in the response to an incident. The DEPO is also responsible for alerting other local authorities in

Kent and voluntary sector organisations, should either of those sectors also be required.

- 2.2 Over the course of the year, the DEPO will respond to and receive alerts about a range of incidents or threats, including flood / weather warnings, border traffic issues, pollution events, and disruption to infrastructure. Three of the most significant incidents from the past 6 months are outlined below.

2.3 **Bitumen discharge, Gravesend, 17 August 2025**

2.3.1 The DEPO was contacted by the Environment Agency to advise that a suspected 5-10 tonnes of bitumen had been discharged by FM Conway.

2.3.2 The response was led by the Port of London Authority, who tasked their contractors with the clean-up. This eventually took 4 weeks, with pollution extending between Erith and Shorne Marshes on the south bank of the Thames Estuary, and past Southend-on-Sea along the north bank. The total recovered material came to 25 tonnes, some of which was challenging to recover due to lack of shore-side access.

2.3.3 The post-incident debriefs identified a number of issues where improvements were needed, including the flow of information, and cross-border working with neighbouring Local Resilience Forums.

2.4 **Portlands Factory Club fire, Northfleet, 26 October 2025**

2.4.1 Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) were called to a fire at the derelict Portlands Factory Club on Northfleet High Street. At the peak of the incident, KFRS had eight fire appliances, two height vehicles, and a number of other specialist vehicles, teams and officers in attendance. The scene was handed over to Gravesham Borough Council (GBC) the following afternoon.

2.4.2 Tests on debris from the fire confirmed the presence of asbestos, and on 28 October a Major Incident¹ was declared by Gravesham Borough Council and Kent County Council.

2.4.3 Gravesham Borough Council requested support from KCC under mutual aid, and it was agreed that KCC would chair the Strategic and Tactical Coordination Groups, with GBC leading on media and communications. A Media and Communications Cell, and a Vulnerable People and Communities Cell were established.

2.4.4 GBC also provided building control and planning expertise, and KCC activated its specialist asbestos contractors to work on the clean-up. KCC services involved included Resilience and Emergency Planning, Public Health, Highways, Health and Safety, Infrastructure, and Marketing and Resident Experience (MRX).

¹ A Major Incident is defined as an event or situation with a range of serious consequences which requires special arrangements to be implemented by one or more emergency responder agency.
(<https://www.jesip.org.uk/webapp/major.html>)

2.4.5 The debris field covered several of the surrounding roads and properties, as well as Lawn Road Primary School and Family Hub.

2.4.6 Due to the presence of asbestos, the clean-up operation was complex and protracted. The clean-up was split into five phases, including roads and street scene, school and hub, surveys and clean-up of residential properties, roofs / gutters / chimneys, and school reopening.

2.4.7 The incident moved into the Recovery phase on 5 November, with KCC handing over as lead agency to GBC. KCC services however have remained involved in the recovery phase of the incident.

2.4.8 The KCC internal debrief took place on 26 November, and we have identified a number of areas that could be further strengthened including awareness of activation processes, County Emergency Centre equipment, and initial information sharing.

2.4.9 Importantly, a number of areas of good practice were also noted, including; collaboration between services, proactive engagement, strong leadership, and contractor relationships.

2.4.10 The multi-agency debrief takes place on 11 December, after this report was submitted for publication, and the Head of Resilience and Emergency Planning will give a verbal overview of its outcome and next steps.

2.5 Tunbridge Wells water outage, 29 November 2025

2.5.1 On Saturday 29 November, an outage at South East Water's (SE Water's) Pembury Treatment Works interrupted supplies to the Tunbridge Wells area. The outage was originally envisaged to be resolved by 22:00 the same day, but as the outage extended into a second day, a decision was taken to stand up a Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG) in response to the ongoing water outage.

2.5.2 In total, 25,000 properties were affected including the hospital, renal unit, care homes, GP surgeries, dentists, schools and early years settings, businesses, and residential properties.

2.5.3 Whilst 10,000 properties were brought back on supply by the morning of 2 December with a plan to resupply the remaining areas, at the TCG meeting that day, SE Water revealed that there was a further issue with the Pembury treatment works which would result in output being shut down.

2.5.4 A decision was taken by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) and KCC to declare a Major Incident the same day. A Media and Communications Cell and a Vulnerable People and Communities Cell (both chaired by KCC) were established to manage specific aspects of the response. TWBC and KCC shared the chairing of the Strategic and Tactical Coordination Group meetings.

