

## REPORT TO SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT PANEL: POWER FAILURE IN PORTSMOUTH 26 JUNE 2010

### Purpose of report

1. This report describes the response of Portsmouth City Council to the power failure in areas of the city on 26 June 2010. It covers:

- Background information on the council's emergency response system
- Portsmouth City Council's response to the incident
- Outcomes

2. The report does not cover Scottish and Southern Energy's (SSE) response to the incident. I made a request to the company for details, though a response had not been received before this report was submitted. The panel may wish to contact SSE direct for more information, as the company is the appropriate and responsible authority to comment, and to seek a response to the initial request for information.

### Background

3. Portsmouth City Council has the following emergency response resources for out-of-hours incidents:

Service	Managed by	Remuneration
<b>Single service call out or out of hours arrangements</b>  (for example, emergency social housing maintenance, social care out of hours service, dog wardens, traffic management centre, CCTV)	Individual services	As per service requirements and LPR
<b>City Contact Officer</b>  for incidents where several services are involved or co-ordination is required. This is a 24/7 duty covered by 14 officers including the 4 emergency planning officers.	Civil Contingencies Unit	Paid standby and over time if called out
<b>Duty Executive</b>  to provide strategic advice and assistance to the City Contact Officer, 24/7	Civil Contingencies Unit	No

<p><b>Specialist response teams of volunteers</b></p> <p>teams where no comparable 'day' service exists:</p> <p><b>Emergency Response Centre Team</b> responsible for co-ordinating tasking and information during a major incident</p> <p><b>Rest Centre Team</b> responsible for managing any building we open to provide shelter and assistance for people who are evacuated from their homes</p> <p><b>Major Incident Support Team</b> responsible for co-ordinating social care interventions in a major incident</p> <p><b>Local Authority Liaison Officers</b> who deploy to the site of an incident to liaise with the emergency services</p>	<p>Civil Contingencies Unit</p> <p>18 staff volunteers</p> <p>33 staff volunteers</p> <p>14 staff volunteers</p> <p>4 staff volunteers</p>	<p>No standby payment</p> <p>Overtime if called out in accordance with LPR</p>
<p><b>Service contacts</b> usually a manager or team leader plus key personnel</p>	<p>Self-nominated or job related</p>	<p>No standby</p> <p>Response based on goodwill</p> <p>Overtime or TOIL if called out at discretion of manager</p>

4. These arrangements are comparable with other councils, although the number of staff volunteers for the Emergency Response Centre, Rest Centre and Major Incident Support Teams are low as a result of historical factors prior to 2008 (lack of recruitment, training and support). A comprehensive recruitment and training programme has been initiated in the last 12 months and the figures have increased significantly.

5. The response arrangements are based on the acknowledgement that a more formal system requiring dedicated officers on standby commitments across the full range of council services is unaffordable. As a consequence local authority emergency response is heavily reliant on support and training

mechanisms, goodwill and the more intangible 'public service ethos'. The last 2 elements are linked to morale. Looking forward I anticipate that the period of change councils will see under the government's plans to reduce the public sector deficit is likely to have a negative impact on staff capacity and willingness to respond out of hours.

6. Most incidents are outside the control of the council and will require a multi-agency response, so the council acts with its partners – emergency services, health services, Environment Agency - to achieve the best good for the most people. In general, priority is always given to those made vulnerable by the incident and in particular those less able to assist themselves.

7. No two incidents are the same or require exactly the same response. It could be a major evacuation, a radiation release from a vessel in the naval port, a large oil spill, a large outbreak of human or animal disease, severe weather. So far in 2010 we have responded to:

- Adverse weather in January
- Arrival of HMS Albion in April and support to the commercial port during the response to the closure of European airspace
- Evacuation of Jessie Road and surrounding area because of a suspect package 30 April
- Power failure 26 June
- Planning for 2 other evacuations which were not required (fire in flats in Elm Grove, flooding in young persons hostel)

8. The aim of emergency planning is therefore to create a combination of generic and specialist plans and people with a range of skills which can be adapted to any situation. The council has the following corporate plans:

- Emergency Response Plan
- Flood Response Plan
- Chemical and Oil Pollution Plan (in progress)
- PORTSAFE Plan – response to a nuclear emergency in the naval base
- Pandemic Response Plan
- Rest Centre Plan

9. Further plans in development are:

- Humanitarian Assistance Guidance
- Mass fatalities/casualty plan
- Multi-agency flood response plan

10. Finally, emergency planning is a statutory duty for local authorities under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. The work is co-ordinated by the Civil Contingencies Unit staffed by 2 FTE officers, 2 PTE officers and 1 FTE operational support post. Again, these arrangements are comparable with other councils. The unit's budget covers staff and running costs only: costs

incurred during incidents are found from council contingency budgets or in the case of major incidents a small proportion may be recovered from central government.

