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# Customer Journey – Out of Hours

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<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	24 May 2022
<b>Portfolio Member:</b>	Councillor Tom Marino
<b>Report Author:</b>	Carolyn Richardson
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	OSMC

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## 1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report is seeking to provide to the OSMC the information provided to the Task and Finish group appointed by OSMC to review the customer journey. It provides context and background information relating to the Councils out of hours (OOH) provision which is one part of the Terms of Reference for the review.
- 1.2 It will highlight the customer and Council interface; provide statistics in relation to the calls received; the services provided out of hours and how these services are provided; the costs associated with these service provisions and the means of escalating an emergency response. The report also contains some suggestions for improvements provided by Officers. It does not include the suggestions by the Task and Finish Group. The Task Group Chairman will provide a verbal update at this meeting, with a written report setting out the Task Group's recommendations in full to be provided to a subsequent meeting of OSMC.

## 2 Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that OSMC:

- Notes the contents of this report.
- Notes the suggested improvements made by the Officers.
- Provides feedback in relation to any other improvements for Officers to consider and progress.

## 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	There may be some financial implications depending on the outcome of the review.

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<b>Human Resource:</b>	There may be some HR implications depending on the outcome of the review in relation to Job Descriptions (JDs) for OOH provision including changing of JDs for Senior Officers			
<b>Legal:</b>	There are legal duties to provide out of hours provision.			
<b>Risk Management:</b>	Any risk should be reduced by implementing the suggested changes.			
<b>Property:</b>	None			
<b>Policy:</b>	None to note at this stage.			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	X			Depending on the outcome of the review there are likely to be positive recommendations to take forward to improve and reduce any inequalities
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	X			Depending on the outcome of the review there are likely to be positive recommendations to take forward to improve the lives of people with protected characteristics
<b>Environmental Impact:</b>		X		
<b>Health Impact:</b>		X		

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<b>ICT Impact:</b>		X		There may be some ICT impacts as a result of the outcome of the review. These may be projects which may have an impact on resources but be positive for the customer. Hence neutral statement at moment
<b>Digital Services Impact:</b>		X		There may be some impacts for digital services as a result of the outcome of the review. These may be projects which may have an impact on resources but be positive for the customer. Hence neutral statement at moment
<b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b>		X		
<b>Core Business:</b>	X			Depending on the outcome of the review there are likely to be positive recommendations to take forward to improve and reduce any inequalities
<b>Data Impact:</b>		X		
<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	All third tier managers and above were engaged in the development of some elements of this report.			

## 4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 This report is being tabled in relation to the Out of Hours Service provided by the Council and the customer journey which is being reviewed by OSMC.
- 4.2 The report provides the background, the processes involved and the reasons for the current arrangements. It also provides some data in relation to the usage of the service and the costs.
- 4.3 The report touches briefly on the Emergency Duty Service which covers the social care and housing services out of hours but doesn't go into detail.
- 4.4 It was reported to the Task and Finish Group that the out of hours service provided by the Council is adequate in relation to the requirements and the resources available. However there are always opportunities to improve the service some of which were provided to the Task and Finish Group to consider and are included in this report.

- 4.5 This report was considered at the meeting of the T&F Group on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2022 and where a number of other proposals for improvements and considerations were discussed. It is understood that these, and other recommendations following the completion of the T&F Group will be provided in a report to OSCM at a future date.

## 5 Supporting Information

### Introduction

- 5.1 This report provides the Task and Finish Group with an overview of the customer journey when the customer contacts the Council outside of the normal working hours. It will highlight the customer and Council interface; provide statistics in relation to the calls received; the services provided out of hours and how these services are provided; the costs associated with these service provisions and the means of escalating an emergency response. The report also contains some suggestions for improvements.
- 5.2 This report is being prepared by the Service Manager for Emergency Planning as the current lead for the Out of Hours Contact Centre contract, the coordination of the Council's Out of Hours Manual and the lead for preparing the Council's emergency response for Major Incidents. The Out of Hours service provision for each individual service is however the responsibility of those service managers.

### Background

- 5.3 There has been an Out of Hours service provided by this Council since 1998 and by its predecessors since at least the late 1980s. What services have been provided and how it has been provided has changed over the years often as a result of legislation changes and/or in relation to budgets.
- 5.4 Out of Hours for this Council would normally mean outside the hours that the Council offices are open which are normally 08:30 to 17:00hrs Monday to Thursday, 08:30 to 16:30hrs on a Friday and would include public holidays. During office hours the main contact route is through Customer Services.
- 5.5 There are however a number of services who as a matter of routine provide services outside of these hours including Registration, Leisure, Culture, Libraries, Car Parking, Care Homes, Waste etc. There are also a wide range of services who undertake pre-planned working outside of office hours including Legal and Governance Service for meetings, Public Protection teams for licensing and enforcement work.
- 5.6 In addition to those services mentioned above there are also a number of services, or their contractors, who provide an emergency response.
- 5.7 **Appendix 1** provides details of what each services provides outside office hours and how it is provided.
- 5.8 **Appendix 2** provides data associated with the service delivery. Explanations and analysis are provided in the report and in the area titled 'data'.
- 5.9 The focus of this report is in relation to the customer journey outside office hours and the services currently provided or not.