2.5.5 On 3 December, SE Water resupplied the network accompanied by a Boil Water Notice. Whilst this allowed properties to receive running water, for

the duration of the notice resilience forum partner agencies coordinated the response to ensure that:

- Residents, businesses and critical infrastructure are kept in supply of bottled / tankered water.
- Appropriate communication is taking place on public health messages.
- The impacts on schools, care homes, medical facilities and other impacted infrastructure are managed and mitigated.
- Businesses are supported.

2.5.6 KCC services involved in the response to this incident include Resilience and Emergency Planning, Public Health, Highways, Health and Safety, Infrastructure, and Marketing and Resident Experience (MRX).

2.5.7 In total, 15 schools were affected and closed for the majority of the first week of the outage. Oakleigh School, a Special Educational Needs (SEN) school in the area, was prioritised for reopening by KCC due to the vulnerability of its pupils, and tankered water was arranged through KCC contractors, allowing the school to open sooner.

2.5.8 Montague House, one of KCC's offices, was also closed during the outage.

2.5.9 This report is being submitted for publication during the response, so the Head of Resilience and Emergency Planning will give a verbal overview of its outcome and next steps.

3. Member briefing sessions

3.1 As part of the induction programme for new members after every county council election, the Resilience and Emergency Planning Service runs a number of briefing sessions for all members on the duties placed upon KCC under the Civil Contingencies Act (2004), what that means in practice for the authority, and the role of officers and elected members in planning for, responding to, and recovering from incidents in Kent and Medway.

3.2 In addition, the public inquiry into the fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017, has shown what happens when a local authority is ill-prepared to respond to incidents, and how elected members are a key part before, during, and after an incident.

3.3 The inquiry demonstrated that, on what may be the worst day of someone's life, it is our responsibility, our duty in law, to do the best we can to help them. It has also shown how it is inexcusable for authorities to try to do anything less than its best.

3.4 To date three-member briefing sessions were delivered by the Resilience and Emergency Planning Service in October 2025 with 38% attendance.

3.4.1 Whilst the presentation, the accompanying Handbook, and key links have been provided on the Member SharePoint area, all members are encouraged to

attend a briefing session to validate their knowledge, and to give members an opportunity to raise questions or issues with officers on any aspect of the briefing.

3.4.2 Further sessions are being arranged to ensure 100% of members can attend.

4. Exercise Troy

4.1 Exercise Troy was an internal table-top simulation organised by the Resilience and Emergency Planning Service (REPS) in Autumn 2025 to assess KCC's preparedness for a cyber incident.

4.2 The scenario simulates a major cyber-attack on KCC systems, initiated by a phishing email that resulted in a ransomware outbreak. The exercise tested the organisation's capability to manage a widespread IT outage over the course of several days, to maintain effective communication, and to restore essential services.

4.3 The objectives of the exercise were to:

- Test alternative communication arrangements.
- Identify lessons learned to inform Business Continuity (BC) planning and promote cyber awareness.
- Test arrangements for maintaining service delivery and effective communication between staff, services and suppliers.
- Acknowledge and verify interdependencies between services, systems and suppliers, and action as appropriate.

4.4 The exercise was structured around four scenario injects, which were presented to all participants to encourage group discussion, highlight common issues and find solutions. In addition, individual prompts tailored to specific attendees were provided, allowing staff to address service-specific considerations throughout the exercise.

4.5 Over three sessions, 83 staff members from all directorates participated, taking part in cross-service discussions to test KCC's response and recovery capabilities.

4.6 The exercise demonstrated that KCC is capable of strong cross-directorate collaboration, with participants engaging actively and constructively throughout the sessions. The scenario enabled high levels of engagement and provided a meaningful test of business continuity plans. The structured approach enabled participants to reflect on their preparedness and share valuable insights.

4.7 As a result of these findings, 15 key recommendations were made covering the following areas:

- The value of cross-directorate collaboration
- The importance of realistic and relevant scenarios
- The need for subject matter expert involvement

- The need for data protection guidance on alternative communication methods
- The importance of considering the use of resources where it may take time before Business as Usual can be re-established.
- The importance of managing offices to prevent overcrowding during incidents
- The importance of contact centre engagement
- The need for effective corporate messaging
- The need for guidance on managing paper records.
- The value of using learning from past incidents
- The need for an increased awareness of business continuity plans

4.8 The Resilience and Emergency Planning Service will now work to embed these lessons ahead of the 2026 Resilience Training and Exercising Programme.

