

**PUBLIC EMERGENCY WARNING SYSTEM
(Report by Head of Operations)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report is for Cabinet to note the proposal to establish a text message and e-mail warning system for the public for flooding and other major emergency incidents.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Following the introduction of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 a statutory duty is now placed on Local authorities to warn and inform the public:
- on what plans are being developed to deal with a major incident or emergency in the District, and
 - in the event of such an incident, what advice is available to assist them in dealing with the disruption it is likely to cause.
- 2.2 At the present time the Council is very much dependant on the local media, predominantly BBC Radio Cambridgeshire and Q103, to disseminate information to the public in the event of an emergency, particularly in flooding situations. More recently arrangements have also been made to post messages on the front page of the Council's website.
- 2.3 These systems are useful but are restricted to those residents who either listen to those particular radio stations or regularly check the Council's website. This is particularly relevant at the start of an emergency when the public may not be geared up to access this information. The Environment Agency have their own flood warning system but this is restricted to people who live in particular flood risk areas.
- 2.4 Huntingdonshire has a very large commuter population and these residents, whilst possibly having access to the internet at their place of work, may not have access to the local radio stations and therefore may be unaware of a situation which could affect them on their return. This proposal is aimed at making them aware of such an incident, giving them brief information on what the incident involves and signposting them to the Council's website for further information.

3. PUBLIC WARNING SYSTEM PROPOSAL

- 3.1 It is proposed to develop a text messaging and email system to which members of the public in Huntingdonshire may sign up to free of charge. Those wishing to sign up will need a mobile phone number and/or an email address – both of which will be entered onto a database.
- 3.2 In the event of an emergency affecting the District Council area a text message would be generated and sent to all the registered mobile phones. This message would advise the recipient that there was an incident in the area and where to go to obtain further information
- 3.3 An email message would also be generated and sent to all the recipients who had registered their email addresses. This email could carry much more detailed information including estimated times when the information may be updated. Both the text message and the email would direct the recipient to the Council's website where a system will be established to keep the information as up to date as possible. The system will not require a new database but will use the existing Outlook contacts system.
- 3.4 Activation of the system would be at the discretion of the Emergency Planning Duty Officer or Manager of the Emergency Incident Room

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The scheme would be publicised through press releases, the Council website and Districtwide. There is no similar scheme anywhere else in the County and so there is likely to be media interest in the scheme when it is launched.
- 4.2 The Council already has a good email system and therefore it is not envisaged that there will be any financial resource implications regarding the sending of emails to a list of registered members. The IT infrastructure is already in place for establishing the database and the generation of the emails.
- 4.3 The text message system would cost around £11 per month plus 3p per text message sent. It is anticipated that this cost can be covered through the existing Emergency Planning budget.
- 4.4 There will be some officer time required in maintaining the databases and generating the messages. This time can be covered by the CCTV and Emergency Planning Team and the Emergency Response Team during an incident.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 This proposal is not designed to replace any other warning systems in operation. It is designed to compliment these systems and enhance the service the Council provide to the communities of Huntingdonshire in the event of an emergency.
- 5.2 The Environment Agency and the County Council Civil Protection Team have been consulted as part of the investigation into the feasibility of this scheme and they are supportive of the idea.


6. RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 It is recommended that Cabinet

Note the establishment of the public emergency warning system as set out in this report.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Civil Contingencies Act 2004
Preparing for Emergencies – Civil Contingencies Secretariat

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