

**Meeting:** Operation Highbrow: Multi-agency Debrief  
**Date:** 14 August 2006  
**Location:** Uttlesford District Council (UDC), Saffron Walden, Essex.

**Present:**

Rod Chamberlain (UDC)  
Liz Petrie (UDC)  
Carole Hughes (UDC)  
June Thompson (ECC)  
Rosanna Briggs (ECC)  
Steve Daly (ECC/UDC)  
Robert Needham (Colchester BC)  
Geoff Stacy (GO East)  
Lawrence Fit-Savage (GO East)  
Michael Perry (UDC)  
Alan (Operations Manager for NHS)  
Dale Atkins (PCT)  
Glynis Williamson (WRVS)  
Sara Baker (WRVS)  
Martyn Lockwood Essex Police)  
Denise Yuell  
Angela Kelly (Uttlesford Welfare officer Red Cross)  
Liz Hand (Partnership Manager for Job Centre Plus)  
Jason Dear (UDC)  
Murray Hardy (UDC)  
Phil O'Dell (UDC)  
John Mitchell (UDC)

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The Chief Executive of Uttlesford District Council conducted an initial briefing; 930 people on four flights of whom 130 required assistance, many required help for onward travel whereas others required rest at the hotel before their onward travel. The rest of the evacuees required longer-term housing.

The Executive Manager for Corporate Governance (UDC) reported that the response teams were first activated on Thursday 20 July 2006. He added that there were some differences in flight times from various sources and that this had caused some confusion.

The Emergency Planning Officer from ECC reported that they became aware of the possibility of the arrival of evacuees into Stansted Airport and notified the District Emergency Planning Officer (DEPO). DCLG had informed ECC that there was a strong possibility of a flight arriving at Stansted Airport.

GO East were relying on information from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office for times of flight arrivals.

WRVS were already on Standby as they were informed by colleagues from other parts of the country that were affected. The NHS Ambulance trust reported that there was some misleading information from GO East but this was rectified in the end.

The DEPO reported that after some discussion, UDC had decided to utilize a hotel local to the airport and had put two local schools on standby as rest centre. The Chief Executive added that there was a deficit in staff and this would have proved difficult in setting up a school as a rest centre. It appeared that the use of a hotel was beneficial due to the available resources.

Insurance issues came to light when one school was put on standby. These issues continued to a strategic level and were predominately over the responsibility to cover the excess should a claim be made. In the end, this was not a problem as the school was not used.

**LEARNING POINT: Arrangements to be revised so that such issues do not transpire in the future.**

ECC expressed the view that the multi-agency briefing should have taken place earlier to allow for extra time to undertake any resulting actions. Nonetheless, the Briefing was very useful to all parties concerned.

**LEARNING POINT: UDC Response Teams and CMT to ensure that a multi-agency briefing transpires as a first point of call.**

The Chief Executive of UDC reported that on Saturday morning, the arrangements were made so that there was a crew of three at the airport and another crew to set up a local airport hotel as a rest centre. The intention of the crew at the airport was to meet the evacuees onboard the plane and guide those who require assistance to the coaches. The coaches would then transport the evacuees to the hotel. The idea of boarding the plane did not work as the evacuees were eager to alight.

Job Centre Plus advised that evacuees with credit cards could not be given travel warrants and that in future; other agencies need to be aware of this.

**LEARNING POINT: awareness training.**

The NHS/PCT reported that an “on call manager” attended the hotel along with a GP. However, UDC added that the presence of GP from commencement of the operation would have been more efficient. The PCT replied stating that it appeared that there was communication issues in what is and what was and what wasn't required.

**Saturday 22 July 2006:**

The Chief Executive of UDC advised that the first evacuees arrived on Saturday and that support from the voluntary agencies was very good. There were a few issues regarding Social Services which ECC to try and rectify. Job Centre Plus reported that the information from the airport to the hotel was misleading as one report stated that there would be a few evacuees and another stated that there would be many. The log sheets show that all agencies were briefed as to the amount of evacuees that were expected to arrive at the hotel.

