

CABINET

OUT OF OFFICE HOURS RESPONSE TO SEVERE WEATHER 22nd January 2013

Report of Head of Environmental Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT					
To enable Cabinet to consider generally how the Council should respond to severe weather occurrences out of office hours, and specifically the arrangements for the provision of sandbags to members of the public.					
Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Referral from Officer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Date of notice of forthcoming key decision	NA				
This report is public					

RECOMMENDATIONS OF HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

- (1) That in the event of severe weather occurrences out of office hours the operational response should continue to be in accordance with that which is statutorily required under the Civil Contingencies Act.
- (2) That Cabinet considers the issue of provision of sandbags to members of public.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Contained within the Civil Contingencies Act are a number of statutory roles and duties that the City Council has to undertake in the event of emergencies. Practical arrangements are in place to fulfil essential requirements.
- 1.2 Besides these arrangements the City Council has specific operational arrangements in place to cover out of office statutory responsibilities, contracts, formal agreements, emergencies (eg fallen trees, cleaning up after road traffic accidents, dangerous buildings, call outs to Council buildings, placing of storm boards on Morecambe promenade).
- 1.3 In recent years there has been an increase in the amount of severe weather warnings issued for the area. These warnings have preceded events such as prolonged periods of snowfall, ice, heavy rain and localised flooding.
- 1.4 The immediate impact of these severe weather events is disruption to travel and in the case of heavy rainfall or strong winds the potential of damage to property.

- 1.5 Experience from a number of recent severe weather events both nationally and locally has been that when the severe weather event has occurred out of office hours there is an expectation that besides the emergency services the local Council will provide an immediate operational response in some shape or form. It is not clear quite what operational response is expected but there does seem to be a popular perception that the local Council should be at the scene doing something.
- 1.6 Putting popular perceptions aside in general terms the County Council is the responsible authority for highways. Property owners are responsible for their properties.
- 1.7 The District Council's main responsibility is to oversee subsequent clean up after the event –eg in the event of floods.
- 1.8 If an event occurred such as a major fire that required wholesale evacuation of properties then the District Council would also be involved, with a number of other agencies. Specific arrangements are in place to deal with this.
- 1.9 This report is to seek Cabinet's view on whether the City Council's immediate operational response should be more than that statutorily required and indeed currently provided when a severe weather event occurs out of office hours.
- 1.10 For the purpose of this report the term immediate operational response refers to having frontline staff available with a suitable vehicle and equipment who could attend the scene of a flood or severe weather event and provide a City Council presence. In doing so the City Council would be acting above what it is required to do.
- 1.11 As the City Council does not have any specific statutory duty to provide an immediate operational out of hours response the situation currently is that –
 - *Apart from the capacity described in paras 1.1, 1.2 the Council does not have staff on standby to provide an immediate operational out of office hours response in the event of severe weather etc.*
- 1.12 This means that currently if a severe weather event were to occur out of office hours the City Council could not provide an immediate operational response and indeed has no specific statutory duty to do so. If the severe weather event occurred during office hours again there is no specific statutory duty to provide an immediate operation response. However, there have been many occasions where assistance has been provided to agencies making the request by diverting existing staff from their scheduled duties, on the basis of mutual aid and at this point it is envisaged these mutual aid arrangements would continue.
- 1.13 Historically the City Council also makes sandbags available to members of the public. These have to be picked up by the individual from outside White Lund Depot. Contrary to popular opinion, there is no statutory duty for any Council to provide sandbags to members of the public and indeed doing so has led to confusion as to what local residents might expect to be provided by the Council. For example residents who might wish to make use of this facility but have no means of transport. Nowadays, of course, they are widely available at builders' merchants etc. No monitoring of who takes the sandbags and where they go takes place. In the last 12 months around 2500-3000 sandbags have been taken by members of the public. The cost of providing these is approximately £6750- £8100.
- 1.14 It should also be noted that sandbags often only have a very limited effect in flooding situations. They are most effective in diverting running water. In a

rising water situation however the water will most probably rise on both sides of the sandbags rendering them ineffective and so they are not a 'cure all' solution.

2.0 Proposal Details

2.1 The proposal is that Cabinet notes council policy with regards to out of hours operational response in the event of severe weather and considers the issue of sandbags. This will ensure that a consistent message is provided to residents and other stakeholders.