## Legal Requirements

5.10 There is no one specific piece of legislation requiring an out of hours service provision by Councils - instead several pieces of statute which directly or indirectly require provision of services are applicable, but can be summarised into being able to ensure:

- (a) Safeguarding is in place;
- (b) Health and Safety matters relating to services the Council is responsible for, such as debris on our Highways network;
- (c) Emergencies/Major Incidents can be responded to.

5.11 With respect to the ability to respond to emergency/ major incidents, it is noted that under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and associated guidance, the fundamental approach is an integrated management approach including the following 6 activities:

- (a) anticipation;
- (b) assessment;
- (c) prevention;
- (d) preparation;
- (e) response; and
- (f) recovery management.

There is no time definition in relation to how quickly the Council needs to be able to respond however by implication there should be an ability to do so for an emergency 24/7/365.

5.12 It should also be noted that under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (CCA) the definition of an emergency is:

- (a) an event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare in a place in the United Kingdom, only if it involves, causes or may cause:
  - i. loss of human life,
  - ii. human illness or injury,
  - iii. homelessness,
  - iv. damage to property,
  - v. disruption of a supply of money, food, water, energy or fuel,
  - vi. disruption of a system of communication,
  - vii. disruption of facilities for transport, or
  - viii. disruption of services relating to health.
- (b) an event or situation which threatens serious damage to the environment of a place in the United Kingdom, only if it involves, causes or may cause:
  - i. contamination of land, water or air with biological, chemical or radio-active matter, or
  - ii. disruption or destruction of plant life or animal life.

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- (c) war, or terrorism, which threatens serious damage to the security of the United Kingdom.

5.13 As a result, the focus of the out of hours provision currently focuses on ensuring we can respond to emergencies for which we have the legal duty to provide the service. Additionally, where we are requested to support another agency in ensuring they can respond to the emergency for which they are responsible, whilst taking into account the CCA definitions of an emergency.

5.14 The challenge is often a balance between what is an emergency to one person is not necessarily an emergency for another and there is often a very fine line between responding to emergencies and providing a better service out of hours than during office hours.

## Customer Journey Overview

5.15 The flow chart below in Figure 1 provides the overarching process for the customer contact out of hours to the point where the Out of Hours Contact Centre call handlers make a decision, using the Out of Hours Manual as to what the action/advise is for the customer.