The British Red Cross expressed the view that it would have been useful to have one of their staff present airside at the airport to attend to the needs of evacuees. The British Red Cross added that they have a contract with the Foreign & Commonwealth Office to provide this type of support and that this has been used to good effect at Gatwick and Heathrow. It would be good to develop this contingency at Stansted. **LEARNING POINT: Red Cross to conduct a follow up with Stansted Airport.**

The afternoon flight on Saturday 22 July 2006 contained only 22 people, but their welfare needs proved to be greater than those of the larger group received previously. The afternoon flight therefore put a more of a strain on the respondents than the morning flight.

Nevertheless, the PCT announced that the second flight was reasonably uncomplicated to manage as the needs of the evacuees were more clear-cut as to their medical issues.

The British Red Cross said that their problems arose towards the end of Saturday as the GP arrived and the evacuees from the first flight started to present a variety of medical problems.

**Sunday 23 July 2006:**

The Executive Manager for Development Services at UDC advised the meeting that by no means was the Sunday quiet, as various problem solving initiatives has been required. Problems persisted with the phone cards as some of them could not be used. The Executive Manager for Human Resources at UDC added that this problem was rendered due to BT not accepting the type of phone card that had been obtained and supplied to the evacuees. It was concluded that BT can forbid the use of any phone card and that in future it might be useful to research the types of phone cards that are acceptable to BT.

**LEARNING POINT: to ensure the phone cards purchased are accepted by all phones.**

GO East stated that as the time progressed, they took more of a *back seat* position so that their involvement did not conflict with the actions of the front line responders. Their role was to act as a conduit between agencies and aid the flow of information.

WRVS reported communication problems as they were not informed of the arrival of the last flight.

**Monday 24 July 2006:**

UDC Housing Team arrived at the hotel. They reported that, at first, it was relatively quiet but became busier as the day progressed. The Housing Team conducted interviews with the evacuees to ascertain their housing needs. The Housing Department made contact with DCLG and were informed that the statutory legislation would change so that the criteria to accommodate the evacuees can be changed. The Housing Department provided support and medical advice to the evacuees in conjunction with the British Red Cross. This was followed by a presentation to the evacuees to inform them of what has been done, what we aim to do and a general overview of life in the UK. UDC ensured that there were on-site available to the evacuees to advise them of any welfare and benefit needs.

The Housing Department worked with other internal departments to ascertain the availability of any possible medium term accommodation for the evacuees. The decision was made to utilize student accommodation in the Colchester area. The interviews carried on well into the afternoon and the British Red Cross and Job Centre Plus/DWP were very helpful. Housing asked for a GP but it was later that day before anyone arrived. When the GP did arrive, the pharmacy in the airport terminal had closed so prescriptions could not be processed until the following day.

**LEARNING POINT: the ambulance service can assist as they have teams that can dispense and prescribe medicines.**

The PCT reported that the GPs were constrained within normal surgery hours and that a GP could not be called out unless it was an emergency. The PCT advised that there is a communication list which can be used by the DC to communicate directly with the GP practices. It was added that prescriptions should not be a problem.

UDC reported that Social Services were not present. ECC reported that a misunderstanding had been logged regarding the use of Broxbourne DC and the need for Social Care.

Housing hoped to get some accommodation in Broxbourne but this did not materialise. It was later clarified that Uttlesford was the lead agency for this emergency.

Colchester BC Emergency Plans also report that during the evening of Monday 24 July 2006, they received a call from the university that they were involved in the housing of the evacuees. Joint planning for the medium term accommodation began.

**Tuesday 25 July 2006:**

The flight arrived containing predominately British ex-pats. There were a few problems at the airport as the evacuees were integrated with holiday makers in the baggage reclaim area. This occurred because contrary to expectations, the evacuee's baggage was put on the same carousel as an ordinary flight from Cork.

The Housing Department reported that there were concerns as they received notification that the university accommodation has been stood down. Despite enquiries, the source of the instruction to stand the accommodation down could not be traced.

