

Environment and Communities Committee

18 July 2024

Cheshire East Major Emergency Response Plan Update

Report of: Tom Shuttleworth, Interim Director Environment and Neighbourhoods

Report Reference No: EC/22/24-25

Wards Affected: ALL

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report seeks approval to adopt the updated Cheshire East Major Emergency Response Plan (“MERP”).
- 2 Updating the MERP supports the Open Corporate Plan objective by ensuring that the Councils duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 are clearly set out a structured way, providing a framework for responses to emergency events and defining the role of officers and members in doing so.

Executive Summary

- 3 As a Unitary Council, with statutory emergency planning and community resilience responsibilities as a category 1 responder as defined in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, Cheshire East Council must have in place a plan that guides its response should an emergency impact upon the organisation itself or the community it serves. It is also required to support the actions of the emergency services, together with any other authority that may require assistance as a result of an emergency in the surrounding area.
- 4 The updated MERP is considered a confidential document for internal use within the Council organisation and is therefore contained as a part 2 appendix A to this report.

- 5 The plan gives an outline of how Cheshire East Council will respond to emergencies. It is a generic plan for a wide range of incidents.
- 6 In 2016, Cheshire East Council adopted the current MERP, and following a full review and consultation exercise, we have now produced an updated Plan for approval, which meets our legislative responsibilities as a Category 1 responder, alongside other organisations such as the emergency services, NHS and the Environment Agency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Environment and Communities committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the adoption of the updated Major Emergency Response Plan for Cheshire East
2. Delegate authority to the Interim Director Environment and Neighbourhoods to undertake updates to the Plan on a periodic basis.

Background

- 7 The purpose of the Council Major Emergency Response Plan is to provide guidance to Council Officers and Services on the various procedures and actions that will be put in place in the event of a major emergency.
- 8 An emergency is defined in the Civil Contingences Act 2004 as: *“An event or situation, with a range of serious consequences, which requires special arrangements to be implemented by one or more emergency responder agencies.”*
- 9 A major emergency is beyond the scope of business-as-usual operations, and is likely to involve serious harm, damage, disruption or risk to human life or welfare, essential services, the environment or national security.
- 10 As a Unitary Council, with statutory emergency planning and community resilience responsibilities as a category 1 responder as defined in the Civil Contingences Act 2004, Cheshire East Council must have in place a plan that guides its response should an emergency impact upon the organisation itself or the community it serves. It is also required to support the actions of the emergency services, together with any other authority that may require assistance as a result of an emergency in the surrounding area.

- 11 The current version of the Cheshire East MERP has been in place since 2009 and has been activated effectively in response to many major incidents or major incident standbys in the intervening period including the Bosley Wood Flour Mill Disaster (2015).
- 12 The last large scale revisions were made when Public Health functions transferred to local authorities (2013), and a Members' section was introduced (2015), with the current version having been adopted in 2016.
- 13 Considering the Pandemic and the lessons learned in responding to this, together with more recent government led guidance updates it is considered an appropriate point in time to undertake a more holistic update.
- 14 The updated MERP is considered a confidential document for internal use within the Council organisation and is therefore contained as a part 2 appendix A to this report.
- 15 The plan gives an outline of how Cheshire East Council will respond to emergencies. It is a generic plan for a wide range of incidents.
 - (a) The plan gives definitions of a Major Incident and Major Incident Stand-by;
 - (b) Guidance on procedures in an emergency incident and also the different incident response models;
 - (c) Ensures that there is a coordinated response both internally as a council, and with other Category 1 responders;
 - (d) The plan outlines responsibilities of different roles (such as Incident Coordinator, the Strategic Emergency Management Group and Elected Members);
 - (e) It explains the council response structure and how it fits in with the multi-agency command and control structures and;
 - (f) The plan also signposts to additional incident, location or other specific response plans (such as flooding and severe weather, COMAH sites and the Rest Centre plans)
- 16 The implementation of the MERP will be the responsibility of the Emergency Planning team. The Plan is a live document and will be reviewed and updated regularly based on experience and learning from emergencies and events, together with any national legislative or policy guidance changes and the like.

Consultation and Engagement

- 17 The MERP was developed by the Emergency Planning Team over several months. Consultation was undertaken and input sought and received from numerous services and Members.
- 18 External to the council, revised information that went into the MERP came from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board, Cheshire Police, the Northwest Headquarters of the Army and officers from the Cheshire Resilience Forum.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 19 It is important that any MERP is reviewed and updated regularly to ensure that it remains fit for purpose as highlighted by the prevailing statutory guidance and considering experience and lessons learned from actual emergency events.

Other Options Considered

- 20 The Council has the option to proceed without adopting an updated MERP. However, the current Plan last saw a substantive update in 2016 and has been successfully utilised in response to a variety of events in the intervening period. It is good practice to ensure that the Plan is updated regularly so it remains reliable and relevant.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 21 The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 places an obligation on local authorities as nominated category 1 responders. It is good practice to have in place a MERP to ensure that the organisations response is co-ordinated in a range of different scenarios and that officers understand their roles and responsibilities in managing a major emergency event situation.
- 22 The current MERP has been in place for 8 years and due to amended guidance and the experience and lessons learned in the intervening period, it is the right time to update the current Plan.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 23 There are no significant direct financial costs arising from adoption of the MERP. The production of the updated MERP has been delivered within existing Emergency Planning service budgets.

24 The Emergency Planning service budget funds day-to-day implementation of the MERP. Therefore, there is no anticipated impact on the Council's approved budget/Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), however as is the case now any major emergency event could potentially result in further costs subject to type and scale.

Policy

25 Updating the MERP contributes to delivery of the priorities in the [Corporate Plan](#) as follows:

<p>An open and enabling organisation</p> <p>Ensure there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making</p>	<p>A thriving and sustainable place</p> <p>A great place for people to live, work and visit</p> <p>Reduce impact on the environment</p>
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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

26 There are no specific equality, diversity or inclusion issues relating to having a MERP in place for the organisation.

Human Resources

27 There are no direct implications for human resources.

Risk Management

28 Having a MERP in place and the framework that this provides to ensuring a robust and coherent response to emergency events mitigates the risk that the Council fails to properly undertake its duties as a nominated category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

Rural Communities

29 There are no direct implications for rural communities specifically; however, the MERP will apply to the whole borough of Cheshire East, including all rural communities.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

30 The MERP does not have a direct implication for children and young people or cared for children.

Public Health

- 31 The MERP provides the framework to respond to emergency events which may relate to public health issues such as outbreaks of infectious diseases and the like.

Climate Change

- 32 There are no direct implications for climate change.

Access to Information	
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Appendices:	Appendix 1: Updated Cheshire East Major Emergency Response Plan (Part 2 confidential)
Background Papers:	N/A