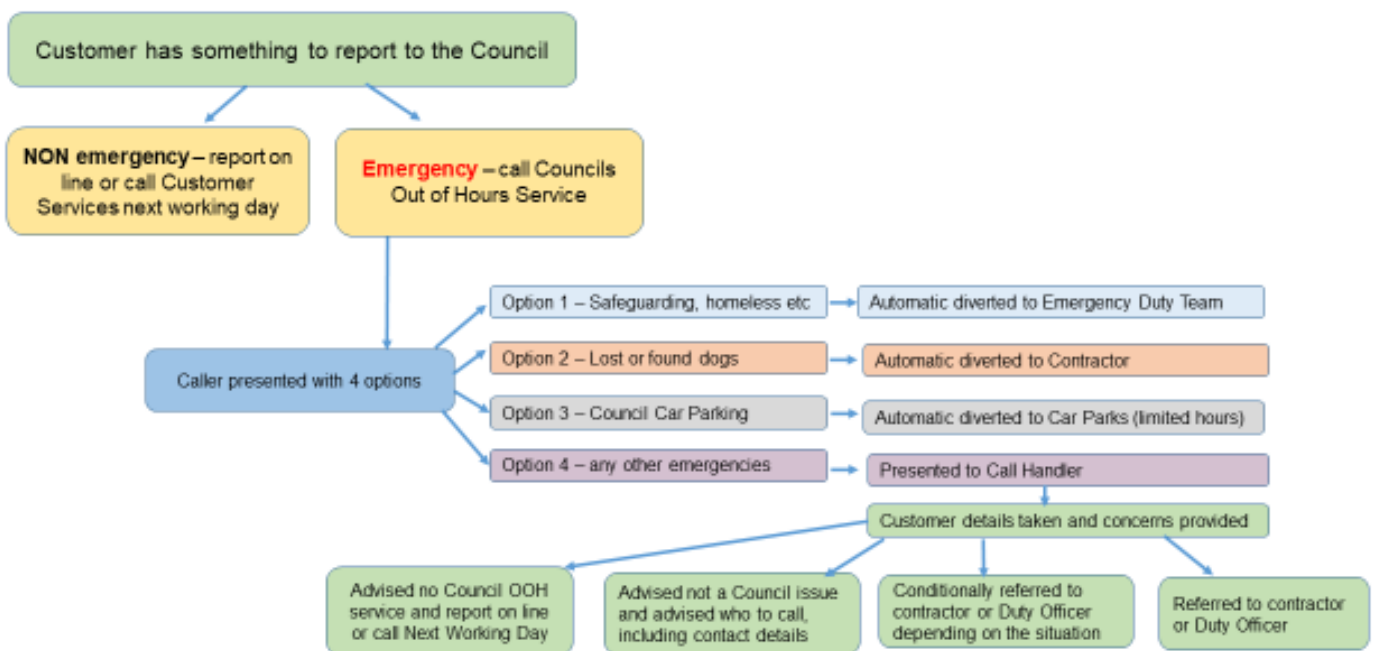


Figure 1: Customer journey overview – Out of Hours.

## Customer Journey - Detail.

### Customers

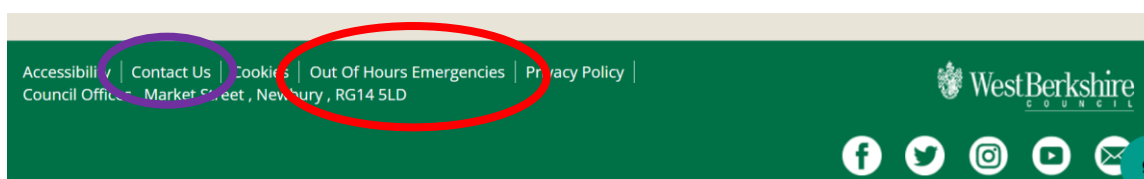
5.16 The customers who may contact the service can be anyone living, working or visiting the Council area. In addition there are a wide range of agencies who can report issues which are affecting or may affect the Council area or whom may require support to resolve an issue their agency is responsible for. Therefore the customer/stakeholder criteria is very wide.

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- 5.17 **Appendix 2 Table 1 and Chart 1** provides details of the customers who have called the Council in 2021/2022.
- 5.18 The data shows that the majority of the calls made are from the public (53%) and the emergency services (38%). **Appendix 2 Chart 2** shows this is a relatively consistent split from 2018/19 to 2020/21.
- 5.19 It should be noted that it is preferred that the customer contact us directly rather than go through a third party, such as the emergency services, in order that we can ask the additional questions directly of the customer to assist the response e.g. more details as to where debris is on a road etc. Instead if the reporting is via a third party then if any additional questions for clarity need to be asked it requires an additional call out by the Out of Hours (OOH) Contact Centre. A third party accepting a call and then reporting it to the Council also has the potential of raising expectations when actually there may be no OOH service provided. This point has been raised with the emergency services.
- 5.20 The number of contacts made by customers since 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2022 are shown in **Appendix 2 Table 2**. This table provides details of the number of customer contacts (logs – which are individual cases) and the number of calls made in total relating to these logs. The calls are normally slightly higher than the logs since they equate to the incoming initial contact with the customer generating the log and then subsequent calls relating to that log to contractors, officers and perhaps return calls to the customer. Hence there will always be greater calls to logs.
- 5.21 **Table 2** also shows that, with the exception of 2020/21 which was the first year of the COVID pandemic which resulted in an unusually low number of customer calls (654), the average is approximately 840 customer contacts a year. This equates to just over 2 calls on average a day, although there may be days with no calls and periods of significant numbers.
- 5.22 There are of course periods when there will be more calls especially if there is adverse weather or an incident happening. Some of these calls may be off-set if alternative arrangements are put in place such as activating the Emergency Operations Centre.
- 5.23 It should also be noted that on some occasions there may be one issue such as a set of temporary traffic lights which results in a number of calls to the OOH Contact Centre as we often await a third party to resolve the issue, particularly if the works are not being undertaken by the Council which is often the case.

## Accessing the Service

- 5.24 There are a number of routes the customer is able to find out how to access the out of hours service including:
- (a) **Website:** On the front page of the website along with the ‘contact us’ link there is an ‘Out of Hours Emergencies’ link



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When clicking on that link it takes the customer to the information relating to the out of hours emergencies contacts, the number to call, reporting online tool and other information about the service provision.

<https://info.westberks.gov.uk/outofhoursemergency>. The current page content is shown in **Appendix 3**.

- (b) **Message on Council's main switch board number.** Should a caller attempt to call the Council using the main switchboard number out of hours there is a recorded message informing the customer of the social care number to call and the Out of Hours Contact Centre, these numbers are repeated for clarity.
- (c) **Information shared with professional partners.** In order to assist all the emergency services and other responding agencies to use the correct number in and out of office hours through the Thames Valley Resilience Forum a database is maintained of all the numbers. This is shared with all responders for them to ensure their call handlers have the correct numbers.

