

**Lebanon Evacuation**  
**Scrutiny Committee, item 5**

**Committee:** Scrutiny **Agenda Item**  
**Date:** 4 October 2006 **5**  
**Title:** LEBANON EVACUATION  
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**Summary**

The document sets out the background, and the Council's response to the Lebanon Evacuation in July 2006. A scoping document outlines a proposed scrutiny review.

**Recommendations**

The Committee to:

- a) agree the scrutiny scoping document and initiate a scrutiny review of the Council's response to the Lebanon Evacuation and funding issues
- b) nominate a lead member for the review from the Committee, and seek further review members from the Committee's and Council's membership.

**Background Papers**

UDC Emergency Plan

**Impact**

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Communication/Consultation | <b>Relevant groups of tenants were advised of the situation. Members of the Council were kept informed</b>  |
| Community Safety           | <b>None specifically</b>  |
| Equalities                 | <b>Important to ensure that evacuees applications are dealt with in accordance with the Council's statutory duties</b>  |
| Finance                    | <b>There has been a significant cost to the Council (£42,062) in respect of the one-off operation. This has failed to meet the criteria for funding under the Government's Bellwin Scheme. Further attempts to obtain funding are in progress, with an updated position due to be reported to Full Council on 17 October. The ongoing housing costs are</b> |

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|-----------------------|---|
|                       | <b>currently being assessed but will attract benefit subsidy from the Government.</b>                         |
| Human Rights          | <b>Evacuees had undergone significant problems relating to loss of their homes</b>                            |
| Legal implications    | <b>Council has a statutory duty to provide accommodation and to respond to emergency situations</b>           |
| Ward-specific impacts | <b>Saffron Walden wards, Stansted wards, The Sampfords, Felsted, Newport, Great Dunmow wards, The Rodings</b> |
| Workforce/Workplace   | <b>Considerable impact on the work of the Housing Department</b>  |

**Situation**

- 1 Previously fragile tensions between Israel and The Lebanon boiled over when two Israeli soldiers were captured by Hezbollah. As a result Israel carried out a massive artillery and air barrage of The Lebanon in an attempt to destroy Hezbollah. Thousands of innocent Lebanese people, as well as a large number of foreign nationals were caught up in the resulting conflict. The British Government mounted an operation to evacuate British subjects and British passport holders caught up in the conflict to safety using Royal Navy ships to reach Cyprus, and then flying them from their onwards to the UK. One of the receiving airports in the UK was Stansted Airport. As the evacuees arrived at Stansted Airport, the Local Authority, Uttlesford District Council, assumed the lead role in responding to the crisis by assisting and accommodating the evacuees. Uttlesford District Council as a Category One responder has a statutory obligation under the provisions of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to plan, prepare and respond accordingly to an emergency. Operation Highbrow was unique compared to most emergencies as there was plenty of warning which allowed the respondents to plan and prepare for the particulars of the crisis.
- 2 Owing to the advanced warning of the crisis, approximately one and a half days were used to plan and prepare as all participating agencies were able to communicate and make arrangements for the arrival of the first flight. The initial response lasted approximately four days followed immediately by the recovery phase.

**The role of Uttlesford District Council**

- 3 Uttlesford District Council (UDC) has a statutory obligation to plan, prepare and respond to an emergency. As a Local Authority, their remit lies within the provision of humanitarian assistance. In brief terms, this involves the planning and preparation of all aspects of rest centres and necessary arrangements to accommodate victims of an emergency. The council networks with other agencies to ensure that all aspects of the rest centres are covered such as,

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logistics, resources, contracts and arrangements. Within this, the Council have a responsibility for business continuity so that essential business services can continue to operate during an emergency especially when the essential services may be depleted of resources due to the demands of the emergency. To ensure the integrity of the plans, the council exercises and simulates an emergency which also facilitates learning and validates arrangements.

### Respondents involved

- 4 As with all emergencies, the response can never be executed by one organisation alone; various agencies are involved and the communication between these agencies is the heart to any response.

