

Emergency Planning

The Role of Elected Members in a Major Incident

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

If you have received notification that a major incident
has been declared
And you have not read this plan

DO NOT READ IT NOW

Refer to the Action Card at page 10

AND FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS



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Purpose:

The purpose of this document is to clarify the role of Elected Members in the Council's response to a major incident, and to give some guidance as to how they can assist. The guidelines defined should act as an addendum to Dudley's Major Emergency Plan.

Introduction:

If an emergency were to occur within the Borough leading to the Major Emergency Plan being invoked, there will be great pressure placed on the Local Authority.

Local Authorities often have high profile roles in assisting the emergency services at the scene and in dealing with the consequences of the disaster. The role of Elected Members can be critical in supporting local communities and in determining the public perception of the Council's response to the situation. Indeed, all the responding agencies will be critically monitored by the public via the media.

To ensure the response of the Council and other responding agencies with which it works is consistent, cohesive and professional, it is essential that clear lines of responsibility are defined and adhered to by all involved.

DEFINITION OF A MAJOR INCIDENT

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 defines a major incident as any emergency that requires the special mobilisation and organisation by one or more of the emergency services and supporting organisations for:

- an event that arises with or without warning;
- an event that affects more people than can be dealt with under normal circumstances;
- an event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare or the environment;
- war or terrorism which threatens serious damage to security.

THE ROLE OF THE ELECTED MEMBER

Clearly Members will want to do whatever they can to ensure that officers of the Council are supported in responding to the extraordinary demands placed upon them in an emergency and to support the Council's normal day to day activities, which may be reduced as resources are utilised in responding to the emergency.

In the response to an emergency incident there are four main phases:

1. **Impact** – is the immediate and urgent response necessary to protect and preserve life, property, and the environment.
2. **Consolidation** – is the period after the initial response where continuing and further needs are identified and addressed.
3. **Recovery** – is the process relating to re-establishing local communities and businesses.
4. **Restoration** – is the phase that addresses social and economic impact and seeks opportunities to strengthen the future of the Borough.

Phase 1: Impact

For the emergency responders, this is crucial for the protection of people, property, and the environment. The role played by the local authority is a supporting one, liaising with the emergency services, providing resources and other facilities as required.

Elected Members may become aware that an incident has happened in their ward but, it is requested that if possible they do not try to contact the 24 hour Call Centre or the District Emergency Centre during the impact phase. Communications can be very difficult at this time with telephone lines handling large numbers of calls. As soon as possible, the Chief Executive or his Deputy will nominate a Support Officer in the District Emergency Centre to make arrangements to brief the Leader of the Council and provide updates on the emergency response.

Reliable information in the early stages can be difficult to obtain and it is often better for the Chief Executive to have a clear overview of the situation before contacting Members directly.

A dedicated contact telephone number for Members may be established once the District Emergency Centre is operational.

For health and safety reasons, Elected Members are asked not to go to the scene or attempt to cross police cordons.

Phase 2: Consolidation

The Council will still be involved in supporting the emergency responders in addition to fulfilling its primary duty to care for the community and may also be involved in providing emergency accommodation and welfare arrangements.

Elected Members may wish to assist at this stage by:

- supporting and providing reassurance to affected communities.
- giving interviews to the local media in relation to the response to the emergency.

At this stage Elected Members may want to visit the vicinity of the incident and speak to residents, providing them with information on the actions taken and plans being made by the Council.

If the incident is of such magnitude as to attract regional or national interest, Elected Members may become involved in meeting and greeting VIPs and briefing visitors on the progress being made.

Phase 3: Recovery

By the recovery phase, responsibility has transferred from the emergency responders to the Local Authority. Elected Members have key roles to play by:

- being community supporters and champions;
- providing the political lead;
- maintaining good relationships with the media and the public;
- supporting representation to government for additional resources and financial assistance.
- when appropriate, express thanks to staff, emergency services and volunteers.

Phase 4: Restoration of Normality

This is an ongoing process that, depending upon the nature of the emergency, can be long term (possibly measured in years). Elected Members may be called on to play a number of roles including:

- approving regeneration issues;
- considering the need for longer term accommodation;
- making representations to MPs, MEPs and Ministers;
- involvement in the management of any appeal funds and memorials;
- repair and reconstruction of the affected community;

COMMUNICATING WITH THE MEDIA

Media relations in an emergency incident are crucial and can often be an important factor in determining how well (or otherwise) the Council is dealing with the situation.

