

From: Brian Collins, Deputy Leader
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To: Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee - 6 May 2026

Subject: Resilience Update

Classification: Unrestricted

Electoral Division: All - Countywide

Summary: This report provides a summary of the work undertaken by the Resilience and Emergency Planning Service in planning for, responding to, and recovering from incidents across the county over the past four months.

Recommendation(s):

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

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Resilience and 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 (KMRF) (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, it means stepping confidently into a political leadership role – before, during, and after emergencies. Officers and councillors have distinct roles, but they're most powerful when they complement each other.
- 1.3 The Local Government Association (LGA) 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 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 **Kent water disruption, 6 January 2026**

2.3.1 On Tuesday 6 January 2026, further water disruption occurred in the South Tunbridge Wells area, linked to issues with the Blackhurst Reservoir. A decision was taken to stand up a Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG) and a Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) in response to the ongoing water outage, led by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC), with KCC attending alongside other responding agencies.

2.3.2 On Saturday 10 January, it became apparent that the disruption was spreading across the county due to issues with Southern Water infrastructure. This forced Southern Water to cease bulk water transfers to the South East Water system, resulting in customers across mid-Kent experiencing a loss of supply. The number of customers off supply varied on a daily basis but was usually in the 5,000-20,000 range.

2.3.3 Due to the increase in affected areas beyond one district and with the agreement of TWBC, KCC took the lead on the response, and a Major Incident was declared. A Media and Comms Cell and a Vulnerable People and Communities Cell (both chaired by KCC) were established to manage specific aspects of the response.

2.3.4 Supplies eventually returned across the county by 19 January 2026.

2.3.5 KCC services involved in the response to this incident included Resilience and Emergency Planning, Public Health, Highways, Education, Social Care (Adults and Children's), Infrastructure, and Communications (MRX).

2.3.6 KCC ran an internal debrief after the incident. Areas to be strengthened included elements of staff resourcing, data processing, and internal comms. Good practice identified included cross-directorate collaboration, rapid mobilisation, and the engagement with the Media and Comms and Vulnerable People and Communities Cells. The recommendations have been included in the new Resilience Lessons Identified process, and progress of their implementation will be tracked through both the Cross Directorate Resilience Forum (CDRF) and individual Directorate Resilience Groups.

2.3.7 A multi-agency debrief for the December and January water outages took place in March 2026. Areas for improvement included MP engagement, staff resourcing, information sharing, alternative water provision, and communications. Good practice identified covered Category 1 responding agency liaison, the use of frequently asked questions (FAQs), and support to health settings. The recommendations have been included in the KMRF Lessons Identified process, and progress of their implementation will be tracked through both the KMRF Lessons Identified Group, and the KMRF Delivery Board.

2.3.8 The KCC Short Focussed Inquiry reviewing both water outages is currently ongoing and is scheduled to report back to the Scrutiny Committee in May 2026.

2.4 **Canterbury Meningitis Outbreak – 15 March 2026**

2.4.1 On Sunday 15 March, KMRF partners were alerted to an outbreak of meningitis in Canterbury. The lead agency for the incident was UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), but they tasked the NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB) to manage command and control meetings. Whilst the NHS could resource the TCG meetings, they requested KCC Public Health to chair and manage SCG meetings. KCC agreed to the request, and the Director of Public Health and Corporate Director for Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) shared the chairing duties. A Media and Comms Cell were also set up, chaired by KCC MRX.

2.4.2 A Major Incident was declared for the response.

2.4.3 Alongside the KMRF structures, UKHSA activated their national Incident Management Team multi-agency structure, which KCC Public Health also attended. KCC also activated extraordinary meetings of the Cross Directorate Resilience Forum to manage the internal response.

2.4.4 KCC services involved included The Resilience and Emergency Planning Service (REPS), Public Health, MRX, Education, Coroners, and Social Care (Adults and Children's).

2.4.5 The incident response was stood down on Thursday 26 March. An internal KCC debrief is scheduled for 30 April, followed by a multi-agency debrief at the end of April. The Head of Resilience and Emergency Planning will provide a verbal update on the internal debrief at Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee on 6 May.

2.5 Installation of the Archbishop of Canterbury – 25 March 2026

2.5.1 On 25 March, the ceremonial installation of the Archbishop of Canterbury took place in Canterbury Cathedral. The Lord Lieutenant and KCC Leader were among the guests at the service, alongside members of the Royal Family and senior politicians.

2.5.2 A full multi-agency operation was set-up as a contingency should any incidents arise. The Strategic and Tactical Coordination centres, hosted by Kent Police, were opened and responding agencies, including KCC, attended.

2.5.3 The day was a useful test of partner capabilities and relationship building. KCC also took the opportunity to do a limited test of our new Airwave radio capability.

