

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY INFORMATION AND PROTECTION
SELECT COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY 30 OCTOBER 2001 AT 10.30 AM

Agenda Item No.

9

**HATFIELD DERAILMENT, FLOODING AND FUEL CRISIS DEBRIEFING
REPORTS**

Report of the Head of Safety Emergency & Risk Management

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1. Purpose of report

In response to the Select Committee's request for a report on the County Council's performance in responding to a major emergency, in the context of the multi-agency response to such incidents. It was agreed that the three Hertfordshire Emergency Services Major Incident Committee (HESMIC) reports into the Hatfield Derailment, last year's fuel crisis and the widespread flood events of October 2001 and February 2001 would provide an overview to enable the Committee to scrutinise that role.

2. Summary

2.1 Each of the reports, previously circulated, contains a series of recommendations. These have been given careful consideration by the relevant constituent group and committees within HESMIC and will result in a number of actions being undertaken to properly address each of the issues raised.

2.2 When considering the "lessons learnt" across the three reports there were a number of recurrent themes / issues and these are worthy of particular attention. These issues are summarised below:

- 1) The HESMIC structure and its inclusive approach to multi-agency partnership working has provided an important mechanism for delivery of a co-ordinated response to major emergencies in the county. The structure is also flexible enough to respond to crises for which little, if any, prior planning had been undertaken. The fuel crisis would be an example of such an event.
- 2) It is important that during a major emergency those organisations with an important decision making or information sharing role to perform are represented at the Strategic (GOLD) Command and that those

representatives are of a sufficient seniority to be able to commit their organisations to actions.

- 3) It is important that when significant information is received, or actions/decisions taken, that these events are properly recorded and documented in order to assist in any subsequent enquiry or debrief.
- 4) In responding to national or regional emergencies it is important that central government adopt the integrated approach to emergency management which is already practised at a local government level. What is required is a strong, central, emergency planning and response structure, with decision-making authority and appropriate control and communications facilities, which can co-ordinate across departmental lines. This did not appear to be present last autumn, notably during the fuel crisis.
- 5) It is important that plans are in place and organisations sufficiently resourced to respond to the possibility of more than one major emergency occurring at the same time. There was an occasion last autumn when staff in the Emergency Planning Team were involved in responding to the Hatfield derailment, the October floods and preparations for a second fuel crisis.

3. Conclusion

The Select Committee is invited to indicate whether it wishes to undertake further scrutiny of this subject and, if so, by what method. It may wish to consider in more detail, the impact and arrangements for dealing with one particular incident or emergency, for example, flooding. Site visits could be organised along with an opportunity to ask questions to a multi-agency panel of officers with experience of planning for and responding to such events.

1. Background

1.1 Hertfordshire Emergency Services Major Incident Committee (HESMIC) is the inter-agency group which co-ordinates inter-agency emergency planning activity in the county and it is the HCC Emergency Planning Team which provides the secretariat function for HESMIC. It was the County Council's Emergency Planning Team which was tasked with conducting the inter-agency debriefs into the incident response and producing the three reports.

1.2 The purpose of all three reports is to highlight inter-agency issues and areas of good practice in the response to each incident. Each report concentrates on the response, rather than the cause and does not seek to consider intra-agency issues since these will have been addressed in internal debriefing reports. Throughout the debrief process there was a determination not only to highlight the many occasions when good practice was demonstrated but also to learn from the experiences and to address areas of the responses which might have been improved on. Each of the reports lists a series of recommendations. many of these recommendations have already been addressed by particular HESMIC Committees and, where appropriate, action plans drawn up to address particular issues.

1.3 This autumn the Emergency Planning Team will be subject to a Best Value Review. All ten of Hertfordshire Borough and District Councils have agreed to be part of this review. The benefit of this approach is that it will enable the process to be comprehensive and that it will prevent the complexity and inefficiencies of individual authorities carrying out their own reviews and repeating ten-fold the consultation with partner organisations, comparisons etc.

1.4 The BV Review will take a very focused approach and will concentrate on four particular aspects of Local Authority arrangements for dealing with major emergencies. This approach has been supported by the Emergency Planning Division (EPD) – now of the Cabinet office, but formerly within the Home Office. The review will focus on the following areas of interest:

- Whether there is an adequate and consistent approach by all local authorities towards the provision of 24/7 callout arrangements at an appropriately senior level
- The way in which agencies declare an event to be a major incident and whether better procedures are required to activate an appropriate level of response to events that fall short of being a major incident for the majority of HESMIC agencies
- The current provision of Emergency Control Vehicles
- Whether to change the boundaries of the LEPFs from the current 10 ten district councils to mirror those of one of the other HESMIC agencies

2. Financial implications

- 2.1 The prediction by experts on climatic change suggest that the south eastern region of the UK is likely to experience increasingly wetter winters. The consequence of the predicted increase in rainfall levels could well have a financial impact not only on those organisations called on to respond to flooding events but also for those organisations whose buildings and or workforce who are located in flood affected areas. In both instances, costs are extremely difficult to predict.

Background papers used by the author when compiling this report

HESMIC Inter-agency Debriefing Hatfield train Incident 17 October 2000

HESMIC Review of the October 2000 and February 2001 Flooding Incidents.

The HESMIC Response to the Fuel Crises