

Committee: COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

Agenda Item

Date: June 19 2008

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Title: REVIEW OF OPERATION Highbrow

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Item for decision

Summary

1. At an earlier meeting members of this committee requested a further report on our response to the Lebanese evacuation to better understand the response from other authorities. This report reviews Uttlesford District Council's response to the Lebanese crisis of July 2006 and identifies how a cost efficient response might be delivered in the likelihood of a similar incident in the future.

Recommendations

2. That the report is considered and the Emergency Planning Officer is authorised to establish plans to prepare for any future evacuation of a similar nature as set out in the report to minimise costs and improve efficiency whilst continuing to provide appropriate support to those in humanitarian need.

Background Papers

3. The following reports were referred to by the author and can be obtained from the author upon request:
 - Operation Highbrow – A comprehensive report into the response of the Lebanese evacuation July 2006
 - Scrutiny Committee Report September 2006
 - Extract from Scrutiny Committee minutes of meeting 29th November 2006
 - UDC Emergency Plan

Impact

4.

Communication/Consultation	None applicable to this report
Community Safety	None
Equalities	Training need to address equalities issues
Finance	This approach will deliver beneficial value for money.
Human Rights	None applicable to this report.

Legal implications	We have a duty to give humanitarian assistance.
Sustainability	None
Ward-specific impacts	All
Workforce/Workplace	This approach will allow us to manage any future situation within our staffing resource.

Situation

5. Uttlesford District Council was asked to respond to give humanitarian assistance to evacuees from the Lebanon who entered the district through Stansted Airport. Earlier waves had already entered through other airports including Gatwick and Manchester City.
4. The Crisis Management Team agreed and planned for the Chief Executive Officer of UDC to greet the evacuees whilst they were still on the plane following landing, allowing him to address and welcome them and give general instruction as to what was going to happen. This did not happen as evacuees rushed to get off as soon as they had landed.
5. The evacuees were allowed to leave the plane before the Chief Executive could engage with them, where upon they entered the main terminal to collect any luggage before being transported direct to the designated rest centre by airport transport.
6. The Chief Executive Officer made a decision to use the Hilton Hotel as the chosen rest centre having already put two local schools on standby. This decision was made due to lack of staff resource to manage a rest centre. There were multiple rooms booked, including one for a staff rest room, secretarial/office facilities and two conference rooms for registration purposes.
7. Uttlesford saw the last of the evacuees to enter the UK, many of which had nowhere to travel onto or indeed any family in the UK. This resulted in a demand for permanent accommodation needs within the district.

Considerations

8. We assisted families, single men and women, children, older people and those with extensive medical problems. A high number of these people have strict cultural and religious beliefs and customs. Many of the women requested to be given notice if any personnel were to approach their rooms so that they could cover their heads
9. With a more in depth knowledge of their customs and religious culture a rest centre could be sought at a local school or leisure centre. These chosen

centres would still be able to give separate areas for families and male and female segregation if necessary and have separate sanitary facilities.

10. Offers of help and assistance in the way of staff resource and relief for the Emergency Planning Officer on site was offered several times by Braintree District Council Emergency Planning Officer and these offers were not accepted. This cross border working could possibly have dictated the use of an alternative rest centre.
11. BAA Stansted has an area in one of their satellite buildings, airside, which is a designated survivor Reception Centre. Following recent discussions with BAA Contingency Planning personnel, it has been agreed that in any future incident where numbers of people may be repatriated they will be automatically transferred into this area where UDC staff would be allowed access via security check points to register them and assess for all needs. This would minimise time spent in a rest centre and aid fast onward travel to chosen destinations thus reducing numbers using a rest centre.
12. Discussion with both Crawley Council and Manchester City Council found them to have already adopted this policy with Crawley assisting 2500 evacuees through Gatwick Airport's reception centre and facilitating onward travel for all immediately, resulting in no further rest centre requirements or permanent accommodation needs. Manchester City Council advised of similar methods and outcomes.
13. It was also advised by these other local authorities, that having recognised early that compensation through the Bellwin Scheme would not be possible, executive decisions were made to inform their Government Office that they were no longer able to provide resource for any further evacuees, therefore effectively preventing further waves from entering their districts through Gatwick or Manchester airports.

Learning Points

The following actions should be incorporated into the plan

14. More in depth training to be sought for cultural and religious requirements so that all response staff have better understanding of how we can accommodate needs more effectively in the event of future similar incident.
15. Assessment of our rest centres to identify those that can best manage those needs.
16. We have a Memorandum of Understanding for cross border working in the event of any incident which gives guidelines on assistance available between Local Authorities. There needs to be awareness raising training for the Crisis Management Team of its existence as this would prevent hotels being used as rest centres.

17. Confirmation of the agreement reached with BAA Stansted Contingency Planning for the use of their Survivor Reception Centre as an initial reception/registration area with access for local authorities and other agencies as required and for any luggage to be brought to the passenger's direct, therefore maintaining control
18. Crisis Management Team to discuss at the outset of an incident the likely resource problems we may have and put into place an exit strategy whereby limits could be set when decisions needed to be made to cease assistance. Resources to be considered are both staff and budgetary.

Risk Analysis

19.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Failure to anticipate and plan for such events would leave us ill prepared and resourced	3 - World events dictate that this is likely to happen again	3 - Costly in both financial and resource terms	Continue to improve and develop our emergency plans to enable us to deliver humanitarian assistance in a robust and cost efficient manner in the future.