3.0 Details of Consultation

3.1 No consultation has been undertaken

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

OUT OF HOURS OPERATIONAL RESPONSE

	Option 1a Continue with the existing policy of not providing an operational response over and above statutory responsibilities in the event of an out of office hours severe weather event.	Option 1b Provide a year round enhanced out of office hours response in the event of severe weather	Option 1c Provide an enhanced out of office hours response when severe weather warnings are received
Advantages	Consistent with statutory duties of a District Council	. Would meet the expectations of some of the public	Would meet the expectations of some of the public
Disadvantages	- Contrary to the expectation of some of the public - Contrary to the expectation of some stakeholders	Would require a team of 2 to be on permanent standby and to be trained accordingly. The staff would also have to be paid for call out. This would cost a minimum of £11,400 per annum. There would obviously be additional staff costs if attendance was required at the	Would require a team of 2 to be on standby for a minimum of 7 days when a severe weather warning is received. Assuming 10 severe weather warnings in a year the approx cost would be £1000 for standby. There would obviously be additional staff costs if attendance was required at the

		<p>incident.</p> <p>The City Council would be operating beyond its statutory responsibilities which raises public expectations</p>	<p>incident.</p> <p>-sometimes severe weather events (eg flash floods) aren't always accompanied by severe weather warnings.</p> <p>If the severe weather warning was received out of office hours it may not be possible to contact the team to put them on standby.</p> <p>The City Council would be operating beyond its statutory responsibilities which raises public expectations</p>
Risks	- Adverse publicity		- raising of public expectation

PROVISION OF SANDBAGS TO MEMBERS OF PUBLIC

	Option 2a Continue to make sandbags freely available for people who wish to collect them from WLD	Option 2b Introduce a charge for the provision of sandbags members of public	Option 2c Discontinue the policy of making sandbags available to members of public
Advantages	Meets the expectations of some of the public	<p>Meets the expectations of some of the public</p> <p>Already the practice in a number of Councils</p> <p>Ensures sandbags are used for the purpose intended</p>	<p>Ensures the Council is not acting beyond its statutory duties</p> <p>Encourages householders to consider in advance how best to protect their home</p> <p>Saves around £6750- 8100 per</p>

			annum
Disadvantages	<p>Already the Council receives requests from the public to deliver the bags to peoples homes because they have no transport. These are declined which causes upset to the member of public.</p> <p>Anecdotal evidence suggests the sandbags are used for all manner of things other than protection from flooding. There is nothing to prevent one person coming and taking away the whole supply of sandbags that is left outside the depot</p> <p>Goes beyond the Council's statutory duty</p> <p>Around 2500- 3000 sand bags are taken per year which costs the Council around £6750- 8100</p> <p>Doesn't encourage people to plan ahead for severe weather.</p>	<p>Would require administering. Charges for the sandbags would have to reflect this</p>	<p>Contrary to the expectation of some of the public</p>
			<p>Adverse publicity – this is a key concern when there has been so much flooding recently elsewhere in the UK. Much footage has been</p>

			shown of sandbags being deployed – to varying degrees of success on national and local news.
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NOTE- the Council also retains a supply of sandbags for its own use in the event of emergencies and will continue to do so.

5.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)

- 5.1 The Officer preferred option is that in the event of severe weather occurrences out of office hours the operational response should continue to be in accordance with that which is statutorily required under the Civil Contingencies act.
- 5.2 With regards to sandbag provision currently by providing free sandbags for collection the Council is acting beyond what is statutorily required, and at a direct cost to the Council. The options Cabinet have in this regard are outlined in the table above.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 It is in the Council's interests to ensure that there is clarity as to the Council's position on these issues.

<p>RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK</p> <p>As outlined in the report.</p>
<p>CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT (including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, HR, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)</p> <p>The Environment Agency provides clear and easily accessible information to all as to the risk of flooding in specific areas.</p> <p>The Met Office provides clear and easily accessible information to all as to the risk of severe weather events.</p>
<p>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</p> <p>Legal Services have been consulted and have no further comments.</p>
<p>FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS</p> <p>Option 1b- Should Members choose to provide an out of office hours response in the event of severe weather then there would be a corresponding financial cost. As detailed in the report, a team of two would be required to be on permanent standby plus also any additional call out and associated vehicle costs. Whilst the call out costs are unquantifiable, the cost of standby is approximately £110 per week per employee, therefore the annual cost equates to a minimum of £11,400. There is currently no budgetary provision for this amount.</p>

Option 1c-The option of putting a team on standby when a severe weather warning is received would be cheaper. In order to ensure that the service could be staffed it would be necessary to leave staff on standby for a minimum of 3 days whenever a severe weather warning was received. If there were 10 severe weather occurrences during the year this would equate to a minimum cost of £1,000. Again, there is no budgetary provision for this amount.

The 2012/13 general fund budget for Regeneration & Planning includes £173,700 for R&M in respect of sea and river plus promenade flood defences. This amount includes the cost of sandbags taken by members of public which is estimated at £8,100 per annum. Should Members choose to discontinue offering the public free sandbag provision or introduce a charge to cover the cost of sandbags, then this amount will be built into the savings proposals within the current budget setting process.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Human Resources:

NA

Information Services:

NA

Property:

NA

Open Spaces:

NA

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

Cabinet is advised to consider the proposals in context of affordable priorities and the Council's financial prospects - in particular the need to make major budget savings in future years.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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