### Category One Responders

- **Uttlesford District Council:** Provided the staff, resources and rest centre and co-ordinated the overall response.
- **Essex County Council Social Services:** assisted with vulnerable people who may require care and support.
- **Essex County Council Emergency Plans:** Activated a range of services and provided resources (beds, logistics etc)
- **Stansted Airport Limited (STAL):** Co-ordinated the response at airport level and acted as a source of information.
- **The Primary Care Trust:** provided GP's to the rest centre (hotel) advice and information
- **East of England Ambulance NHS Trust:** provided paramedics to the scene as and when necessary.
- **Crisis Support Team Essex:** provided a range of care and counselling services to the evacuees.

### Voluntary Agencies

- **British Red Cross:** provided basic medical assistance, welfare and emergency logistics along with an ambulance.
- **WRVS:** provided refreshments and basic provisions along with comfort and a shoulder to cry on.
- **Job Centre Plus:** assisted with travel and offered a range of financial services.

### Other Responders

- **Essex University (Colchester Campus):** provided student accommodation as medium-term accommodation for the evacuees.
- **Hilton Hotel:** provided a one of their hotels to be used as a rest centre.
- **Salvation Army:** provided resources in the aftermath of Operation Highbrow.

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#### **Summary of Response: Sequence of Events**

##### ***Thursday 20 July***

- 5 The District Emergency Planning Officer (DEPO) was notified by Essex County Council Emergency Plans Department of the likelihood that a flight into Stansted containing refugees may arrive. The Crisis Management Team (CMT) of Uttlesford District Council (UDC) assembled that afternoon at their Emergency Centre to discuss the Council's action. CMT split the group so that a shift rota could be initiated if necessary. Later that day and after some confusion regarding the flight arrival times, CMT made the decision to temporarily stand down until further notice.
- 6 The first meeting was kicked off by a briefing from the DEPO followed a discussion between the CMT to develop a response strategy. Various meetings continued during the course of the day to discuss the following topics:
- Media strategy.
  - Making contact with Crawley Borough Council to learn from their experiences.
  - Location and practicality of rest centres.
  - Putting necessary organisations on standby (Social Services, WRVS, and British Red Cross etc).
  - Discussion of the variety of needs of the evacuees.
  - Gold, Silver or Bronze liaison officers to be arranged.
  - Situation Reports.
  - Acquisition of staff volunteers.
  - Facilities at the airport to support the evacuees.
  - Warning and informing the members and parish councils.

##### ***Friday 21 July***

- 7 The CMT reassembled to discuss the Councils response and make further arrangements to involve implementing partners:
- Confirmation that funding would be received from Central Government.
  - Putting Rest Centre Volunteers on standby and onto a shift rota.
  - Costs of using various hotels to accommodate the evacuees.
  - Informing other respondents of the rendezvous point and to keep them informed of developments (PCT, Red Cross, WRVS, ECC, And GO East).

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- Strategy of delivery (location, logistics, who what when and how).
  - Problems experienced at Gatwick.
  - Provision of food and welfare.
  - Plan A is that UDC utilizes hotels. Plan B is that they open a rest centre.
  - Administration duties and equipment required.
  - Check lists.
- 8 At 09:00hrs a call centre was established to accommodate the quantity of calls relating to Operation Highbrow.
- 9 The CMT continued to meet throughout the course of the day. The CMT and Response Teams mapped out and explored the possibility of using various forms of short term emergency accommodation (rest centres and hotels) with a view to identifying the best method to facilitate the response. The CMT came to the consensus that the using a hotel as emergency accommodation would best suit this response. It was later learned that this decision had a positive outcome as the hotel contained all necessary facilities and its location was most suitable.
- 10 The first *multi-agency briefing* commenced at 20:00hrs at UDC in the Council Chamber which defined the roles and responsibilities of those involved, along with a discussion of key issues:
- The Chief Executive briefed all delegates of the Councils action.
  - The number of people requiring care and accommodation.
  - ECC Social Services agreed to be present at the Hilton Hotel (Rest Centre).
  - Method of deployment of resources.
  - Logistics and responsibility.
  - Essex Police to locate at the airport for media control.
  - UDC staff to rendezvous at the airport at 03:00 hours on Saturday 22 July 2006.
  - Responsibilities of Job Centre Plus, WRVS, British Red Cross, Social Services, Stansted. Airport, Essex Police, and Essex County Council (ECC).
- 11 Following the briefing, the Chief Executive, DEPO and an Executive Manager met to finalise any arrangements and inform the teams.
- 12 Throughout the course of Friday night through to the early hours of Saturday 22 July, the first shift of the volunteers guided by the DEPO arranged and organised the Hilton Hotel not merely to accommodate the refugees but to implement registration facilities and arranged any essential services such as,