5.25 Currently the only route of accessing the system is via a phone call to the Contact Centre. This has been a deliberate decision since the current service is in relation to emergencies and should a customer send an email or should there be an option to leave a message then the urgency of the call and the remedy may be delayed due to other incoming calls. Indeed there was a deliberate decision made when setting up the options voicemail to not allow for messages to be left for that very reason.

5.26 There is also no monitoring of the online reporting out of hours which is detailed on the 'report a problem' website page. It clearly states at the top of the page that if it is in relation to an emergency to go to another page. In addition feedback is provided at the time a problem is reported to advise the customer that their report will be picked up during the working week. As a result, if it were urgent then they would know and ideally call the out of hours number. There are however some improvements which could be put in place to improve the 'report a problem' website page and the message sent to the customer.

### Contact Centre

5.27 The route into the Council out of hours is via a Call Handling Centre contracted to the Council to undertake this role.

5.28 In the past from the late 1980s to 2005, the Council phones out of hours were diverted to one of four Council officers who was on call and answered all the calls outside the office hours. A number of issues arose from this system when a review was undertaken (post the learning from the floods in 2003 at Purley on Thames and the enactment of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004) including:

- (a) there was only one person taking the calls, and whilst there was an escalation option it was weak because the technology did not allow for it at the time, therefore should there be a lot of calls the Council would be failing the customer;
- (b) there were only 4 officers on the rota therefore the resilience was weak should one become sick or be on leave;



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- (c) the Working Time Regulations were coming in which meant that the officers could not do their normal work during the day and continue to work overnight, regardless of the fact it was a 'sleeping watch' in that they did not need to sit up all night waiting for a call;
- (d) the cost of the service at that time was approximately £26,500, a review assessed that it could be contracted out for a cost of £10,000.

As a result at that time it was approved that an external provider be commissioned to undertake the call handling role out of hours.

- 5.29 Since 2005 there has been a contract in place with 2 contractors (2005 – 2010 5yrs), 2010 - 2015 (3 +2yrs) and 2015 - 2022 (5 +2yrs).
- 5.30 The current contract was due to expire on 31 March 2022 as a result of the ending of the 5 year plus 2 year extension permitted in the agreement. As a result of this review the procurement process has been paused with an exception being approved to extend the current contractor until 31 March 2023.
- 5.31 Occasional comments have been made to officers that the current contractor is not within Berkshire resulting in lack of knowledge of the area however processes are in place to ensure there is minimal risk relating to this. There has been no evidence of this manifesting as issue as to the way the calls are handled when the logs are reviewed.
- 5.32 The current specification is shown in **Appendix 4** with statistics associated with the specification detailed in **Appendix 2**.
- 5.33 Whilst cost is one element of the procurement process, since this is a critical service in relation to being the starting point out of hours for major incidents, the robustness of the service delivery by way of being able to resource staff up quickly and having a detailed business continuity plan is equally important.
- 5.34 Contract monitoring meetings with the contractor take place at least every 6 months. These have been more frequent at contract set up times and when there have been issues to be resolved. At these meetings there are discussions in relation to standards, areas of concern, resolutions to be put in place, timescales and any penalties, any concerns with the manual and any training issues required. At the moment there are no outstanding issues.
- 5.35 Outside the formal checks of the contract an officer in the Joint Emergency Planning Unit (JEPU) reviews the out of hours logs submitted from the contractor every working day in order to check the calls for accuracy in relation to the detail provided and the response provided raising issues immediately as and when necessary.

## Call Answering

- 5.36 At the end of the office hours an officer in Customer Services transfers the phone to the OOH Contact Centre and then does a check call to make sure it has transferred successfully.
- 5.37 When a customer calls the out of hours service they are provided with a recording and a number of options (Interactive Voice Response (IVR)). This IVR process has been in

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place for a number of years having been put in place originally in order to manage the calls coming in and allowing some to be diverted to the most appropriate agency or service without going through the OOH Contact Centre.

5.38 The current IVR recording is:

*Please note this service is for emergencies, Social Care, Lost & Found Dogs and Car Parks calls only, for everything else or non-emergencies please hang up now and call back during business hours, alternatively you can report your issue on-line at [www.westberks.gov.uk](http://www.westberks.gov.uk) to be processed the next working day.*

*West Berkshire Council business hours are 08.30am to 5.00pm, Monday to Thursday and 08.30am to 4.30pm on Friday.*

*All emergency calls are recorded for training and quality purposes*

- *for Emergencies about Children or Adult Social Care or if you are homeless tonight, press 1*
- *for lost or found dogs press 2,*
- *for Council Car Parks issues, press 3*
- *for any other genuine emergency, Press 4*
- *to hear these options again press 5*

A further option for Car Parks relates to the times car parks staff are not available between 00:30 – 07:00:

*The Car Parks service is closed between half past midnight and 7.00 am. Officers will not be available to assist you onsite between these times. If you would still like to talk to an advisor who may be able to help press 6 (this then re-routes to an operator)*

5.39 The call diversion process is limited to Children's, Adult Social Care, Homeless, Car Parks and lost and found dogs calls only because all these respective calls are handled by that one contractor or service and they deal with all the issues associated with that subject. Other requests may have conditional responses or a number of contractors or duty officers who could resolve the matter. Highways is such a service where there are at least 3 contractors and at times 2 duty officers in place, therefore all their calls are directed through the Out of Hours Contact Centre call handler to then direct the call to the correct route to be resolved.

