

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD  
Havering Town Hall, Main Road, Romford  
7 December 2022 (7.30 - 9.48 pm)**

**Present:**

**COUNCILLORS**

**Conservative Group** Timothy Ryan, Christine Smith and David Taylor

**Havering Residents' Group** Laurance Garrard, Gerry O'Sullivan (Chairman), Philip Ruck (Vice-Chair) and Bryan Vincent

**Labour Group  
East Havering  
Residents' Group** Matthew Stanton and Katharine Tumilty  
Martin Goode

Apologies were received for the absence of Councillors Natasha Summers and Damian White.

All decisions were taken with no votes against.

The Chairman reminded Members of the action to be taken in an emergency.

**21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Councillors Mandy Anderson (Matthew Stanton substituting) Natasha Summers and Damian White.

**22 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

There were no disclosures of interest.

**23 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meetings of the Board held on 13 October and 10 November 2022 and of the exempt meeting held on 10 November 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

**24 EMERGENCY PLANNING AND RESILIENCE ASSURANCE**

Emergency planning officers confirmed that there had only been one major incident in Havering in the last 5 years – the Wennington fires. Many of the other incidents during this period had been related to climate change e.g. flooding, extreme heat etc.

Members expressed concern that they were sometimes not notified of incidents occurring in their wards but it was pointed out that the Council was often not the first responder to an incident – this could be e.g. the Fire Brigade. Members felt however that they should be notified of incidents at the first opportunity and that this should be built into plans with partners.

Numerous major incident exercises were undertaken with the next exercise dealing with flooding and due to take place in May 2023. A pandemic exercise had taken place in 2019. The transformation team was currently looking at the impact of cyberattacks. This was in the Council's Corporate Risk Register and work had been undertaken with the London Borough of Hackney on the impact of the cyberattack that Council had suffered.

It was felt that Councillors had three main roles in emergency planning with a focus on political leadership – ensuring plans were in place, civic leadership – acting as a focal point during an emergency and community leadership during the recovery phase. Councillors had been observers on exercises though it was felt that Member training on this area could be revisited with the role of the Councillor being explored more widely.

Business continuity plans had been updated in light of the Covid pandemic. Lessons were learnt from all incidents and debriefs took place as soon as incidents had happened. Scrutiny had also taken place of pandemic issues including the Council and the impact on care homes. Learning from cross-borough incidents e.g. the London Bridge attacks was also shared through the London Resilience Forum. The Council's emergency plans were also updated on a monthly basis.

The Strep A outbreak was being responded to at a national level. Practice exercises had been undertaken for any terrorist attack on the night time economy in Romford and emergency planning officers would also work with the Police as needed. Havering also self-assessed against resilience standards for London.

There were good procedures in place for risk assessments and these were fed into the London Resilience Forum. It was also hoped to broaden the membership of the Borough Resilience Forum. There was also an important role for scrutiny in reviewing emergency planning procedures and policies. It was wished to increase training to be offered to Members but there was a resource issue. The London Resilience Forum offered a course to Councillors and the availability of this could be investigated. A Member felt that the impact of most staff working from home should also be considered as regards emergency planning.

It was accepted that it was difficult to control e.g. unofficial fundraisers on social media but officers and Members could be prepared for high levels of media interest etc. Fundraising issues were now covered in emergency planning procedures. Officers were also happy to take referrals from Members of relevant support organisations. A Member felt that the risk

register should be more public facing and that the successes of the Council in its emergency response should be communicated more widely. Officers agreed that learning from and publicity of emergency incidents could be reviewed and perhaps this could be taken to the Places Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

There were clear emergency response arrangements established that were not affected by staff working from home. These included Local Authority Liaison Officers and it was wished to increase the numbers of these. These officers, along with a Senior Leadership Team member were on call at all times. Each Council was required to have its own gold/silver/bronze command network but could also get support from other Local Authorities.

All emergency plans were checked by the Emergency Planning Manager and reported to the Council's Senior Leadership Team. The Council also attended the Essex Resilience Forum to review cross-border incidents.

Notification arrangements were in place 24:7 but it was accepted that different arrangements were in place out of hours. The out of hours emergency telephone number remained 01708 434999. Members felt that the out of hours staff displayed a lack of knowledge about Havering and officers explained that this service was provided by an external company that was not based in London. The details of the on-call Local Authority Liaison Officer would be known to the call centre although options were under review for a new contract for this service. It was suggested that a cold calling exercise could be undertaken on the out of hours service and the results brought back to the Board.

Officers agreed that partnerships with the Police, Fire Brigade and other partners needed to be strengthened. It was hoped work on emergency planning, counter-terrorism and community safety could be linked up and that partnership working with the voluntary sector could also be strengthened. It was also suggested that a review of third sector partnerships with the voluntary sector could be undertaken covering who the partners were, the impact of the voluntary sector etc.

A Member suggested that the impact of strikes and possible blackouts could be the subject of an exercise although it was pointed out that this area was covered by the Council's business continuity plans. The impact of e.g. an IT outage was also in the business continuity plans. There had been a lot of support in the recent Wennington fires from the Havering volunteer centre and it was suggested that training could also be offered to volunteers. Support was also received from the Police cadets and the Territorial Army. Local Area Coordinators were also involved in the recovery work following the Wennington fires. It was also wished to improve relationships with private, charity and community organisations in order to assist with recovery work.

Clarity would be given to a Member who raised whether the outcomes of checks of fire hydrants were reported back to the Council.

Counselling would be offered where necessary to staff and Councillors involved in emergency work. It was hoped that an increase in the number of Local Authority Liaison Officers would reduce the number of hours individual staff would need to work. A mapping diagram of who should be contacted to report an emergency could be circulated to Members.

Officers accepted that the retention of emergency planning officers was a challenge but this was a London-wide and also national issue. Officers were keen to develop their own staff and perhaps an emergency planning apprenticeship could be developed.

The Board agreed the following recommendations:

- 1. Communication with Councillors during incidents to be reviewed. Perhaps an emergency Whatsapp group for Councillors could be established.**
  - 2. To consider the impact of downsizing/reductions in expenditure on emergency planning.**
  - 3. The introduction of emergency planning training for officers and key Councillors.**
  - 4. To review the impact of working from home on the ability of staff to respond to incidents.**
  - 5. To take steps to publicise more widely the positive emergency planning work of the Council.**
  - 6. To undertake a review of third/voluntary sector partnerships in emergency planning. This to include the impact of budget restrictions on the impact of the voluntary sector to respond.**
  - 7. The People OSSC to consider the mental health provision for staff and residents involved in emergency response work.**
  - 8. The Places OSSC to be asked to look at flooding preparedness and the Wennington fires recovery.**
  - 9. That the Board should meet in approximately 3 months to scrutinise the Borough Risk Register. The precise scope of the scrutiny to be decided prior to the meeting.**
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**Chairman**