

APPENDIX B

HARROGATE BOROUGH COUNCIL



A GUIDE TO THE MEMBERS ROLE IN AN EMERGENCY

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INTRODUCTION

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 establishes the framework for a consistent level of civil protection across the United Kingdom. It seeks to regulate responders' approach in the way they function especially towards partnership working. Working towards a common framework local responders will establish how they will respond in the light of local circumstances and priorities whilst maintaining its normal services.

It is the nature of emergency incidents or events that they are unpredictable and each will present a unique set of challenges but which will impact on the Council and its ability to respond. This impact may affect the Council in several ways, and requires a response and allocation of resources to meet the needs of the Communities affected.

The Council's Emergency Planning Unit provides the link between all responders who work together to provide a seamless response to these events.

A major event can occur at any time with or without warning and may include:-

- Floods
- Severe Weather
- Terrorism
- Pandemic Influenza
- Industrial action/accident
- Transport Accidents

A response therefore to an event should not be seen as the Council responding in isolation but as a partnership of local authorities' emergency services, non emergency services, government departments voluntary organisations and local communities all working towards restoring normality.

ROLE OF ELECTED MEMBER

During an emergency the support and help of Members to the officers involved and the local community is essential and they are a vital contact point.

This is underpinned by previous disasters such as the Lockerbie air disaster where the Chief Executive of Dumfries and Galloway said:-

“The unwavering support and confidence shown by the Elected Members of the Council was a major factor in encouraging staff to give of their best under the most difficult of circumstances”.

In an emergency there are four main Member functions:-

1. Members of the Cabinet giving direct support to the Chief Executive and his team dealing with the emergency, and acting as the public face of the Council when dealing with the media.
2. Ward Members particularly those whose Ward is most affected play a valuable role as the eyes and ears of their community.
3. Volunteering to run the telephone or give direct aid and assistance where possible in the local community.
4. Effective public relations for example the Mayor may wish to visit the location after the commencement of the restoration and to co-ordinate VIP visits to the area.

During an emergency staff are under a great deal of pressure dealing with the situation. Members must not interfere in operational matters as this could distract staff from their primary role. If you do need to raise an issue of concern please contact the Emergency Planning Unit or the Chief Executive or any Director who will take the appropriate action.

Experience shows that considerable frustration builds up within the community for a variety of reasons eg lack of response, outside organisations moving in and taking over the area, and the emotional impact of the event. Member assistance as a direct link to their community at this time can be very useful in advising residents what is happening and reassuring them that every effort is being made to assist them. In the medium to longer term Members leading the community in the restoration effort is vital in that it enables the Council to respond to the needs of the community and help it take the lead in its own recovery as far as possible.

Communities can play a leading role in emergency situations by self help but only if they are well prepared prior to the event having agreed a plan, roles and responsibilities. Members should therefore encourage Parish/Town Councils to participate in the North Yorkshire Parish Emergency Plan Scheme. It would then be possible to build in the key role of District Council Members as a key link between the Community and the Emergency Planning Team.

Finally Members should not put themselves at risk by going on to the site or to dangerous areas as this may hamper the relief effort and may lead to unnecessary loss of life.

ELECTED MEMBERS AIDE MEMOIRE

1. Always keep notes of any information received and or actions taken, times, dates, names etc. This will be required if you are called as a witness to a public inquiry should there be a need to hold one.
2. Do not visit the disaster site without prior agreement as you may be putting yourself and others at risk.
3. Be prepared to be the focal point for your Ward but make sure you use the proper channels and do not try to circumvent protocols.
4. Consider giving support to other Ward Members that are affected when yours is not.
5. Consider volunteering to assist with answering telephones and support in the reception centres.
6. Coordinate relevant information gathering for your Ward, make sure you verify the information is accurate (non accurate information costs time and resources) and pass to the Duty Officer.
7. Check progress of the situation and disseminate the information to the public.
8. Contribute if requested to the media response giving media briefings where appropriate. Check this is appropriate with Leader or Chief Executive before giving interviews. If appropriate check the facts with the Council before giving an interview.
9. Be prepared to participate in any VIP visits (which may include royalty). This will take the pressure off the operational staff.
10. Consider being a Trustee for a follow up disaster appeal if approached. Remember however to seek advice on the implications from the Director of Resources or the Chief Solicitor.
11. Liaise as appropriate with the local MPs, Chief Executive, Parish Council representatives etc.
12. Be prepared to give feedback to fellow Members and officers.
13. Encourage your Parish and Town Councils to establish Community Emergency Plans.

REMEMBER

- i. Please do not interfere in operational matters.
- ii. Questions and queries should be channelled through the Emergency Planning Unit, the Chief Executive or the Directors who will respond as soon as possible.
- iii. Do not attend the disaster scene without prior agreement as that may be counter productive. In some situations such as flooding it may be helpful if you are within the vicinity to act as the liaison between the local community and emergency services. Let the site manager know who you are and where you are.
- iv. THERE MAY BE UNPLEASANT SIGHTS.
- v. DO NOT PUT YOURSELF AT RISK

WHAT MEMBERS CAN EXPECT FROM THE EMERGENCY PLANNING UNIT

To assist Members undertake this work the Emergency Planning Unit will:

- organise training on - emergency planning
- dealing with the media
- Provide Members with periodic reports on specific emergencies and regular updates on the work of the Unit.
- Provide advice, assistance and support to Members as appropriate.

Members requiring further information should contact the Civil Contingencies/Resilience Officer on (01423) 556014.