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medical and welfare assistance. It was anticipated that some of the evacuees would make their own arrangements for onward travel and accommodation following registration, or would require support from Job Centre Plus for onward travel upon arrival.

#### ***Saturday 22 July***

- 13 The first flight arrived on Saturday 22 July at 05:10 hours with approximately 400 evacuees on board of whom; 15 required help with onward travel, and 44 adults and 29 children required overnight accommodation at the Hilton Hotel.
- 14 It was planned that three members of staff from UDC, which included a senior member, to board the aircraft to meet the evacuees and give them an introduction. This did not materialise as planned due to the rush to disembark from the plane into the airport. The evacuees were taken through to the baggage reclaim area and finally onto the coach to the hotel.
- 15 Following the response to the first flight, the various agencies based at the hotel met to assess the efficiency of the response so that changes could be made prior to the arrival of the second flight. It was concluded that the initial response was very successful and that a similar approach should be adopted for any subsequent flights.
- 16 The second flight arrived on Saturday 22 July at 15:45 hours with 22 persons on board. 15 persons required overnight accommodation, two of which required immediate social care. Another two of the evacuees required immediate medical attention and were transported from the airport to a hospital in Colchester.
- 17 The response teams based at the hotel reported that the second flight contained less people than the previous flight but their welfare needs had proved to be more difficult. Despite this, the PCT expressed the view that the second flight was easier to deal with as the medical needs of the evacuees were more clear-cut.
- 18 Due to the needs of the evacuees from the second flight, a GP was required to be present at the hotel. Once it became apparent to the evacuees from the first flight that a doctor was available, the British Red Cross reported that the GP became inundated with patients from the first and second flight.

#### ***Sunday 23 July***

- 19 The third flight arrived on Sunday 23 July at 17:30 with 140 evacuees on board, of which only a handful required overnight accommodation. Nevertheless, Sunday remained a busy day for the response teams as continuous welfare issues persisted into the night, along with various problem solving issues. Phone cards had been purchased so that evacuees could phone relatives and family to inform them of their whereabouts and that they were safe. It then became apparent that some of the phone cards

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were invalid at which UDC sought to purchase a supply of phone cards from a general retailer. The additional phone cards appeared to be sufficient.

### **Tuesday 25 July**

- 20 The final flight arrived on Tuesday 25 July with approximately 39 ex-pats on board. There were a few problems at the airport as the evacuees were integrated with holiday makers in the baggage reclaim area. This occurred because contrary to expectations, the evacuees' baggage was put on the same carousel as an ordinary flight from Cork.

### **Recovery: Housing Needs**

- 21 Out of the many people evacuated by the British Government, who entered the UK at Stansted Airport, a total of 64 people were homeless and virtually destitute.
- 22 Accordingly Housing staff carried out in depth interviews and established that all qualified for statutory assistance in accordance with current homelessness legislation which had been urgently amended (overnight) by the Government to allow all of the group entitlement to all appropriate benefits available in the UK. In some cases this is for 6 months which will then be subject to Government review. The 64 evacuees comprised of 23 family units, some of which were single people.
- 23 In the initial phase (24/25 July) of responding to such a large number of homeless cases, Housing staff made contact with many other nearby councils to ascertain if any help was available. In addition, assistance was investigated with other housing providers.
- 24 The Council was extremely fortunate to be able to access student accommodation at Colchester and all the group were moved to this site. However, the accommodation was only available until Friday 25 August which gave Housing staff 4 weeks to make alternative housing arrangements.
- 25 During the first 2 weeks (until 10 August 2006), extensive work was undertaken by a handful of staff. This centred on attempting to access various types of accommodation (non UDC) and this involved detailed discussions with a number of agencies some of which were outside the Uttlesford District. In addition, the group needed a great deal of support as they were distressed having fled a war zone and were clearly vulnerable in a strange country. It was very important to note that the Council had a duty of care to the group. Assistance with the welfare work was provided by members of the Essex Crisis Support Team but a heavy burden of the work fell upon Housing staff.