5.40 It should be noted that the OOH Contact Centre is a call handing service which follows instructions. They are not decision makers on behalf of the Council.

5.41 When a call is presented to the call handler at the Out of Hours Contact Centre there is a process which the need to go through as set out below:

- (a) Answer the call with "West Berkshire Council Emergency contact centre. You're through to [operator name]. Can I have your name and full address, please?"
- (b) Capture the details of the caller – name, address and contact number
- (c) Confirm the address of the emergency – if different to above

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- (d) Check that the address is within West Berkshire (historically members of the public and the emergency services have made calls about incidents in 'Berkshire' which are not in West Berkshire and therefore this check is done – advising to call if not for this Council)
- (e) Take the details of the emergency – i.e. the type of emergency pothole, ice on the roads, emergency repairs needed in Council property etc.
- (f) Using the Out of Hours Manual check the next action relating to the emergency and action as necessary advising the customer what they are going to do including informing if there is no out of hours service.
- (g) After completing the call then a log would be completed and closed to be sent securely to the Council the next working day.

## Out of Hours (OOH) Manual

5.42 The OOH Manual is maintained by the Joint Emergency Planning Unit (JEPU).

5.43 The OOH Manual is an Official Sensitive document as a result of the number of private phone numbers and confidential contract contact details. An extract of the OOH Manual is attached as **Appendix 7** to this report with the non-public numbers removed due to personal details held within them.

5.44 On at least a monthly basis a request is made to all services to provide any updates or information for the manual. At the same time the OOH Contact Centre are asked to provide details of any elements of the OOH Manual which are not clear. It is then updated and circulated to:

- (a) all services by email and stored on a limited access shared drive;
- (b) to all the Emergency Duty Officers (EDOs) by email and stored on limited access shared drive and a secure internet based system (Resilience Direct (RD)) which is used by emergency responders;
- (c) to the OOH Contact Centre.

5.45 The OOH Manual attempts to cover as many eventualities as possible that may be called through to the Council whether it is for the Council to respond to or not. Over the years it has been refined and added to in order to assist as many people including the call handler support the customer as much as possible.

5.46 The OOH Manual needs to be up to date, simple and clear in order to ensure an effective quick response to the customer. This can be a challenge since JEPU are reliant on other services providing updates on their out of hours service delivery. The officer responsible for this coordination is excellent at digging and checking for accuracy and currency however there is always a risk that something will slip through the net.

5.47 The current OOH Contact Centre has a training team for new staff and when needed officers have supported that training to ensure as far as possible consistency and accuracy.

## Emergency Duty Officers (EDO)

5.48 Within the OOH Manual where there are no officers on standby to answer any queries or respond to a call relating to their area of expertise then the 'catch all' is the Emergency Duty Officer (EDO) who can then make a decision to escalate the situation, contact another officer within the service, call on mutual aid from another Council or agencies as necessary or advise there is no out of hours service.

5.49 The type of calls this currently relates to include:

- (a) Any Major Incident or calls in relation to specific risks which the Council should know about including AWE, Petroleum Storage Depot, Death of a senior Royal etc;
- (b) Dangerous Buildings – to make an assessment in relation to whether a private matter, whether to make the public area safe or to try to contact a Building Control or Structural engineer;
- (c) School Emergency - relating to issues such as damage to a school or school trips;
- (d) Flooding – is happening or likely to happen to the internal areas of properties from rivers/roads etc and not burst pipes.
- (e) Incursions by Travellers & Gypsies
- (f) Utility failure – affecting an area
- (g) Weather related emergencies
- (h) Request for support from emergency services
- (i) Anything unusual not covered in the OOH Manual

5.50 There are three main functions of the EDOs:

- (a) to be responsible for coordinating any incidents (not major incidents) which have been going on during office hours or to monitor emerging issues. In so doing they attend multi-agency meetings, provide reports and share information with relevant staff.
- (b) to start the escalation and get systems in place in relation to any emergency. When this is in place they then step back in order to be on standby for any other emergencies.
- (c) be the 'catch all' when there is no standby service on call or there are queries where the OOH Contact Centre need some support. The areas where the EDO has received most calls, albeit very small in numbers, over the period 2021/2022 have related to:
  - i. *Requests by the emergency services for support from 'building control' due to damage to properties. It should also be noted however that the number of calls are small and most have not been for the Council to resolve but the owners of*