5. Kent and Medway Resilience Forum engagement

5.1 KCC is a proactive and engaged member of the Kent and Medway Resilience Forum (KMRF). A key part of this is the provision of KCC staff (along with Kent Police and Kent Fire and Rescue Service staff) to the multi-agency Kent Resilience Team (KRT). The KRT is the central team that coordinates the work of the KMRF, ensuring partners work together as part of their duties under the Civil Contingencies Act to collaborate, coordinate, and develop plans to respond to incidents.

5.2 The KMRF structure is made up of the core Strategic and Delivery Boards, four standing groups, and numerous working groups. Appendix B outlines how KCC engages with each of these.

5.3 KCC regularly sends delegates on courses provided by the KMRF as part of the annual Training & Exercising Programme. In 2024/25, KCC sent the most staff on KMRF training courses, and so far in 2025/26 is joint first with further courses planned in Q4.

5.4 Courses attended included Strategic / Tactical / Operational Command courses, Welfare Centre, College of Policing Multi-Agency Gold Command Incident Command (MAGIC), How to Chair a Multi-Agency Command Cell amongst others.

5.5 KCC also attends multi-agency exercises to test our planning alongside staff from other responding agencies. The two main exercises run in 2025/26 were Op Skippered and Ex Pegasus which are summarised below:

5.5.1 Specific maritime threats have been identified in the National Security Risk Assessment which describes the reasonable worst-case scenario for the risk of passenger ferry incident. A number of pre-identified roll-on/roll-off (ro-ro) ferry ports within the UK have been designated as 'ports of reception'. Operation Skippered is a local plan which aims to provide options to enable the Port of Dover to prepare and manage the consequences resulting from a marauding terrorist attack (MTA) on a large, international ro-ro ferry.

- A two-day multi-agency tabletop exercise was run in June 2025 to test the draft plan, looking at aspects of the response such as welfare / casualty / fatality management, the counter-terrorism investigation, and recovery of the vessel and port.
- KCC staff, including the Duty Director, Coroner, Resilience and Emergency Planning, and Highways staff, participated in the exercise.
- The exercise, and subsequent debrief, identified a number of areas where further planning was required. This included port evacuation, communication between welfare centres, local authority welfare centre capabilities, and conveyance of significant numbers of walking wounded casualties.
- The Home Office team who ran the exercises for all ports of reception were very complementary about the strong partnership working between all responding agencies at the exercise. KCC staff were also positive about the opportunity to participate in the exercise.

5.5.2 Exercise Pegasus was a Tier 1 national (four nations) exercise delivered by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). It was designed to assess progress since the Covid-19 pandemic and test the UK's preparedness and capabilities arrangements to respond to future pandemics.

- KCC and other KMRF partner agencies attended three tabletop exercises (covering emergence, containment, and mitigation) in Autumn 2025, with information on the scenario for each only released a couple of days before the event.
- Whilst KCC staff were positive about the opportunity to participate in the exercise, the limited information available meant that the event wasn't as worthwhile as it could have been.
- KCC will lead on the update on the KMRF Pandemic Plan following the exercise, although the lack of finalised national plan limits the extent of the changes that can be made at this stage.

5.6 The next significant engagement that KCC will undertake with KMRF partners will be Ex Salvus, a multi-agency multi-part exercise taking place throughout 2026. The aim of the exercise is to explore and critically challenge KMRF partners and stakeholders' resources and capabilities to manage the secondary impacts of mass evacuation at an event site.

5.6.1 This will be achieved through the validation of control room training with a live call; a no-notice stand-up of Strategic and Tactical Co-ordination Groups to validate KMRF Command Training; a simulation briefing for KMRF partners and stakeholders to engage with and identify their organisational preparedness; the capabilities, constraints, and casualty tracking by SECAMB and the NHS through a casualty management live exercise; and the role of, and how information is shared between, the Survivor Reception Centre, Casualty Bureau, Friends and Family Centre, and Casualty Tracker.

5.6.2 KCC is involved in the general planning for the exercise, as well as leading the humanitarian assistance workstream.

5.6.3 KCC is also advocating for an observer programme, to allow KCC senior officers and key elected members to understand KMRF preparations.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The work of the Resilience and Emergency Planning Service is varied and extends across all services. Whilst the service prepares in the hope that the risks it aims to mitigate through plans, capabilities, training, exercising, and embedding lessons do not manifest in an incident response, experiences in Kent and in other areas across the country have shown the value of effective planning.

Recommendation(s):

The Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee is asked to NOTE this report.

7. Background Documents

- 7.1 Local Government Association – [A Councillor's Guide to Civil Resilience](#)

<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/councillors-guide-civil-resilience#part-a-supporting-senior-councillors>

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A – Ex Troy scenario overview
8.2 Appendix B – KCC engagement with KMRF groups

9. Contact details

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