

REPORT TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE – 6 OCTOBER 2011**REVIEW OF ACTIONS IN RELATION TO FIRE AT PAINESFIELD DRIVE, CHERTSEY (DTS)**

1. **Purpose of Report**
 - 1.1 **To inform the Committee of actions taken in response to this fire and of lessons learnt for future emergency responses.**
2. **Background Information**
 - 2.1 At around 13.00 on 29 May 2011 Runnymede Borough Council (RBC) began to receive information that a fire was occurring at Painesfield Drive (a block of 9 flats) in Chertsey. Around 80 fire Officers tackled the blaze which had started in the top floor flat of the property. The property is owned by A2 Dominion, but maintained and managed by RBC who also nominates tenants.
 - 2.2 Initial notification worked well. Safer Runnymede's (SR) access to the Police Radio network (Airwave) facilitated early notification of the incident. SR notified the Emergency Planning Officer (EPO). Around the same time residents of Painesfield Drive telephoned RBC's Housing Department.
 - 2.3 Senior managers were notified and the Eileen Tozer Day Centre in Addlestone was declared a rest centre. Community Services transportation was made available to evacuate residents. Contact was maintained with the Senior Fire Officer at the scene and an Incident Liaison Officer (ILO) was sent to the scene.
 - 2.4 There are a number of the Council's staff who have volunteered to act and be trained as ILOs. Their role is to go to the scene of any emergency, liaise with emergency services operating there and feedback information and requests for assistance to the Council's Incident Management Team. It means that the Council has first hand insight into what is happening at the heart of the incident.
 - 2.5 The ILO arrived promptly at the scene and was permitted access through the cordons. Her attendance was expected and she was introduced to the relevant personnel. There was a very good level of understanding of the role of the ILO and liaison worked extremely well.
 - 2.6 The ILO liaised directly with the EPO regularly. The two way communication worked well for the ILO, with RBC issues and questions fed back to the ILO and answers promptly returned. Questions from the ILO were passed to the EPO and from the EPO to the relevant department. Details and outcomes were passed back to the EPO and back to the ILO. Should telephony have failed near the scene, RBC has a very strong provision of high and low band VHF radios.
 - 2.7 Following notification of a potentially dangerous structure, the Council's Building Control Manager was promptly deployed to the site to provide professional dangerous structures analysis, and assistance to Surrey Fire and Rescue during the fire fighting and potential rescue stages. Further assistance and advice was provided during the evening and the following day to ensure the site was secured and made safe for adjacent residents and the general public.
 - 2.8 The rest centre was set up promptly, although it was still in operation as a day centre for older people at the time. The centre functioned well and the layout was appropriate. However, with 30 evacuees and between 15/20 members of staff the centre was not far from reaching comfortable capacity.
 - 2.9 During the first day communication with Surrey County Council's (SCC) Emergency Management Team Duty Officer worked well. The EPO made early contact with the Duty Officer and both kept in regular contact. The Duty Officer mobilised a welfare team to the Rest Centre.

- 2.10 Towards the end of the first day, it became clear that the impact of the fire on these residents was catastrophic – many personal possessions had been lost and approximately 80% of residents were found not to have had contents insurance.
- 2.11 Accommodation for those that required it (who did not have relatives or friends with whom to stay) was arranged for the initial few nights in local hotels or bed & breakfast. All the families were rehoused within a few days in temporary accommodation, either by RBC Housing or A2 Dominion.
- 2.12 A meeting with all relevant agencies was arranged for the next day. SCC representatives and the Citizens Advice Bureau attended at very short notice as did A2 Dominion and a representative from their maintenance team.
- 2.13 At this meeting, a number of issues were discussed particularly around the immediate needs of residents' accommodation and access to the site. Access was facilitated by Surrey Fire and Rescue Services, A2D and RBC for some residents to collect some possessions. Discussions took place around a proper salvage and issues of storage and transport. A2D were helpful in facilitating storage. However, a considerable amount of support was required of RBC (such as co-ordination, staffing and transport).
- 2.14 Discussions were had about the kind of care residents needed and over what RBC would provide and what could be expected of SCC. It became clear that SCC's main concern was for those individuals either known to them or who had been assessed on the first day as in need of support. RBC was unclear on what this support involved.
- 2.15 Generally it was felt by RBC staff that these meetings were useful and worked well as a way of staying on top of issues. On the second day, temporary office space at the Runnymede Civic Centre was made available to SCC staff.
- 2.16 RBC arranged for the transportation of evacuees as well as necessary transport over the recovery period.
- 2.17 There was a prompt offer for bedding from the SCC Duty Emergency Management Team. However, this was not required/suitable on this occasion. There was a real need for other resources such as clothing. There was a great deal of confusion over who was responsible for providing clothing. In the end RBC purchased items with some clothes being accessed from St Peter's Hospital (via the SCC Welfare Team). However, although very welcome, the quality was such that these clothes were not generally used.
- 2.18 Animal issues were dealt with by the RSPCA extremely promptly and effectively. Two cats were collected and re-homed, removing that pressure from the rest centre manager.
- 2.19 RBC contacted the Citizens Advice Bureau as well as making requests for furniture and additional items. RBC co-ordinated this response.
- 2.20 SCC Adult and Children's Social Care's Welfare Response Team attended extremely promptly and in appropriate numbers. In line with their roles and responsibilities the team undertook the second stage of registration which was handled well. On day 2 (25 May 2011) the two Adult Care Service representatives at the Rest Centre were especially valuable in supporting the Rest Centre team.
- 2.21 There were a number of demands placed on RBC not only around providing accommodation, but also around kitting out replacement flats with white goods, bedding, clothes as well as acting in the co-ordinating role for keeping residents updated. Additional actions in support of evacuees also fell to RBC staff. Two examples include provision for a family with a two week old baby (such as breast milk, beakers, a steriliser, nappies, etc) as well as contacting the school of one boy who had a GCSE exam the following morning, letting them know what had happened. This role fell heavily to Housing staff who already had operational responsibilities crucial to RBC's response and the Local Resilience Forum Emergency Assistance Centre plan.
- 2.22 Citizens Advice Bureau offered assistance with obtaining white goods and providing advice to all residents affected. This aid was co-ordinated by RBC.