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- 26 By the end of the second week, it had become clear that the realistic offers of suitable assistance were limited to a few councils. In addition, and on further interview, some connections with other councils in the UK had been established. The councils that assisted were: South Cambs, East Herts (via Housing Association), Manchester, Newcastle and Springboard Housing Association. At this point, it was decided that the bulk of the families had to be found accommodation in Uttlesford. Accordingly a number of units which were reserved for elderly people and where there had been some difficulty in letting, plus 2 ex-warden properties, were allocated to the families. This was a bold decision as it would require a great deal of goodwill by local communities to befriend the families. A number of the allocations were not appropriate to the family needs. Before any formal offers could be made, some work needed to be undertaken in the units. Prior to this only very basic work had been done to several of these dwellings as it was likely that they were going to be difficult to let and work would be done on an as and when basis.
- 27 With only a few days to go before the University accommodation had to be vacated, formal allocations were made. Members were notified of the details and some urgent residents meetings were called in sheltered accommodation.
- 28 The next phase was to equip the units with basic furniture and cooking facilities which proved to be very difficult. Appeals for help to local supermarkets and stores failed to achieve any offers of help.
- 29 All the moves took place just prior to the deadline date. Three families had to go into bed and breakfast accommodation until the work on their allocated homes was completed. All families were in their homes by 4 September 2006 on a temporary tenancy basis.
- 30 Following their moves, a very high number of welfare issues emerged. Many of these were dealt with by Housing staff and there has been assistance given by charities, voluntary people and Members of the Council. Essex County Council Social Services embarked on initial visits of all the families after they moved into their homes which took several weeks to complete.

### Debriefing

- 31 Each agency involved sought to instigate an internal debriefing to identify the lessons learnt and to build on any existing strengths. This would then prepare each agency to attend the multi-agency debriefing which was held by Uttlesford District Council on 14 August 2006. In conclusion, lessons were identified and the general outcome of the multi-agency debriefing was positive.

