

Committee: Community Committee

Agenda Item

Date: January 2009

11

Title: Lebanon Evacuation

Author: Lisa Lipscombe, Emergency Planning Officer, 01799 510624

Item for information

Summary

- 1 Committee requested a more detailed explanation and comparisons to money spent between all the responding councils and reassurance of how we would manage a similar event 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 upon request. Please note item 3.1 is attached.
 - 3.1 Communication from Dept for Communities and Local Government.
 - 3.2 Scrutiny committee report. September 2006
 - 3.3 Review of Operation Highbrow June 2008

Impact

4

Communication/Consultation	None applicable to the report
Community Safety	None
Equalities	Training needs to address equalities issues
Finance	The approach will deliver beneficial value for money
Human Rights	None applicable to this report
Legal implications	We have a statutory duty to give humanitarian assistance
Sustainability	None
Ward-specific impacts	All

Workforce/Workplace	This approach will assist us to manage any future situation within our staffing resource
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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 in the UK
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. As part of this process the following county, borough and district councils were approached: Crawley Borough Council, North West Leicestershire District Council and Leicestershire County Council.
9. Crawley Borough Council, received the first wave which consisted entirely of British citizens who were living and or working in the Lebanon at the time of the evacuation, therefore upon arrival at Gatwick airport, the processing of these people was relatively uncomplicated as most if not all had homes or relatives to whom they could go within the United Kingdom. As a result while Crawley Borough Council processed 2500 evacuees, the largest figure of the responding authorities/airports, they only spent £3,786 which was largely expended on travel warrants to enable evacuees to reach home, staff overtime and miscellaneous expenses
10. Leicestershire County and North West Leicestershire District Councils received 102 evacuees through East Midlands airport, all of whom were British Passport Holders (foreign citizens who for whatever reason have been granted a British passport) They had in place a plan to deal with evacuees and after housing them initially in an hotel on the airport, moved them the following day to another hotel which was less expensive in addition these people were accommodated for a shorter period of time than the evacuees arriving at Stansted. These evacuees were eventually dispersed to a number of local authorities within the UK and some of them were provided with onward flights to destinations in Germany, Spain and Northern Ireland. As a result the combined Leicestershire authorities spent a total of £54,000 on their operation.

11. Uttlesford District Council received 601 evacuees over the period of four days who arrived through Stansted airport. The council had no plan in place to deal with this eventuality and as such much of the initial planning was undertaken on an ad hoc basis. This was not assisted by the fact that information being provided by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was vague and very often not received in a timely fashion. At the time of this incident the availability of cheaper accommodation on and within the vicinity of Stansted airport was in very short supply resulting in the evacuees having to be accommodated in a hotel which might not normally have been used. To process 601 people and assess even their most basic of needs with the limited number of trained staff available to this council, takes time. Eventually this figure was reduced to 64 persons who required permanent accommodation to be provided for them. As a result this authority's expenditure was increased because of the prolonged time necessary to make all the required arrangements. As a result Uttlesford District Council spent a total of £84,812
12. Studying these figures the sum expended by this authority to process 601 people over a prolonged period of time, compared to the figure expended by the Leicestershire authorities to process a far smaller number of people is to be considered reasonable. One comparison of costs which stands out in particular is the fact that Leicestershire accommodated their evacuees for the first night only at the Thistle Hotel, East Midlands airport at an approximate cost of £18,000, this authority accommodated 64 people at the University of Essex in Colchester for several weeks at an approximate cost of £24,000

Learning Points

- 13 Uttlesford District Council Crisis Management team is to discuss our future response in advance. This will then ensure a more enhanced strategy for dealing with future events and will include awareness raising of our Memorandum of Understanding with bordering authorities' regarding mutual aid. This process has already begun.
- 14 A full and complete reassessment of all of our rest centre sites is to take place in 2009. This will ensure that rest centres can be identified with adequate facilities to best manage people's needs for any type of incident. This update will include an equalities assessment.
- 15 An agreement has been recorded and confirmed with BAA Contingency Planning that they will assist us in dealing with future arrivals/refugees at the airport as expediently as possible in order to minimise distress to the evacuees and disruption to normal airport operations.

Risk Analysis

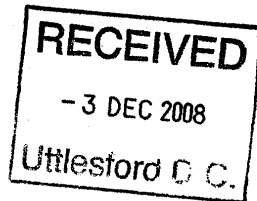
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Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Failure to anticipate and plan for such events would leave us ill prepared and resourced	3 World events dictate that this is likely to happen again	3 Costly in both financial and resource terms	Continue to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

- 1 = Little or no risk or impact
- 2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.
- 3 = Significant risk or impact – action required
- 4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.



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Our Ref: JH/JH/032410/08
Your Ref: AKJ/sk

26 November 2008

Dear Jim

Thank you for your letter of 7 November concerning the costs incurred by Uttlesford District Council in supporting British Nationals returning to the UK from the Lebanon in July 2006. This follows earlier correspondence on this issue between this Department, Uttlesford District Council and the Local Government Association, between October 2006 and January 2007.

Under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, local authorities are responsible preparing for a wide range of emergencies such as the Lebanon operation. However, I can understand your concerns around funding and was grateful for the effective role which your authority played in the situation created by the Lebanon evacuation. The Government did, of course, move quickly to make emergency regulations to ensure that evacuees were eligible for mainstream housing assistance from local authorities and for housing benefit to help meet their housing costs, if required.

More generally, we believe that Government support in situations such as this is best considered on a case by case basis. I can assure you that we will consider carefully all requests for financial assistance. Important factors for consideration concern the scale of the financial liability and the extent to which local authorities should have been expected to make reasonable provision from within existing budgets to respond to any unexpected event.

I know that this response is not in line with your suggestions, although I hope it sets out clearly the Government's position in relation to this type of incident.

Yours sincerely
John Healey

JOHN HEALEY MP