- 2.23 On a number of occasions concerns were raised by RBC about, or on behalf of, individuals and questions about additional care needs they might have (one example being mental health issues). Generally RBC was told by SCC that residents should access these additional services through their GP. It seemed apparent that RBC would be responsible for passing on this information and advising residents further (such as those without a registered GP on how they got there and back etc). Again, this fell heavily to Housing staff to action.
- 2.24 There was a great deal of work involved in practicalities. Some examples of where RBC went above and beyond their day to day duties are:-
- Staff using their own van to deliver furniture for residents in their temporary accommodation
 - Staff and their friends helping to load vans with furniture and equipment
 - Staff going to the Salvation Army (when closed) and managing to get furniture and bedding and then arranging for its delivery and set up in flats.
 - Staff managing to secure a £200 donation from Tesco's to provide support for victims
 - RBC staff buying and donating personal items
- 2.25 When it came to making certain decisions around roles and responsibilities and taking on actions, the situation would have benefited from having a more senior level of SCC representation – matching that from the RBC side. This was improved towards the end of the incident. However, the lack of this in the early stages was problematic.
- 2.26 Educational welfare was handled well – the relevant teams took on responsibilities for assessing and taking on necessary actions. Updates were provided at the recovery group meetings. Surrey Fire and Rescue representation at the recovery meetings was excellent.
- 2.27 While no formal report has been received from Surrey Fire and Rescue regarding the building's containment and reaction to the fire, RBC's Building Control Manager has had a significant involvement with both Surrey Fire and Rescue and A2 Dominion's representatives to provide a practical compliant fire engineered design, to enable the rebuilding of the damaged flats as swiftly as possible. This involvement will continue with a strategic Inspection regime until the completion of the rebuilding. Due to the considerable damage to the building, displaced residents will be in temporary accommodation for some considerable time.

3. Report

Lessons Learnt

- 3.1 A number of recommendations were made by the EPO which were accepted by the Corporate Management Team. These are detailed below.
- 3.2 When notified of an incident, a "precautionary principle" should apply. Where possible, notification should be given early and with anticipation that a small/or potential incident may develop into a larger problem. This allows staff to be placed on standby and ultimately leads to a more ordered and efficient deployment of resources. A simple "wait and see" approach should be avoided.
- 3.3 More staff need to be aware of who within the organisation is designated as an ILO – including between the ILOs themselves. A full list should be circulated to relevant staff. In most circumstances, two ILOs should be deployed, one to take the lead and a second to act in assistance and with logging. Other key staff must be fully aware of the role of the ILO and when they need to be deployed and the ongoing management requirements. All departments should consider who in their team could act in the Incident Liaison Officer role and liaise with the Emergency Planning Officer on nominees.