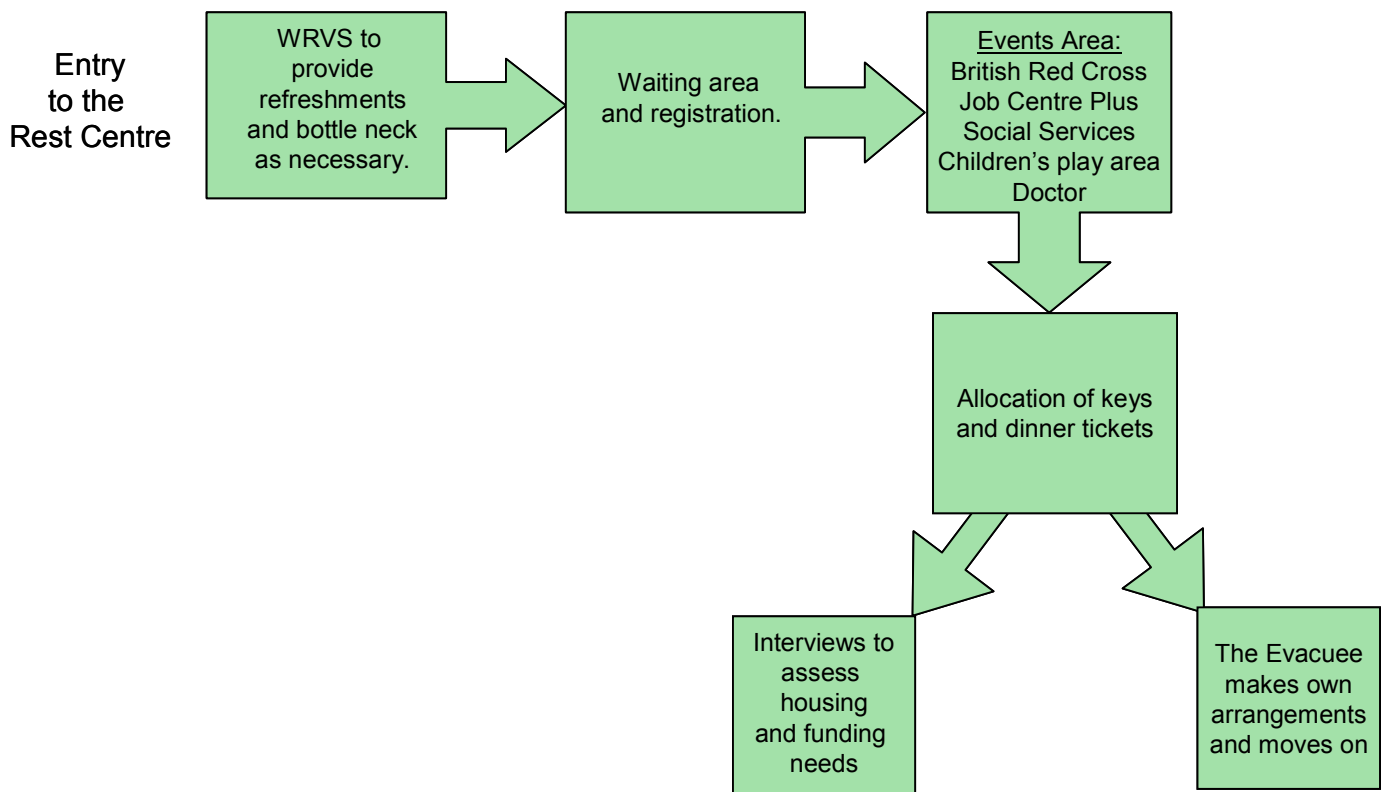


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#### Registration and Administration

- 32 The Rest Centre Plan was utilized to organise registration and welfare areas at the Hilton Hotel. These worked effectively, in that the evacuees received the necessary care in a structured manner. The hotel lobby and conference room was arranged in a way that allowed for an entry point, processing/registration, followed by an event and services room and exit point whereupon the evacuees could move to either the hotel restaurant or bedrooms.
- 33 Upon arrival at the hotel, evacuees were greeted by the British Red Cross and Hotel staff and were then given a raffle ticket for registration. As they approached the *ticket waiting area*, they were then meet by WRVS for refreshments. The evacuees were offered a seat in the waiting area until their raffle number was called for registration. If the waiting area became too full, the WRVS would assist in slowing the entry to the waiting area by offering more drinks and making conversation with the evacuees. Upon leaving the registration area, the evacuees then entered the “events room” where they could receive various welfare and support services. Any high priority cases were referred to Social Services, the British Red Cross or Job Centre Plus.
- 34 The administration team consisted of some of the Executive Managers from UDC whose role was to assess the registration forms to match people together in order that accommodation was utilized to the maximum. The evacuees were then called up and allocated a room key and dinner tickets.



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#### What went well?

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- The operation was successful
- Good coordination and communication
- Effective command and control structure
- The Rest Centre Plan
- One team to set up the rest centre and separate team to operate the rest centre.
- The decision to use the Hilton Hotel due to its suitability in terms of location and facilities
- The arrangement of logistics and facilities at the hotel.
- The overall running and management of operations at the airport and the hotel was extremely successful.