### **Power failure 26 June**

11. At approximately 0100hrs 26 June 2010 a fire occurred in a sub-station in Warblington Street. This resulted in the loss of power to areas across the city.

12. In accordance with the Emergency Response Plan, CCTV advised the City Contact Officer at 01.30hrs of the loss of power. Because of the potential severity of the incident the City Contact Officer contacted the Civil Contingencies Manager and the police. SSE's emergency number confirmed there had been a power failure and repair work was underway. At approximately 0245hrs power was restored to large areas of the city, including the Civic Offices. At this stage there was no indication that a full power restoration had not been achieved, or what areas remained without power.

### **Highways issues**

13. At 0615hrs the Traffic Management Centre and Colas identified that a number of traffic lights were not working:

- Anglesea Road/park Road all out
- Kingston Road/Kingston Crescent all out
- Goldsmith Ave/Milton Road/Eastney road all out
- Eastney Road/Bransbury Road/Devonshire Avenue all out
- Eastern Road/Kirpal Road all out
- Elm Grove/Victoria Road all out

14. The Traffic Management Centre, Colas and the City Contact Officer implemented standard emergency traffic measures with the police over the next 2 hours:

- Emergency signage deployed
- Local radio stations informed to broadcast information
- Liaison with SSE and Siemens (traffic light contractor) about prioritising restoration work on major junctions.
- Matrix signage on A27/M27 updated

15. At 0900hrs Gunwharf Quays reported the car parking barrier system was not working and the car park would be closed until power was restored. The location of Gunwharf Quays means that any back up of traffic to their site will quickly lead to congestion along the western approach to the city onto the M275. The Traffic Management Centre, City Contact Officer, Colas and police decided to open up Southsea Common as an emergency overflow car park.

16. Loss of power affected a number of public toilet facilities. Early communication with the Clean City team is essential in any future incidents involving loss of power and this will be taken forward in updated procedures (see **Outcomes** below).

17. The timely and effective response of all agencies involved in traffic management meant that congestion and other incidents were avoided. Traffic flowed freely, if cautiously at junctions, and no accidents were reported. Information provided by local radio to drivers was accurate, and the Traffic Management Centre reported that traffic flow was significantly better than a 'normal' Saturday.

## **Wider impact and the council response**

### **Vulnerable people**

18. Through contact with SSE during the morning it became clear that power had not been restored to all areas affected during the night and that the subsequent repair would necessitate different areas being on or off power throughout the day with very little notice. The company had an 80% confidence the repair would be completed initially by 1700hrs, revised in the afternoon to 2100hrs.

19. SSE advised they would be contacting their vulnerable clients and requested an emergency helpline so that the public would be able to access other assistance. At 1115hrs I spoke to Karen Biddle from CHD to open an emergency line in accordance with procedures. I also initiated call out of the Major Incident Support Team to provide a social care triage system for vulnerable people known to the council and those who may self-identify through the helpline. The priority was to contact those people who relied on power for health care (provision of oxygen, blood pressure monitoring, electric beds to combat bed sores). It was important to keep people in their homes rather than relocate them as there were 2 beds available in residential care that day.

20. I advised the heads of Customer Access, Adult Social Care, Traffic and Transport and the Duty Executive of my actions and the support I required. Both the heads of Customer Access and Adult Social Care attended the Civic Offices to support the response.

21. The head of Customer Access informed the Leader of the Council and provided several updates during the incident.

22. We opened the helpline at 1300hrs and started social care interventions. We ran it as joint operation out of the CHD offices. Three members of the Major Incident Support Team and the out-of-hours social care service initiated contact with priority vulnerable people through social care lists, and also direct contact with care homes and agency care providers. Housing management also initiated significant support measures for their areas.

23. A number of cases requiring interventions were also directed to us from SSE and from contact through the council helpline. The majority of interventions involved the delivery of emergency oxygen resupply to clients and I would like to thank the commercial provider, Rapid Response, for their excellent support. Another intervention required the delivery of a specialist foam mattress to replace the electric bed required for the prevention of pressure sores and organ collapse. This was achieved by 3 members of staff who collected and delivered the mattress in one of their own cars. The Community Wardens also provided water to a lady in Gunwharf who stated she was in distress and unable to leave her children.