- 3.4 Consideration should be given to appointment of a "link officer" for the ILO (probably another trained ILO). This would provide a single point of contact for all departments for questions/issues to be passed to the ILO and free the EPO to cover other areas.
- 3.5 Borough Emergency Centre planning needs to take place as a priority with the support of relevant departments. The Borough Emergency Centre should consider the number of evacuees and be prepared to open additional rest centres.
- 3.6 Upon notification of an incident an email should be sent to all staff informing them that an incident is happening (including basic details). The email should request that staff are aware that they may be asked by responding staff to assist with the process and should endeavour to offer full co-operation.
- 3.7 Additional training is required for all staff on the role of RBC during an emergency and potential additional roles staff may be asked to undertake to support the response.
- 3.8 Responding staff should give consideration to providing more detailed updates to those staff who are more likely to be drawn into a response (such as customer services).
- 3.9 Further work is required around the use of teleconferencing to ensure that all relevant parties are updated simultaneously. A protocol for using RBC's considerable VHF (radio) assets needs to be developed with respect to an emergency response. Training for relevant staff should follow.
- 3.10 All staff should be reminded of the importance of proper transfer of information between forms.
- 3.11 Where possible, response and recovery tasks (that RBC is responsible for) should be delegated to other members of staff who do not have operational responsibilities related to the emergency response. There needs to be an understanding from Managers that this is required.
- 3.12 During an emergency or major incident, representation at co-ordination/recovery meetings should be appropriate.
- 3.13 Purchase of rest centre equipment (including bedding) should happen urgently.
- 3.14 Senior managers considered that staff support and welfare as a result of the incident were sufficient.

4. Council Policy

- 4.1 The Council's Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Plan has core aims to provide local healthier, safer and prosperous communities. As part of this, communities, local businesses and vulnerable people will be supported.

5. Resource Implications

- 5.1 Specialist staff will tend to become involved in emergencies depending on their nature. In flooding, drainage engineers tend to take the lead, in dangerous and fire damaged structures/ buildings, Building Control would take the lead, and environmental health staff would lead in a pollution incident or major food poisoning situation.
- 5.2 In this particular case, it was Housing staff who were predominantly involved. Community services have a heavy involvement in most emergencies as they provide community transport (used to evacuate) and day centres which are used as rest centres in emergencies. The 24/7 capacity of the Safer Runnymede control room is a huge advantage in terms of response and communications.
- 5.3 In virtually all cases, emergency response involves inter-agency working with emergency services, Surrey County Council, Environment Agency etc.
- 5.4 One crucial issue of concern is that of capacity. Specialist staff involved in emergencies tend to be in small sections. They will inevitably be called upon to work for long hours, but this

can only be sustained for a limited period before a reasonable period of rest must be taken. Runnymede has yet to experience a situation where this became critical but has come close to this.

- 5.5 Large parts of the organisation are not involved in emergency response and indeed may not even be aware of the particular emergency situation that is being dealt with by their colleagues, hence the recommendation in paragraph 3.6.
- 5.6 In the event of a major disaster, 'business as usual' would virtually cease and all available staff would be diverted to answering telephones and responding to the public.
- 5.7 It also has to be accepted that there will inevitably be a period after an event where staff are still dealing with issues or are catching up on work that was postponed. This is certainly the case in Housing where staff continue to deal with issues arising from this incident.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 The Civil Contingencies Act 2004, and accompanying non-legislative measures, establish a clear set of roles and responsibilities for those involved in emergency preparation and response at the local level. The Act divides local responders into two categories, imposing a different set of duties on each.
- 6.2 Those in Category 1 are those organisations at the core of the response to most emergencies (e.g. emergency services, local authorities, NHS bodies). Category 1 responders are subject to the full set of civil protection duties. They are required to:
- Assess the risk of emergencies occurring and use this to inform contingency planning;
 - Put in place emergency plans;
 - Put in place Business Continuity Management arrangements;
 - Put in place arrangements to make information available to the public about civil protection matters and maintain arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public in the event of an emergency;
 - Share information with other local responders to enhance co-ordination;
 - Co-operate with other local responders to enhance co-ordination and efficiency; and
 - Provide advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about business continuity management (Local Authorities only).

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 Having to deal with evacuees, many of whom had lost all of their belongings, and all of whom had been through a traumatic event, first hand and over an extended period of time had a psychological impact on RBC staff. Additionally some RBC staff had a strong feeling of "if we don't do this, who will?". This added to the stress involved for staff. Managers need to ensure they are doing all they should with respect to staff support and welfare.
- 7.2 Overall, the response from RBC staff was of an incredibly high standard, with staff pulling together and going above and beyond their day to day duties. RBC staff worked incredibly well and in mutual support of each other throughout the incident.
- 7.3 From a multi agency working perspective there are a number of issues highlighted in this report that will require further follow up – particularly around roles and responsibilities of welfare. However, it is clear that in many ways the multi agency emergency response was highly successful, with residents benefitting because of it.

(FOR INFORMATION)

Background Papers

None