Contact with the media will be undertaken through the Communication and Public Affairs Team (CaPA). However it is recognised that Elected Members may be approached by various media channels to give statements and interviews.

Members are therefore advised to ensure that they are fully aware of the situation before making statements to the media. Every effort will be made to inform Members of the current situation and to keep them abreast of information as circumstances change. If Members are in any doubt about events or require support in dealing with the media then they should refer journalists to CaPA.

CaPA will keep the Mayor, Lead Members and Members representing affected wards informed.

Members should keep the CaPA informed of any approach by the media.

LEGAL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council has the power to incur expenditure when an emergency situation arises involving the destruction of property, danger to life or when such an emergency is imminent, and it is likely that the consequences will affect a large part of the Borough.

The Council's legal responsibilities are met through the adoption, monitoring and review of the Major Emergency Plan and the implementation of relevant management policies, including the authorisation of expenditure.

The Bellwin Scheme for Emergency Financial Assistance may be invoked by the Government if the Council has incurred large-scale expenditure in taking action to safeguard life or property. There is no automatic entitlement to financial assistance and Government decide whether or not to activate a scheme after considering the circumstances of each individual case.

Litigation:

During emergencies decisions can be made at speed, and there is the possibility that some may be considered inappropriate at a later date. It is therefore essential for those involved to maintain accurate contemporaneous notes or records of the incident. The purpose of notes / records may be:

1. to refresh the memory of the person completing any logs, reports, statements etc.;
2. to provide a record for the purpose of establishing continuity of evidence;
3. to provide evidence of facts;
4. to provide the basis for showing when, how, and why decisions, recommendations, or opinions were reached, made, or given.

Members should bear in mind that even in a major emergency they are subject to the protocols that usually apply in respect of their roles and responsibilities as members of the council. It is therefore important that Members refrain from making comment or commitment to any third party without consulting the relevant officers.

TRAINING

It is imperative that Members who may be asked to comment to the media during any emergency situation have a broad understanding of the arrangements that exist within the Council. Relevant training events and seminars are arranged by the Emergency Planning Team, which Elected Members are encouraged to attend.

A copy of the Major Emergency Plan is located in the Members' Library and Members are encouraged to acquaint themselves with this document.

Further Contingency and Disaster Management information is available at www.dudley.gov.uk/emergencies. In the event of an emergency arising updated information will become available to the public.

A list of useful contact telephone numbers are given at Appendix 2.

CONCLUSION

Dealing with any major emergency within the Borough will put pressure on all those involved - the public, officers and staff of the Council as well as Elected Members. It is imperative to remember officers will be busy dealing with the situation and may not be able to deal with other requests as swiftly as usual. It is therefore essential that the principles outlined in this protocol be followed.

Should day to day activities be reduced whilst officers deal with the emergency, Directorate Business Continuity Plans will be activated in order to ensure delivery of critical services.

ACTION CARD

Upon notification of an incident you should make yourself available to support communities, council officers, and fellow members in responding to the incident.

- Keep a written record of any telephone numbers or other contact details that are given to you for your use.
- Note carefully the information given to you regarding the incident.
- Ensure that you do not commit the Council to any course of action unless it has been specifically cleared for you to do so.
- If you attend the incident site do not cross any emergency services barriers or cordons unless specifically invited to do so by the officer in charge at the scene.
- At the scene make sure that you do not put yourself in any danger.
- Make sure that you allow those responding to the emergency to get on with their jobs without let or hindrance.
- Please avoid making any public statement implying failure or blame on the part of the Council or any of the other organisations involved.

Useful Contact Details

Emergency Planning Team
The Laundry Block
Himley Hall & Park
Dudley
DY3 4DF

Tel **01384 811552**
Fax **01384 814865**
Email **disaster.mgt@dudley.gov.uk**

District Emergency Centre at the Laundry Block

Members' Contact Number 01384 811544 or BT No. 01902 896185

Alternative District Emergency Centre at the Council House

Members' Contact Number 01384 815289

Alternative District Emergency Centre at Saltwells EDC

Members' Contact number 01384 813714

Public Helpline (if set up) 0800 073 1016

Members will be e-mailed with up to date information when appropriate.

RECORD OF AMENDMENT

Date	Page Ref	Amendment	Amended by
01.01.2009		Annual Review – previous Plan electronically archived	SJW
20.7.2012		Review – previous Plan electronically archived	JH

DISTRIBUTION

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