

## Background and Context

In the early hours of Sunday 11 December 2005, explosions at Buncefield Oil Storage Depot, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire resulted in a large fire, which engulfed a high proportion of the site.

Over 40 people were injured; there were no fatalities. Significant damage occurred to both commercial and residential properties in the vicinity and 2,000 people were evacuated on emergency service advice.

The fire burned for several days, destroying most of the site and emitting large clouds of black smoke into the atmosphere. Over 16,000 employees within the adjacent Maylands Industrial Area were unable to access work and 92 businesses were displaced for more than one week. 17 were forced to permanently relocate.

Overall, the explosion cost local businesses more than £70 million in lost stock, lost revenue and relocation expenses.

## How the Topic was Handled

Although the economically fragile were most affected by the incident, it also had a considerable impact on both the poorer and more affluent societies in Hemel Hempstead. As the incident occurred in the run up to Christmas, there was a need for immediate financial support. This took a number of different forms, such as uninsured loss, small cash sums and money for food. In particular, immediate support was needed by casual workers who had lost their source of employment.

In the longer term, financial support issues included uninsured loss, replacement of work tools and personal protective equipment for self employed workers, small grants for redecorating children's bedrooms, the cost of private counselling, help with paying debts and higher heating bills due to damaged housing.

One of the biggest issues in terms of financial support was the delays in providing benefits (e.g. 6 weeks), due to the nature and length of the benefits process. Job Centre Plus played a key role in the work undertaken by the Community Recovery Taskforce and the resulting impact in terms of job losses was less than initially anticipated. Although the majority of people managed to keep their jobs, associated issues, such as relocation, increased travelling expenses and additional expenditure associated with child care placed an increased financial burden on some people.

There were also numerous issues regarding insurance and legal rights. However, the Borough Council was conscious that they had to remain neutral in terms of some of these issues and were effectively only able to provide general help and signposting.

## Lessons Identified

Dacorum Borough Council has identified one key lesson relating to financial support for individuals. It has to be recognised that the local economy is fundamentally important in terms of the longer term recovery

of the community. There are so many knock on and indirect financial impacts that it is particularly difficult to separate the two.

## **Contacts for Further Information**

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## **Additional Documents**

The [Buncefield Multi-Agency Recovery Plan](#) (version 1.1) includes considerable detail about the establishment of the Community Recovery Taskforce and particularly the work undertaken in the weeks and months immediately following the incident.

The Report of the [Report of the Buncefield Community Recovery Taskforce](#) (December 2005 – May 2007) provides a comprehensive overview of the community recovery to date.