

**Agenda Item No:** 4  
**Report To:** Overview and Scrutiny  
**Date:** 22 September 2015  
**Report Title:** Emergency Planning response to Oak Tree Road Gas explosion.  
**Report Author:** Della Fackrell, Resilience Partnership Manager



<b>Summary:</b>	A brief overview of Ashford Borough Council emergency planning arrangements and specific response to the Oak Tree Road Gas explosion and fire.
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**Key Decision:** No

**Affected Wards:** Beaver Ward

**Recommendations:** **The Cabinet be asked to:-**  
Note the contents of the report for information.

**Policy Overview:**

**Financial Implications:** None

**Risk Assessment** No

**Equalities Impact Assessment** No

**Other Material Implications:**

**Exemption Clauses:** **None**

**Background Papers:** None

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## **Report Title: Emergency Response to Gas Explosion in Oak Tree Road**

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide members with an overview of Ashford Borough Council's preparedness to respond to an incident in the borough
2. To inform members on the emergency response and recovery actions taken by ABC officers to the gas explosion incident.

### **Background**

1. ABC has a Major Emergency Plan which was issued in January 2013 and is scheduled to be reviewed this winter. The plan includes details of specific roles and procedures that staff will follow. Each role has a detailed check list to assist staff in ensuring they cover all their actions they are responsible for.
2. To support this plan ABC have a fully resourced emergency centre which is located in Committee Room 2. There are additional telephones, stationery and white boards in the cupboard. There are also two panaboards in the room which have three separate purposes. The first provides a summary of the current situation of the incident. The Second lists focuses of our response or recovery actions. The final board shows what actions are outstanding and who has responsibility for these. These therefore provide a very good overview for our Assistant Emergency Coordinator and Information Manager on how our response is going.
3. We have developed bitesize training sessions for staff that fulfil the roles in the emergency centre, at the scene or in the welfare centre. These sessions focus on specific elements of their role which ensures they understand them before having to put them all together in response.
4. We are looking to run a live emergency centre exercise as soon as we can but clearly nothing is as good as a real emergency. We use the response to any incident to review all of our processes and procedures.
5. We are therefore holding a structured debrief on 18 September 2015 for some of the staff that responded during the Gas explosion incident. The debrief date has been delayed due to the response to Op Stack and the summer holiday period. The remainder of the staff that responded have completed a structured debrief form to ensure everyone's comments are included. These forms were also sent to the staff attending but they will be using it on the day as an aide memoire for the discussions at the structured debrief.
6. A report summarising the recommendations from staff and emergency planning will be produced and taken to management team for approval.

## Key actions during the response and recovery

### 7. Monday 15/06/15

8. A call was made to Della Fackrell at 15:50 by Gareth Recht in the Ashford Monitoring Centre advising on information that had come across on the police radio. It was unknown at this time of the scale of the incident.
9. Further calls were made to emergency planning police and fire contacts to confirm the seriousness of the incident. It became clear that these were ABC properties and that it was unlikely that the residents would be able to return after being evacuated by the fire service. It was agreed with our partners that we would send an Incident Liaison Officer (ILO) to the scene to represent ABC. This ensured that we could have our own eyes and ears there to feed back to the emergency centre.
10. Emergency planning therefore worked on level 3 with housing colleagues to establish a rest centre to provide shelter for the evacuated residents. While this was happening other ABC officers were recruited in to their emergency planning roles and proceeded to set up the emergency centre in committee room 2.
11. The centre was ready to be used at around 1730 which meant all officers could then work from one location.
12. We set up a rest centre at Oakleigh House (Sheltered Scheme) in Beaver Lane, South Ashford as it was a short walk from the affected properties. This was a great advantage as our housing officers had easy access but the property was secure.
13. Many of the residents went to stay with relatives; one resident had been taken to East Grinstead burns unit. The housing officers had clear records of whom and where the residents were.
14. The focuses of ABC's response on this first night were:
  - the rest centre for support to the residents and public,
  - assisting in securing the site overnight through erecting heras fencing
  - Glass fragments in the area
  - Likelihood of demolition of the building
  - Advice to residents to attend Oakleigh House for further information
  - Road closure and the associated impacts
  - Consideration of the recovery phase.
15. The emergency centre was closed down at midnight as the site was secure and all of the residents were at their agreed locations.

### 16. Tuesday 16/06/15

17. The emergency centre opened again at 0730 ready for an update briefing from Housing and Incident Liaison Officers. This enabled all officers dealing with the recovery from the incident to ensure we delivered a coordinated and efficient response.
18. A key focus for the emergency centre now was to ensure that regular and informative updates were provided to residents, councillors and the media. The Incident Liaison Officers on site were liaising directly with the residents.

19. The police handed the site over to the HSE during the morning. Our ILO's therefore worked with the HSE officers on site feeding back to the emergency centre on any further resources

20. Wednesday 17/06/15

21. There were two main focus areas from today. Firstly working closely with the HSE and their requirements and secondly housing working with the residents for more permanent temporary accommodation.

22. Our officers were also able to obtain some key personal items from some of the affected properties which reduced the concern of some residents.

23. By the end of the working day the HSE had completed their on-site inspections and were then able to hand the site over to ABC. The emergency centre closed down overnight once the site was confirmed as secure.

24. Thursday 18/06/15

25. In addition to the ongoing issues previously mentioned our main focus on site today was ensuring that the site was made safe and to liaise with Ashford Oaks School with reference to the impact of the road closure being in place long term.

26. Demolition of the site began on this day to make the structure safe for the surrounding properties.

27. We were making arrangements with a removal company to collect as much of the tenants possessions' as we could which would be stored and returned to them as soon as possible.

28. Another addition to our focus was to ensure all residents had enough cash to get them over the weekend until bank cards etc. could be recovered. The council therefore spoke to each resident to assess and ensure they had this cash available if required.

29. The HSE had made some further requests for information which the emergency centre was able to coordinate and allocate to the correct officers.

30. Friday 19/06/15

31. By Friday the emergency centre was very much scaled down as we were dealing with the last few clean up issues and officers were starting to be able to return to business as usual for housing. The centre was therefore closed during the afternoon.

## **Summary**

32. From an emergency planning perspective we continued to finalise some outstanding actions with the HSE, the school and road closure.

33. All through the response we were receiving constant positive feedback from the residents and partner agencies about how the council had dealt with this incident. We had acknowledged that the key element during our response was communication and our Communications team ensured that this continued every day.

34. Clearly at the time of writing this report we have not held the debrief but I am more than happy to provide a verbal update at the meeting to outline the areas highlighted that we could improve our response in the future.

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