#### Learning Objectives

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- Misinterpretation of information: Different organisations provided different ETA's for the flights. In some cases, the details of the flight manifest were different from the details provided by another organisation.
- The disclaimers for "no assistance" were not used due to the rush at the airport to collect baggage and then to the hotel.
- The call centre was inundated with calls and at times overwhelming the staff.
- There was confusion as to whether a 'major incident' had been declared.
- Although the rest centre registration forms proved to be useful, it became clear that the forms should be more generic.
- The deficit of volunteers to assist at the hotel was tolerable but would have been a major issue had a rest centre (school, town hall, leisure centre etc) been set up.
- The provision of prescriptions did not match the facilities for medical supplies as there were no pharmacists/chemists nearby. This was rectified as a member of the response team was able to ascertain that medicines were available from a chemist at the airport. However, others were still unaware of where prescriptions could have been obtained.
- Confusion arose over the responsibilities of shift rotas as there were many staff who assumed this role.
- The need for an *announcer* who would address the evacuees of the system for processing and registration as they waited in the "waiting area".

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- The Emergency Plan was activated but not followed: time was consumed in compiling a plan that contained the same information as the Emergency Plan. This has identified that training is required so that all are aware of what is contained in the emergency plan.
- Implementing partners should be built into the Emergency Plan so that their involvements can dovetail other organisations: The doctor used normal operating procedures to refer a family to the hospital; plans will be revised so that the doctor uses a joint procedure with the British Red Cross to transport people to the hospital.
- A media representative should be present at the site to manage any on-site media enquiries. This arrangement should also be extended to the temporary accommodation once the evacuees had been moved from the hotel.
- Some shifts were too long and although staff reported that they had worked well under these conditions, it would be more effective if shifts were shorter.
- Social Services provided assistance at the beginning but were not present in the latter stages. This caused considerable problems as the need for Social Services became apparent with the arrival of the second flight.
- Due to the time of Operation Highbrow, most hotels had no vacancies. It was identified that there should be a greater relationship with rest centres and hotels in the Uttlesford District.
- Telephone cards were purchased by the Council to be used in conjunction with the evacuees phoning home however, some of these cards did not work and some were over-consumed.
- Difficulties were encountered when doctors were requested by UDC on Monday 23 July. As it was a working day, a doctor was not available until the out-of-hours emergency doctor service kicked in later in the evening.
- The hotel did not have any available rooms for people with disabilities resulting in accommodation issues. UDC had put alternative hotels on standby with facilities to cater for any person with a disability. The hotels were later stood down as the disabled facilities were no longer required.
- A definitive list of rooms was required, but due to the complexity of this, locating evacuees became more difficult. This problem was overcome thanks to the skills and knowledge of the staff involved.
- The layout of the rest centre was very successful although it was realised that a proper area for children should have been identified.
- Communication was in general, very good but on occasions, a breakdown in communication occurred between respondents which had resulted in contradiction and confusion. For example, on one occasion two parties were trying to accomplish the same objective without communicating with each other.

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- There were too many organisations submitting general Situation Reports (SitReps) resulting in contradiction and confusion. A central agency or lead agency should take the sole responsibility for general SitReps. All other participating agencies should take responsibility for their own SitReps.
- It was later learned that a room should have been set aside for a doctor. Even though a room was utilized, this should have been integrated into the plan. It was also acknowledged that a structured approach should be introduced so that people are triaged before referral to the doctor. A waiting area was a great benefit as this prevented people wondering which would have caused delays.
- The staff on standby should have been informed to stand down once it was clear that their services were no longer required.
- The exploitation of staff for this emergency left the Housing Department with a shortfall in staff resulting in business continuity issues.
- On Monday 23 July, the interviewing conducted by the Housing Department of UDC took longer than expected due to the complexities of the refugees.

### Statistics

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- Duration of the initial response: 5 days
- Total number of agencies involved: 13
- Total hours of labour from UDC staff during the initial response: 465
- Longest shift worked (without break): 22 hours
- Shortest shift worked (without breaks): 1 hour
- Approximate cost of the initial response £42,062

### Recommendations (Internal)

38 The results and trends from data have generated a number of recommendations to be implemented by UDC.

- Develop the “communications logging system” to comply with current standards and to be effective in that recording and log keeping is uncomplicated and robust.
- To obtain and improve current communication systems to compliment the “communications logging system”.
- To enhance documentation, check lists and procedures to be tested in follow-up exercises for ratification.
- To develop step by step training session for UDC staff to facilitate their comprehension of communications and emergency plans.