*the building through their insurers. In addition the actual requirement is a structural engineer and not a building control officer which are different skills. This issue is being looked at with solutions being considered being a Berkshire West or Berkshire wide solution, a broader group of officers who could be called upon or a contractor commissioned to undertake the role on behalf of the Council.*

- ii. Enquiries about travellers, particularly from the police when there have been incursions onto Council owned land where there is a joint process in place between the Council and TVP. There are however more challenges where the incursion is on Town or Parish land, private land or indeed where the land is owned by the travellers but there is no permission to use the land for the purpose they intend. With respect to the latter there are currently no planning enforcement staff on standby. The number of such calls out of hours about travellers has been low with 11 calls in relation to 3 sites in 2021/2022. In addition there were no other calls in relation to planning enforcement in the same period. This issue however is being looked at as part of the Place Review.*

- 5.51 The EDOs are currently made up of a team of five officers who undertake a week at a time on call (Friday evening to the following Friday morning).
- 5.52 This team used to be made up of nine officers however as a result of some staff leaving and others not wishing to continue with the role since it is a 'voluntary' role the numbers have depleted in the last two years. It is now at a point that another solution needs to be found to build resilience and have less of an impact on the existing officers.
- 5.53 Whilst it is a voluntary role the staff who undertake the role do get paid. This was based on a Job Description and Job Evaluation process undertaken. The job description for the role which is provided in **Appendix 5**. The payment grade is at SCP 37.
- 5.54 The officers who undertake the role are senior officers and/or have been in post for some time. The EDOs meet on at least a quarterly basis to discuss the forthcoming rota, calls they have received and any learning as a result and are briefed on any future issues.
- 5.55 The EDOs also work as a team if something does happen since they have a higher level of knowledge about the response the Council provides and come from different services and backgrounds within the Council including Environmental Health/Emergency Planning, Trading Standards, Adult Social Care, Highways and Countryside.
- 5.56 The EDOs are also provided on at least a monthly basis, if not weekly or daily depending on the risk and the situation, with information from the Met Office, details of events due to take place in the next month and any specific intelligence or issues which may arise out of hours such as flooding risk storm risks, calls about resettlement projects (Afghans/Ukraine) and ongoing incident such as utility outages. Some of the updates are reliant on the other services alerting JEPU of any ongoing issues.
- 5.57 The EDOs are also resourced with mapping, log books, JESIP cards, laptops, mobile phones enabled to tether to their laptops, Council reflective jackets and Corporate Credit Cards (£5 to £10k limits) in order to undertake their role. They are also provided with additional training and exercising opportunities.

## Escalation

5.58 There are two ways escalation can arise out of hours:

- (a) Pre-warned potential incident – such as storms, flooding, large events, protests, intelligence.
- (b) No notice incidents - such as explosions, road, rail or air incidents etc.

5.59 When there is a pre-warned potential incident the information comes in to the JEPU from a number of sources including the Met Office and the Environment Agency for adverse weather, Safety Advisory Groups for events, the Animal Plant and Health Agency for animal disease outbreaks, TVP for protests, utility companies for outages they may be experiencing and Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum for emerging emergencies such as fuel shortages etc.

5.60 The JEPU has a duty officer system during office hours to monitor for any emerging issues such as those described above and undertake actions as necessary.

5.61 The actions which could be taken by the JEPU when informed of an emerging incident/emergency include:

- (a) Setting up a Coordination meeting across all services, and as necessary external partners;
- (b) Informing senior officers and making recommendations in relation to arrangements to be put in place for approval;
- (c) Activating or placing on standby any relevant plans;
- (d) Activating or placing on standby the Emergency Operations Centre (the council's formal coordination arrangements);
- (e) Providing information to the partners including Town & Parish Councils, ward members and community groups. This action will vary in relation to how much publicity is in place nationally about any emerging incident;
- (f) Putting in place arrangements for pre-deployment of resources such as equipment and staff as appropriate and safe to do;
- (g) Fully activating the relevant plans if the emerging issue becomes an emergency;
- (h) Stand down any actions should the situation not arise.

5.62 A similar approach would be taken by the EDO out of hours should they be informed of an emerging situation. This would involve the relevant duty officers and contractors and as necessary activating other services to support.

5.63 Having regard to no notice incidents such as fires, explosions etc then the EDO would follow the Major Incident Framework, Activation Plan and OOH manual to make all the contacts and put systems in place.

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5.64 In relation to contacting Senior Officers out of hours there is no formal standby rota for these officers. Instead the EDOs contact the CEO in the first place but are notified when he is on leave and who is his nominated deputy; if for any reason there is no answer then the process is to contact the other Executive Directors and then Service Directors. In order to expedite that process there is a WhatsApp group with the EDOs, CEO, Exec Directors, Service Directors and all officers in the JEPU.

