

Audit Committee – 28th May 2021

Title of paper:	COVID-19 and Emergency Planning	
Director	Malcolm Townroe, Director of Legal and Governance	Wards affected: ALL
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Other colleagues who have provided input:		
Recommendations:		
1	To be assured that specific and generic arrangements and plans were in place to deal with a pandemic emergency prior to the outbreak of COVID-19;	
2	To acknowledge that the early reviews of both the Council's and the Local Resilience Forum's (LRF) Pandemic Flu plans showed they provided effective templates for the response phase;	
3	To note that an interim debrief of the response phase was held and arrangements adjusted but that a full debrief is yet to be held whilst the pandemic is ongoing, and	
4	That, on conclusion of any full debrief, the recommendations relevant to this council be shared with Audit Committee for consideration.	

1 Reasons for recommendations

- 1.1 This report considers whether the existing emergency plans and arrangements across the council were sufficient to meet the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis and if any lessons for future emergencies can be learned. It does not assess the council's overall response to COVID-19 as that is a considerably larger piece of work and would involve many strands of enquiry. Whilst emergency planning usually deals with major crises, an emergency which affected the entire world at the same time, has lasted at least 16 months, and has affected every sector of life, is unprecedented in the last century (outside of two world wars). Emergency Planning arrangements in the UK were not specifically designed for such a rare event, but nevertheless provided a robust and effective template for a coordinated response by both the Council and the Local Resilience Forum.
- 1.2 It is usual in emergency planning arrangements for incidents to be debriefed and 'lessons learned'. Although an early debrief of arrangements was held last summer, the emergency is ongoing. At the end of the Response phase, a full debrief will be held so improvements in the council's arrangements to deal with any emergency will be made.

2 Background

Emergency Plans

- 2.1 The novel coronavirus COVID-19 emerged at the end of December 2019 and has created the biggest peacetime emergency in the UK and around the world since 'Spanish flu' nearly a century earlier.

- 2.2 The Civil Contingences Act 2004 requires the Local Resilience Forum (of which the council is part) to maintain a local 'Community Risk Register' based on a national register created by the Government's Cabinet Office. Since the creation of the first national Risk Register in 2005, Pandemic Flu has been the highest natural threat to the U.K. Similarly, Pandemic Flu has been the highest threat in the local Risk Register.
- 2.3 As such, the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Local Resilience Forum and the City Council has maintained, trained and exercised, their Pandemic Flu Plans. At the outbreak of COVID-19 in the U.K. in early 2020 there were a number of Emergency Plans relevant to a response to a large Flu outbreak affecting many aspects of the council's work and society in general.
- 2.4 The Nottingham and Nottinghamshire LRF Pandemic Influenza Plan had been prepared by NHS England North Midlands on behalf of the LRF. The plan formalised and clarified the multi-agency procedures and structure for co-ordination of the response to pandemic influenza in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.
- 2.5 Nottingham City Council's Corporate Influenza Plan set out a framework to enable the City Council to respond to the consequences of an epidemic/pandemic outbreak of influenza or other infectious disease, which can cause debilitating symptoms resulting in large-scale absenteeism and excess deaths.
- 2.6 A number of other Local Resilience Forum plans were also implemented, including:
- LRF Excess Death Plan
 - LRF Humanitarian Assistance Plan
 - LRF Generic Response Guidance
 - LRF Communicating with the Public Plan
 - LRF Voluntary Agencies Directory
 - LRF Vulnerable People Directory
 - LRF Spontaneous Volunteers Plan
 - LRF Recovery Plan
- 2.7 The LRF Generic Response Guidance contains much of the structure and processes of the LRF's response, including:
- The Strategic, Tactical and Operational Cell structure
 - The Governance structure
 - The 'battle rhythm' of meetings and reporting
 - The links with Government departments
- 2.8 The Council and LRF did not have specific Coronavirus Emergency Plans (nor did any LRF) as that specific hazard was not the major threat identified in the national Risk Register. However, most emergency plans are written to deal with the consequences, rather than the causes, of any hazard. The Council and LRF considered, in March 2020, whether to write COVID-19 specific plans.
- 2.9 The Council, via the Senior Resilience Group, agreed to use the Council's Corporate Influenza Plan (v5.1, 2018) as the basis of its response to the outbreak of Covid-19. Similarly, the Strategic Coordination Group of the Local Resilience Forum, also took a similar decision in regard to its LRF Pandemic Plan 2017.

