

**Committee:** UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL  
**Date:** October 6, 2006  
**Title:** BEIRUT EMERGENCY  
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510400

**Agenda Item**

**12**

Item for  
information

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### Summary

This report advises members of the actions taken by the council in response to Operation Highbrow – the evacuation of British nationals from Lebanon in July 2006. It advises members of the costs incurred by the council and the steps taken to recover these costs.

### Recommendation

That Council advises officers as to further steps they wish to take to pursue recovery of costs incurred.

### Background Papers

The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

Reports on this issue considered by Community Committee (September 2006) and Scrutiny Committee (October 2006)

### Impact

Communication/Consultation	The pursuit of adequate reimbursement on behalf of Uttlesford taxpayers may require the council to engage in an appropriate publicity campaign.
Community Safety	None
Equalities	A number of refugees have been rehoused within Uttlesford. If they remain resident in Uttlesford then their needs will continue to be assessed in line with our overall policies.
Finance	The costs incurred so far amount to £42,000. This is a significant sum for a council the size of Uttlesford. If it becomes apparent that reimbursement is not forthcoming, the council will need to consider how to meet that sum.
Human Rights	None
Legal implications	The council has a legal obligation to respond to emergencies under the terms of the Civil

Beirut Emergency

Uttlesford District Council, October 17, 2006, Item 12

	Contingencies Act.
Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	There continues to be a significant ongoing workload in providing support to those refugees who are housed in Uttlesford. Although this is reducing, it will remain an issue to be managed within the resources of the Housing Service.

## **Situation**

1. The escalation of the Israeli bombardment of Lebanon in July 2006 caused the British government to take the decision to evacuate British nationals and dependents via sea and air to Cyprus and from there to the UK.
2. Between Saturday 22 July and Tuesday 25 July, five flights of evacuees arrived at Stansted Airport. Uttlesford District Council – as a category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act – led and co-ordinated the response in providing support and emergency accommodation for those arriving.
3. In all, some 800 refugees arrived at Stansted, with over a hundred requiring emergency accommodation and some 20 families (over 60 individuals) requiring longer term housing.
4. A fully detailed account of the response was reported to Community Committee in September and to Scrutiny Committee on October 4. Scrutiny Committee has agreed to carry out an investigation into the operation and to establish points of learning from the exercise.
5. Given the fact of the Scrutiny investigation, it would not be appropriate to repeat the detailed account of events in this report. However, it can be said that during that weekend and in the following days an extensive operation was mounted (at less than twelve hours notice), which involved a large number of Uttlesford council staff.
6. In all some staff worked some 439 hours of overtime in addition to significant numbers of hours within normal working time and the costs incurred by the council amount to approximately £42,000. We have been advised that the normal source for emergency funds – the Bellwin Scheme – does not apply in this instance: since it is designed for emergencies that arise within the boundaries of a council area, and this arose as a result of an emergency overseas.
7. We have now written seeking reimbursement to both the Government Office for the East of England (GO-East) and to national government. Informal soundings with both, and discussions with other councils caught up in the issue (Crawley, North West Leicestershire and Manchester) suggest that the government is not minded to offer any reimbursement.

## **Targets**

8. On this occasion the council responded positively and well to the situation which was landed upon us on that weekend. Political and community support was never in question and the ability to simply do what was needed was a vital feature of the success that followed. This success has been recognised widely – including in a request to brief an emergency planning training day in Manchester.

## Beirut Emergency

Uttlesford District Council, October 17, 2006, Item 12

9. It seems likely that this popular and political support would be placed under greater pressure were local citizens to believe that the cost of such an incident would fall disproportionately on the local taxpayer. £42,000 amounts to the equivalent of a 1% increase in Uttlesford's council tax.
10. This was not an emergency that arose from nowhere – such as experienced in recent years in Boscastle, Hexham or the like. Nor was it the result of a civil disturbance in the UK. These costs have been incurred by Uttlesford as a direct result of a national government decision to impose them upon the council. The council receives no additional resources from government to deal with these issues, but the presence of an international airport within our boundaries means that an emergency anywhere in the world might impact on our operations in the way that we experienced last July.

### Options

11. There are no options in respect of the obligation to honour our duties under the Civil Contingencies Act – these are a statutory requirement. However, members may wish to consider, as part of the budget setting process later this year, whether they would wish to provide a specific contingency fund for these types of incidents.
12. In recent weeks, officers have:
  - a. Briefed GO-East and national government officials on the issue, and written formally seeking reimbursement;
  - b. Briefed the district's MP to ensure that he understands the council's position and might use his offices to support the case we are making;
  - c. Made contact with officers in the other affected councils. At the time of writing it is hoped that a meeting between those councils will take place before the date of the council meeting. Further information will be presented to the council meeting if available.
13. Members are asked to advise on any further steps they feel are necessary.

### Risk Analysis

14. The following have been assessed as the potential risks associated with this issue.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
That no reimbursement will be forthcoming	High	Medium	The council will need to continue to meet its statutory obligations, but a reduction in political/popular support for management actions will hamper the possibility of an effective response.

Beirut Emergency

Uttlesford District Council, October 17, 2006, Item 12