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#### Recommendations (General)

39 The District Emergency Planning Officer conducted a follow up to identify a list of recommendations which can be adopted by any agency or can be used to advise future response by any agency:

- To make use of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) Working Groups and in particular the “Media & Public Information Group (Warning and Informing) to guide and assist in dealing with the media
- To identify an individual to undertake the role of not merely a liaison officer, but a communications officer who deals primarily with communicating messages but does not get involved in the decision making processes
- To use an initiation team to set up the rest centre and registration areas and a separate team to take over.
- To use hotels as and when necessary to accommodate victims especially where staffing resources are low.
- To augment Emergency Plans and to integrate the arrangements of all responding agencies and how they feed into the response especially at a rest centre.

#### Glossary

|    |      |                                     |
|----|------|-------------------------------------|
| 40 | BC   | Business Continuity                 |
|    | BRCS | British Red Cross Society           |
|    | CCA  | Civil Contingencies Act (2004)      |
|    | DEPO | District Emergency Planning Officer |
|    | ECC  | Essex County Council                |
|    | EP   | Emergency Plans                     |
|    | LRF  | Local Resilience Forums.            |
|    | STAL | Stansted Airport Limited            |
|    | WRVS | Women’s Royal Voluntary Service     |
|    | UDC  | Uttlesford District Council         |

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**Risk Analysis**

| <b>Risk</b>                                      | <b>Likelihood</b> | <b>Impact</b> | <b>Mitigating actions</b>   |
|--|-------------------|---------------|---|
| <b>Future emergencies such as this may occur</b> | <b>High</b>       | <b>High</b>   | <b>Issue needs addressing at appropriate Emergency Planning Forum</b>                   |
| <b>Welfare needs of people not addressed</b>     | <b>Medium</b>     | <b>High</b>   | <b>Need for a plan to be agreed committing appropriate resources within a timescale</b> |
| <b>Cost of emergency</b>                         | <b>High</b>       | <b>High</b>   | <b>Council needs to make provision for such situations</b>                              |

**Title of Review: Lebanese Evacuation**

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**1 What are we looking at?**

**This review will examine:**

- Initial emergency planning procedures associated with the British evacuated from the Lebanon in July 2006
- Housing response
- Financial issues, including the reimbursement of associated costs by the Government

**2 What are we not looking at?**

- Wider aspects of emergency planning procedures not associated with this direct example

**3 Why are we looking at this?**

- To improve UDC and other agencies response to dealing with similar emergencies in the future
- To identify common issues with other local authorities involved in this evacuation

**4 What do we hope to achieve?**

We will produce a report including recommendations to the relevant decision makers that will:

- Streamline procedures
- Seek reimbursement by Government of directly associated costs

**5 What information do we need?**

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- Background to the event (chronology)
- List of agencies etc involved throughout in July and in the longer term
- Assessment by the Council of lessons learnt
- Examination of any best practice examples from similar evacuations, and learning from other local authorities involved in this evacuation to different airports
- Direct experiences from evacuees and the emergency response team

### **6 How will the evidence be gathered?**

We will gather information in a number of ways that may include the following:

- Formal interviews with expert witnesses
- Informal interviews with relevant individuals
- Site visits, including those to other local authorities involved throughout the country
- Gathering written evidence
- Desktop examination of research and information

### **7 Potential witnesses and consultations**

These may include:

- UDC Executive Management Team
- Emergency Planning Officer
- Other UDC and Essex County Council officers
- EEDA
- Go-East
- Evacuees
- Relevant agencies involved, ie Red Cross, JobCentre Plus, etc
- Other local authorities
- University of Essex

### **8 Timescale**

The review will begin in October 2006 and conclude by April 2007.