5.65 There are some risks associated with escalation out of hours including:

- (a) Whilst there are a number of people on standby the challenge is increasing the numbers of staff to support a major incident out of hours and possibly in the middle of the night. Within the manual there is an Annex which has a wide range of staff who can be contacted as best effort, including their personal numbers, plus there is the WhatsApp group. However calling individuals etc takes time when there are also incoming calls and an incident to manage. As a result, consideration is underway in relation to a smarter, quicker way of notifying a wider pool of staff.
- (b) Officers not living within the area or Berkshire, but some distance away. This has always been an issue out of hours to some extent, but as a result of COVID19 and home working this has become a greater risk. This is not exclusive to this Council and is not limited to out of hours as a risk for emergency response. In part this can be overcome by coordinating responses remotely via the Virtual EOC over ZOOM and MS Teams but linked to the work underway to review how we can better contact staff out of hours this will be taking into account distance staff are away from the area whilst at the same time not impacting on the same people all the time.

## Learning the lessons

5.66 Whenever any calls are made to the EDO, a debrief is undertaken. This may be a small debrief between the other EDOs at their routine meetings to consider what went well, not so well and what could be learned from it. Alternatively, depending on the scale and number of services and agencies involved, then a more formal debrief process would be undertaken including a 'hot' debrief during and directly at the end of the emergency, a formal survey process and then a 'cold' debrief a few weeks or even months later allowing responders to consider and reflect as part of the structured debrief. The lessons will then be taken forward by way of amending plans and training.

## Complaints, Contract Compliance and Service Responses

5.67 In the last 2 years there have been 2 complaints made about the service:

- (a) Complaint 1: related to the time to answer the calls which suggested that the caller had been waiting for nearly 50minutes. On investigation the complaint was upheld, albeit that there had been 3 calls made within that timeframe and not one. However the caller had waited too long on these 3 occasions.
- (b) Complaint 2: related to a visitor to one of the Council's multi-storey car parks and incorrect information being provided in relation to gaining access to the car park after 00:30hrs. This was upheld and the Car Parks Service was engaged in order to improve the signage to help people gain access out of hours to their vehicles.

## Customer Journey – Out of Hours

- 5.68 These 2 complaints out of a total of 1500 incidents called in over 2 years equates to 0.13%. This is not to suggest the service is perfect or nearly perfect, but there are very few complaints received and both have been resolved at Stage1 – Informal Resolution and managed by the Service. An area of improvement would be in relation to proactive contact with the customers after their calls. This however will need a change in the introductory message to allow for this under GDPR.
- 5.69 As indicated previously, there is an officer within the JEPU who reviews the reports when they are submitted, checking not only for the response by the OOH Contact Centre, but as necessary if there were any issues by the responding service.

## Data

- 5.70 **Appendix 2** provides data and statistics in relation to the OOH service provided. Explanations and considerations have been provided throughout this document.
- 5.71 All data is reviewed on at least an annual basis by Emergency Planning with reports being provided by the OOH Contact Centre contractor on daily, weekly, monthly and an annual basis to allow for any issues or emerging trends to be identified and addressed as soon as possible.
- 5.72 The data and information relating to items 1 to 3 in **Appendix 2** is covered in the 'customers' section
- 5.73 **Appendix 2** Tables 3 and 4 along with Chart 3 provide data in relation to the types of calls received with Table 5 providing a sample of some of the calls which are received and categorised as 'other'.
- 5.74 What these figures do not show however are the number of calls received about the same issue such as one set of traffic lights with a fault can generate a lot of calls about that one issue as do fallen trees and a car alarm sounding. Another example would be the figures relating to travellers which involved 8 calls on one day relating to one site.
- 5.75 In addition, the figures do not show some of the splits relating to the themes, in particular traffic lights, which can relate to council managed 'fixed' traffic lights, Council managed 'temporary' traffic lights as a result of works being undertaken by the Environment Services appointed contractors, or 'temporary' traffic lights by another party working on the highway. This is relevant in relation to the response and what we can do if there are faults on traffic lights where the work is not commissioned by the Council, sadly not helped by the current online system that all Councils use to provide information to the public about road works, which names the organisation undertaking the work but not the contact details. <https://one.network/uk>. This has been raised by officers with the supplier.
- 5.76 Another example where the figures do not show the split or perhaps the detail is in relation to 'non Council property' where this can relate to any issues relating to a building which is not a Council building. These calls include calls from tenant about a private landlord issue or the RBFRS calling about damage to a building where they would like a structural engineer to attend.



## Customer Journey – Out of Hours

- 5.77 It should also be noted that the figures can change year on year depending a great deal on the winter conditions, this is clearly shown by the number of tree calls in 2021/2022, the majority of which were related to Storms Eunice and Franklin in February 2022.
- 5.78 The data is reviewed by the JEPU in order to work with the services to see if there are actions to be taken to reduce the calls out of hours in these high 'demand' areas by way of pre-emptive work, more detailed information on the website so that if it does not relate to the Council the customer knows who to call. Indeed through this review process it has been established by officers that there are two website pages which should come together to provide a more comprehensive out of hours 'experience'. These pages are owned by different services which is now being resolved.
- 5.79 Data in relation to average time to answer calls, call handling times, abandoned calls etc for 2021/2022 has been requested from the contractor. As soon as this is available it will be shared.

