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| Briefing for: | Safer Communities Executive Board | Item number | |
| Title: | Haringey Emergency Alert Service | | |
| Lead Officer: | Andrew Meek, Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Manager | | |
| Date: | 14 th January 2010 | | |
| Cabinet member input and introduction | The Council has a statutory duty to communicate with the public to warn and inform people about emergencies. Text messaging is the most accessible format for many people, and provides a means for getting information to many people as quickly as possible. This service will operate with ward based contact lists to ensure messages are relevant locally, and a borough-wide list to keep key stakeholders informed. | | |

1. Purpose of this paper

To inform and advise SCEB Members about the Haringey Emergency Alert service.

2. Background and context

The Council, along with the emergency services and a number of other agencies, have a statutory duty under the Civil Contingencies Act to put in place systems to provide information to the public about emergencies. This takes two forms:

- Information to help people prepare for emergencies themselves
- Systems to warn and inform people in the event of an emergency.

A number of boroughs, and other local authorities have put in place mass messaging systems to alert the public about potential emergencies.

3. The text alert system

The Haringey Emergency Alert system will send a text message to all those who have subscribed to the service, to make them aware of emergencies in a timely manner.

Text messages are the best format for messages for most people, because they are quick, simple and will reach people wherever they happen to be. But the system can



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send messages email, landline, or fax and these options will be made available to ensure accessibility, as required under the Disability Discrimination Act.

The system will be set up with ward contact lists to make the messages locally relevant. There will also be a borough wide list to ensure key stakeholders are made aware of any serious incident in the borough.

4. The messages

Standard messages have been developed which can be adapted for the incident at the time of need. These messages are designed to be factual, non-alarmist and with a clear call to action.

- Severe Weather

"<Insert weather – e.g. Heavy snow> is expected within the next few hours, please avoid travelling where possible. Tune into TV or Radio forecasts for more information"

- Stay away

"An incident has occurred in <insert area>. Police cordons are in place. Please avoid the area if possible. For more information go to www.haringey.gov.uk"

- Stay in [e.g. in case of an air quality incident]

"An incident has occurred in <insert area>. Please stay inside if at all possible. We will keep you advised of developments. For more information go to www.haringey.gov.uk"

- Evacuation

"Due to an incident in <insert area> you may be advised by the Emergency Services or Council to leave your home. Please ensure you are prepared."

It is not proposed to use the system for routine communication of a non-urgent nature. By limiting its use to emergencies it is anticipated that residents will be more likely to recognise the urgency of the message and act appropriately.

5. Marketing and subscription

Initially, sign up to the service will be via email response to the Emergency Planning team. The following key groups will be approached as key community stakeholders:

- Councillors and MPs
- Faith leaders
- Community and voluntary sector groups
- Schools and other education facilities



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- Residents associations
- Traders associations and business organisations
- GPs / Community Health Centres
- Social care providers

It is proposed to extend the service thereafter to residents at large via:

- Subscription via the Haringey website
- Invitation to callers to the Contact Centre
- Inclusion in various public awareness initiatives.

The service will become a key component of the awareness raising activities of the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Team. Particular attention will be paid to extending the service to vulnerable people.

It is accepted that an English-language service may not be as accessible for some members of the community. Translating messages is not practicable, and it is believed that in many cases family members will be able to interpret for those with weak English language skills.

6. Controls

It will be important to strike a balance between ensuring the timeliness of the warning being issued, and the need to maintain consistency and appropriateness of tone in communicating with the public.

Haringey Emergency Alert Service will be operated by the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Manager or the duty Emergency Planning Officer. Messages will be approved prior to being sent by one of the following (depending on availability)

- Cabinet Member for Enforcement and Safer Community Safety
- Corporate Head of Safer Stronger Communities
- A CEMB member
- Duty press officer, Head of Communications or Communications Manager.

7. Costs

The service will cost the Council £250 per month, plus 6p per message if over 500 messages are sent. This threshold is unlikely to be reached unless a borough-wide emergency notification needs to be sent.

The chosen provider is PageOne Communications. This is separate from the Council's main provider for text messaging because they provide greater guarantees of availability and security for the service. PageOne Communications are widely used within the NHS, and are government-approved for major incident communication.

8. Limitations



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It is important to note that the Council cannot and should not guarantee to send a message, but will make every reasonable endeavour to do so. The service can be operated out of hours, without office access.

9. Neighbourhood Link

The Metropolitan Police Service are rolling out a service across London called “Neighbourhood Link”, which will also issue text messages. This remains at an early stage, and its emphasis is unclear. It is expected that it will issue some security and terrorism-related alerts, as well as more general crime information.

Focus groups have shown that different parts of the community will react differently to information from different agencies. It is also our experience that different agencies do not always have a shared view of what information is their responsibility to issue to the public. As a result, the guidance from the London Resilience Team is that boroughs should develop and maintain their own system, and be prepared to pass on appropriate messages from Neighbourhood Link.

If it proves appropriate to merge the two services at a later date, there will be no financial penalty associated with doing so.