

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.

The nature and scale of the incident placed a considerable burden on the resources of Dacorum Borough Council. Not only did normal service delivery have to be maintained, but the tasks of managing the ongoing incident response, the removal of waste, and repairs to housing, created additional pressures.

How the Topic was Handled

As far as Dacorum Borough Council was concerned, local performance targets following the incident were not a concern. The decision was taken that resources and effort should be directed towards managing the recovery phase and maintaining normal services to a level whereby it was felt that residents would not be disadvantaged. Maintaining service delivery was considered to be more important than meeting performance indicators, so they were effectively suspended for four months.

Whilst there was some limited impact on the closure of accounts, other significant issues, such as compiling Bellwin Scheme claims, dealing with insurance issues and undertaking repairs to a large amount of local authority housing, it also helped turn attention away from the day to day running of the Borough Council. There appears to be no evidence of any complaints or issues arising from the suspension of local performance targets.

Lessons Identified

The key lesson identified by Dacorum Borough Council was that, in the context of the magnitude of the incident, performance indicators were not considered to be an issue. Allowing middle managers the freedom to respond to the ongoing incident, whilst maintaining normal service delivery to residents, was more important.

The flexibility of staff from Dacorum Borough Council was a key feature of both the incident response and recovery. Consideration was given to how

existing staff skills could be transferred and utilised to undertake the many tasks that were necessary.

Contacts for Further Information

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