Review of plans

- 2.10 In April 2020, the council's Coronavirus Response Group (CRG), led by the then Senior Responsible Officer, Candida Brudenell, examined whether the existing Council Pandemic Flu Plan would be a sufficient model to inform the council's response to a novel coronavirus pandemic.
- 2.11 The CRG, and subsequently Corporate Leadership Team, concluded that, very largely, the plan had been implemented successfully. Although the plan was not written with Covid-19 in mind, the scope, response phases and guidance, command structure (internally and externally), specialist roles (e.g. HR, Facilities, Health and Safety, Legal, IT, Comms etc.) and Business Continuity considerations had all been implemented successfully.
- 2.11 There were, at that stage, a few parts of the plan that had not been implemented. At that stage (April 2020), the unimplemented parts of the plan were identified as;
- A need to confirm that appropriate logging systems were in place across all key meetings.
 - Maintaining capability to respond to other emergencies that may occur during a pandemic period ('concurrent emergencies').
 - Implementation of a Recovery Phase and the restoration of council services to 'normal' via business continuity plans as soon as possible.
- 2.12 As a result of this assessment, all Corporate Directors were asked to ensure that meetings were appropriately logged and stored. Similarly, the Head of Resilience was asked to ensure that the council's call out procedures could be adapted to deal with more than one emergency occurring at the same time and also to ensure that systems were in place within the LRF for concurrent incidents. Later in the year, the LRF agreed to use its COVID-19 Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) meetings as "All Hazards" SCGs if necessary, and some minor (non-City) emergencies were dealt with by the LRF in this way. The Recovery phase began to be scoped by the LRF around May last year and discussions as to when the Recovery Coordinating Group would 'take over' from the SCG were considered. However, the second, and subsequent third, wave of infections meant that this work was postponed. The above work is now underway at an LRF level but the current thought is that SCG will continue to meet until at least June 2021 when a final decision as to 'what RCG will look like' has been agreed by the LRF.
- 2.13 At a City Council level, the Recovery phase was built into the programme management strands and has been active since summer last year.
- 2.14 The LRF also considered in April 2020 whether it considered its LRF Pandemic Flu Plan was sufficient to inform their response to COVID-19. It concluded that its Plan had formed a successful basis with which to respond in a structured multi-agency manner to COVID-19, with the command and control structure, partnership working, decision making process and specific sub groups having been all implemented. Similar to the Council's assessment above, there was only one major aspect of the Plan that then required formal implementation, and that related to the setting up of a Recovery Coordinating Group, which started work on 20th April 2020.

- 2.15 The LRF welcomed external scrutiny of its Plans and processes and participated in a MHCLG Covid-19 Task Force review to identify those critical issues that were impacting on delivery of the local Covid-19 response. The Task Force's report was considered in detail by members of the LRF's Resilience Working Group (RWG) and they reported their finding to the LRF's Tactical Coordinating Group. The TCG agreed with the RWG assessment that the large majority of the Task Force's comments were being met in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. Areas of divergence were discussed and the LRF were satisfied that they did not impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of their Response.
- 2.16 At the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire SCG meeting on 4th June 2020, agencies agreed that some form of debrief be conducted into the LRF's response to the Covid-19 outbreak. Normal practice is for the LRF to conduct a post incident debrief whenever an incident results in a multi-agency response. However, it was felt that, because the incident has been running for some 16 weeks, it would be useful to have an interim review, in order that interim learning could be captured, and that the Response could be tailored appropriately. Some agencies were keen to have a full review, whilst others, who were still committed heavily to response, did not think the timing was right. As a compromise, a short survey was devised in order to collect interim feedback, which was used to shape the ongoing response.
- 2.17 The interim feedback indicated that responses were largely consistent and that most respondents judged that the multi-agency response was 'effective' or 'very effective'. The LRF Tactical Coordinating Group was seen as being particularly effective, while suggestions for improvement included proposals for avoiding duplication and repetitiveness. All the interim recommendations were referred to the most appropriate sub group of either the SCG or the LRF for consideration and, if necessary, implementation.
- 2.18 A full post incident LRF debrief has yet to be held, but will be done in due course.

Generic Emergency Response procedures

- 2.19 In addition to the implementation of specific Council and LRF Plans there are a raft of agreed Emergency Response procedures concerning 'Command and Control', 'battle rhythm' and Response and Recovery structures. Both the Council and the LRF's generic responses have worked well. The Council's reporting and response structures were designed to fit into the overall LRF processes and the flow of information and decisions 'up and down the chain' worked very well. The LRF's SCG has met on 58 occasions and the TCG 56 times. The sub group 'cell' structure has also worked well.

3 Background papers other than published works or those disclosing exempt or confidential information

- 3.1 None

4 Published documents referred to in compiling this report

- 4.1 National Risk Register 2020
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-risk-register-2020>