3. Member briefing sessions

- 3.1 The Resilience and Emergency Planning Service has continued to run 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 As highlighted at previous meetings of this committee, part of the learning from the Grenfell Tower fire incident is the culture of local authorities recognising the importance of resilience.
- 3.3 Elected members are part of this, and this training is an important part of improving members' awareness of their role before, during, and after an incident.
- 3.4 We have now held six-member briefing sessions since October 2025, and 72% of members have attended.
- 3.5 Whilst the presentation, the accompanying Handbook, and key links have been provided on the Member SharePoint area, all members are strongly encouraged to prioritise attending a briefing session to validate their knowledge, and to have an opportunity to raise questions or issues with officers.
- 3.6 Further sessions are being arranged in April and May 2026, to ensure 100% of members can attend.

4. Exercise Troy

- 4.1 Exercise Troy, a cyber incident simulation held in October 2025 (see Appendix A for details of the scenario), has now been fully evaluated, and the lessons learned have been incorporated into a wider lesson learned programme. As part of this work, clear actions have been developed and assigned to relevant individuals and services.
- 4.2 The resulting plan was presented at the most recent Cross Directorate Resilience Forum and will be circulated to all teams and services to support ongoing improvement as part of the new Resilience Lessons Identified process. Progress against these actions will be reviewed as a standing agenda item at both the Cross Directorate Resilience Forum and individual Directorate Resilience Groups.
- 4.3 Fourteen key recommendations were identified from the exercise which focused on:
- Ensuring that all BCP plans are up to date with regular review process and contact details – The new Business Continuity Planning (BCP) system that has been adopted includes this functionality and is due to be audited as part of the council's audit programme to provide assurance as to the use of the system.
 - The creation of guidance and communication protocols - The delivery of this action requires input/ actions from a number of teams across the council. Progress on these has been delayed as a result of the need to move to response for a number of recent incidents but is being progressed to develop the necessary guidance for services.
 - Review of the contact centre capacity and contingency arrangements - Following the mobilisation of the new provider this will be developed further.
 - Develop and reconfirm protocols in relation to office occupancy during system outages. The facilities management team are reviewing processes
 - Further training and increased awareness in relation to Business Continuity Plans and responsibilities – an Organisational Resilience eLearning course has been drafted which includes a section on Business Continuity to be added to the councils online training system 'Delta' when finalised. Current communication and engagement routes will continue to be used and further developed including the use of KNET, specific and corporate exercises and the use of existing forums.
 - Enhance the lessons learnt process – a formal process has been implemented which is now a standing item at the cross-directorate groups

4.4 The need for an increased awareness of business continuity plans

4.4.1 REPS has reviewed the training materials and supporting documents for the Business Continuity system (Meridian) to ensure they are accessible and fit for purpose. Updates have also been made to the information and tools available on KNet. In addition, REPS Head of Service will be meeting individually with teams that have not yet begun developing their plans in the system, to identify where further support may be needed.

4.4.2 The REPS Team is also planning a renewed messaging campaign to support promotion of the system, aligned with Business Continuity and Resilience Awareness Week (18–22 May).

4.5 The importance of realistic and relevant scenarios; the value of using learning from past incidents; the value of staff wellbeing

4.5.1 Development of the Business Continuity programme for 2026 has begun, which will focus on the theme of Pandemic. The programme will explore the impacts on staff resourcing and the effects on workforce wellbeing. It will draw on learning from the Covid-19 response, insights from the national exercise conducted in the autumn (Pegasus), and any further lessons captured through the recent meningitis outbreak debrief.

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 C 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 and Exercising Programme. The 2026/27 programme has just been released, and KCC emergency response staff have been scheduled to attend a wide range of courses over the next year, in order to maintain competency in their roles.

5.4 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.

5.4.1 This will be achieved by: validating Control Room training through a live call; running a no-notice stand-up of the Strategic and Tactical Co-ordination Groups to validate KMRF Command Training; providing a simulation briefing for KMRF partners and stakeholders to test organisational preparedness, capabilities and constraints; and testing casualty tracking with SECAMB and the NHS through a live casualty management exercise, including the roles of and information-sharing arrangements between the Survivor Reception Centre, Casualty Bureau, Friends and Family Centre, and Casualty Tracker.

5.4.1 KCC is involved in the planning for the exercise and is leading the humanitarian assistance workstream.

5.4.2 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 wide-ranging and spans all services. While the Service plans on the basis that the risks it helps to mitigate—through planning, capability development, training, exercising and embedding lessons identified—may not materialise, experience in Kent and elsewhere continues to demonstrate the value of effective preparation.

Recommendation(s):

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

10. Background Documents

10.1 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)
<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/councillors-guide-civil-resilience#part-a-supporting-senior-councillors>

11. Appendices

11.1 Appendix A – Ex Troy scenario overview
11.2 Appendix B– KCC engagement with KMRF groups

12. Contact details

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