24. CHD provided information through the emergency helpline based on our response and the latest update from SSE. My experience of the information provided to the public on the company helpline was that it was as accurate as it could be, given the circumstances of the repair work they had to achieve. Staff from the council's Corporate Communications team provided press and website updates.

25. The Housing Out of Hours Service began receiving calls from residents at 1.10am and responded to 199 calls about the power outage, mainly providing information and reassurance, until the restoration of power. The service kept in contact with SSE throughout. Housing Out of Hours Service staff were deployed to Edgbaston and Tipton Houses where sheltered residents were visited to check their well-being, provide support and bottled water was delivered as needed. Bottled water was also delivered to the community rooms at Leamington and Horatia Houses where residents were gathering. Ian Gibson Court, a more sheltered scheme, was severely affected since the lifts, freezers and cooking facilities were all out of action and the Sheltered Housing Manager spent the day at the scheme working with staff to ensure that residents received meals and cold/hot drinks using resources from other sheltered schemes as necessary

26. A major concern involved a private sheltered housing complex where the power outage had disabled their alarms, doors and windows. The council was able to provide assistance to one resident who required oxygen, alert the police to the potential security issues and strongly request SSE of the need to provide a power supply to the complex. After the event I was advised of another private sheltered housing complex in similar circumstances. These two instances suggest that the emergency and business continuity

arrangements in these facilities are inadequate given their reliance on uninterrupted power supply.

27. Early work was undertaken by council staff to identify replacement staff in case power was not restored as indicated. At this stage we were planning to work till 2200hrs and then resume at 0800hrs. Overnight calls would be directed to the 999 service. This approach was agreed with the police.

28. None of the staff that responded to run the emergency helpline or social care interventions were on formal call out and all cancelled personal arrangements to attend.

### **Water provision**

29. By early evening the CHD was receiving calls about lack of water to multi-storey residential buildings. I advised the police commander and started contingency planning for an emergency bottled water distribution in the affected areas with Portsmouth Water Company. The restoration of power from 2030hrs onwards eventually saw the restoration of water supplies. The lack of water and functioning toilets was a significant disruption for residents, and if the power outage had lasted longer would have presented major logistical issues for responding agencies to alleviate.

### **Multi-agency working**

30. Whilst there was an inevitable process of information exchange and catch-up during the morning of the incident, communication was generally adequate. I attended a tactical meeting held by Chief Superintendent Peacock at 1800hrs when contingencies for a second day without power were discussed.

31. Both the police and I have identified at our debrief on 8 July 2010 that it would have been useful if a management representative from SSE could have been available during the day, and present at the 1800hrs meeting when more extensive and potentially costly contingency plans for a second day were being discussed. We appreciate the primary focus of the company was to effect a complex repair in difficult circumstances. Our understanding of the incident and contingency planning would have been aided by a more formal engagement from SSE. As the incident commander, Chief Superintendent Peacock will take this up with the company.

## **Calls to the Emergency Helpline and housing out of hours**

32. The emergency helpline was open from 1300-2200 and received 52 calls. The housing out of hours team received 199 calls during the incident.

### **Outcomes**

33. The power failure and subsequent repair management were events the council did not control and could not fix. In any incident the short term disruption and understandable desire to alleviate inconvenience need to be balanced against the time, resources and costs involved in implementing more extensive measures. Given the confidence of the company to achieve a complete repair, the council response to the incident was proportionate, appropriately targeted and effective at providing interventions for the most vulnerable people affected by the lack of power.

34. A longer power outage would have created significant additional issues. Interventions such as water distribution and longer term support involving utility and other commercial providers are major operations and will generate costs to the council.

35. This was the first time the emergency helpline had been activated and whilst the volume of calls were low, it proved a cost effective and accessible method of providing information to the public and acting as a gateway to services.

36. The timely implementation of traffic management measures prevented gridlock and allowed traffic to flow freely. The use of the Common for overflow parking was a difficult but appropriate decision given the knock-on effect of potential congestion on the major access road to the city.

37. I would like the panel to record my thanks to all the staff and partner agencies who supported the response.

38. The Civil Contingencies Unit will be taking forward the following learning:

- Further contingency planning with Portsmouth Water and partner agencies on emergency water distribution
- Update 'Loss of utilities' action card in the Emergency Response Plan to reflect the roles of the out of hours housing and social care teams.
- Update 'Loss of utilities' and 'Emergency Traffic Plan' action cards in the Emergency Response Plan to reflect the role of the Clean City Team.

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