Colchester BC Emergency Plans Department advised the meeting that DCLG issued a request through GO East to LA's asking for information on medium to long term accommodation provision. Colchester BC Emergency Plans acted on this and advised of the availability of the student accommodation in Colchester.

It was agreed in the meeting that some misinterpretation and communication problems had occurred as requests for various agencies to stand down resulted in confusion over whether the student accommodation was not required. In the latter, the issue was resolved and all agencies concerned came to a consensus that the university accommodation was to remain open.

**LEARNING POINT: To ensure clear channels of communication and that one officer/liason officer takes responsibility for communicating information.**

Colchester BC reported that it was a very hot day and that briefings were to be done on the coach as the evacuees arrived at the student accommodation. Colchester BC added that all organisations were very supportive. The system worked well with the arrival of the first coach as it was air conditioned. However, an unforeseen delay was a family made requests to be jointly accommodated on the same floor as another family.

ECC reported that the support and goodwill from some organisations to provide resources were nearly lost as confusion arose regarding the communication issue of whether to stand down or not.

GO East at this point was communicating with other government offices to identify their experiences.

UDC Housing reported that the decision to keep the evacuees on the coaches for a briefing upon arrival at the Student accommodation was a problem. UDC Housing Officers reported that it would have been better if the evacuees had been immediately directed from the coach to the accommodation upon arrival in Colchester due to the temperature on that day.

Job Centre Plus reported that they were under a lot of pressure as they had to administer crisis loans. Another problem is that there was little personal documentation of the evacuees so the provision of loans became very difficult.

#### **The Future:**

There have been problems in long-term accommodation. This operation has cost the Council a lot of money in not merely providing housing but furniture, kitchen equipment etc. The voluntary agencies have countered this as they have provided resources. It was reported that the expenses are well over the budget for the Council and that although they had coped in the initial phase, the long-term costs are more detrimental.

GO East reported that their powers do not sustain ability to reimburse the Council for any costs incurred but that they can advise of the best course of direction. They advised that a clear and robust record of expenditure should be kept.

#### **Media:**

UDC provided information to the media on Monday 24 July 2006. The Chief Executive did some live interviews on BBC and radio. Local media have challenged the Council as to who should be paying for this response. The media have been inundating the evacuees with questions and requests for information/stories.

ECC made the decision not to do anything with regard to the media as the responsibility lay on UDC. ECC said that they would like to be informed of any media reports during an emergency.

By the Thursday, the media problems occurred as only one person was available to manage the media and perform their individual role.

The media were later informed not to attend the student accommodation or to engage with the evacuees as they were tired.

ECC reported that there are various working groups (Media and public relations working group for example) who could support the Council.

**AOB:**

- Martyn Lockwood mentioned that the problems experienced are very common and that the response appeared to be very positive.
- The Ambulance Trust advised that locally, it worked very well and that in future they would like to be more involved
- WRVS felt that UDC staff worked very well.
- British Red Cross reported that UDC staff worked very well as a team. They reported that it was difficult to identify UDC staff as many were not wearing Ids or any form of identifying clothing.
- Job Centre Plus reinforced the comments stated by the Red Cross and that their details should be included in the Emergency Plan for future reference.
- GO East stated that their role was predominately to share and coordinate information and that they didn't want to get too involved as this may affect the lead agency.
- Housing Officers reported that the evacuees although more comfortable are still traumatised from the events in Lebanon.
- ECC reported that UDC did a very good job.
- Colchester BC said that there should be a person identified from within the "community of evacuees" to act as a liaison officer/representative.
- Housing has put in an appeal for help in sourcing kitchen utensils, cutlery and towels for the evacuees to use when they move into more permanent accommodation.
- Housing made a strong appeal to Social Services that once the evacuees move, they may find it difficult to become part of the local community and that it would be useful if a Social Services representative should make some visits to each of them.
- The Housing Department suggested that it would also be useful if someone from the PCT could speak to the evacuees to advise them how and where medical supplies can be obtained.
- British Red Cross advised that they can provide a service to show people how to access public services such as local GPs, etc.

Alasdair gave a closing speech and thank you to all delegates.