## Emergency Duty Service

- 5.80 One major element of the out of hours provision by the Council is the Emergency Duty Service (EDS). This is a contract with Bracknell Forest Council, which manages the services on behalf of all the Berkshire Councils.
- 5.81 EDS provides support for Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Housing, employing qualified staff to undertake the role on behalf of each Council out of hours.
- 5.82 Supporting this service are service managers from each discipline.
- 5.83 In Q3 of 2021/22 there were 379 calls made to this service for the West Berkshire area.
- 5.84 This contract is managed from the People directorate.

## Budgets

- 5.85 **Appendix 6** provides details of the costs of out of hours provision by the Council.
- 5.86 There are differences in the costs for the different services provided. This should be as a result of the Job Description and evaluation process undertaken.
- 5.87 Based on the information provided the current annual costs of providing out of hours services is £358,738.90.
- 5.88 This does not include some callouts in emergencies for specific services, any pre-planned work where overtime is paid not the costs of officers who work outside the office hours as described previously but it is part of their normal business hours.

## Other Councils OOH Provision

- 5.89 As part of this review other Councils have been contacted in order to share how they provide their out of hours service. This has provided a very mixed bag of service provision as set out the table below:

## Customer Journey – Out of Hours

LA	Contact Centre	Emergency Duty Officers
1	<p>Provided in-house via CCTV.</p> <p>Pros</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in-house and know the area well</li> </ul> <p>Cons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• only 1 or 2 staff on out of hours therefore an issue with scaling up and escalating.</li> <li>• Potential for conflicting priorities – crime v emergency</li> </ul>	<p>All senior officers are on a rota including CEO/Exec Directors and Heads of Service.</p> <p>Pros</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a large number of staff so less times on a rota (15)</li> <li>• Senior officers more aware of the emergency response procedures</li> </ul> <p>Cons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Escalation a challenge</li> <li>• No EP support on call so may lack tactical if no one from EP answers phone</li> <li>• Mixed operational, tactical and strategic level of staffing</li> </ul>
2	<p>Provided in-house via a contact centre which also supports other services (care support)</p> <p>Pros</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in-house and know the area well</li> </ul> <p>Cons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• only 1 or 2 staff on out of hours therefore an issue with scaling up and escalating.</li> <li>• Potential for conflicting priorities – client on alarm system v emergency</li> </ul>	<p>All Heads of Service on a rota (12)</p> <p>Pros</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a large number of staff so less times on a rota (15)</li> <li>• Senior officers more aware of the emergency response procedures</li> </ul> <p>Cons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Escalation a challenge</li> <li>• No EP support on call so may lack tactical if no one from EP answers phone</li> <li>• More tactical response than an operational one</li> </ul>
3	<p>Provided by TV Fire Control</p> <p>Pros</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Berkshire (note not a Berks LA)</li> <li>• Can be scaled up</li> </ul> <p>Cons – TBC re costs</p>	<p>Emergency Planning Staff on rota (5)</p> <p>Pros</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Escalation not an issues with Duty Senior officer rota in place too</li> </ul> <p>Cons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a small number of staff</li> </ul>
4 & 5	<p>Provided by external contractor outside Berkshire</p> <p>Cons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of detailed knowledge of the area</li> </ul>	<p>Operational Local Authority Liaison Officers (LALO) on call.</p> <p>Pros</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Escalation system via Duty Snr rota</li> <li>• Clear expectation to go on site</li> <li>• EP on standby to support (only 1 or 2 staff therefore issues with resilience)</li> </ul> <p>Cons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not authorised to the same level as a snr officer therefore time delays.</li> </ul>

## Challenges and potential areas of improvement/change

5.90 As part of the ongoing work in relation to out of hours there have been areas of improvement which the service have provisionally identified which the Task and Finish Group may wish to consider along with any others which materialise as part of the review process. Suggested improvements are set out below:

- (a) Undertake periodic customer surveys. This has been undertaken in the past however, as a result of GDPR and because the current voice message on the system which does not state that we could use their data for surveys relating to the service provided, this is not appropriate. A change in the voice message will help overcome this matter in order to allow contact to me made on a periodic basis.
- (b) To review the initial interface points for the customer including:
  - i. Review the website pages to ensure it is clear as to what we do or do not provide out of hours.*
  - ii. Consider the provision of a 'public' version of the out of hours manual to guide customers as to what the Council does and does not provide out of hours and as appropriate the contact details of other agencies.*
  - iii. Engage further with the online highways mapping contractor to have additional information added to the website including who to call if there is a problem with the road works being undertaken.*
  - iv. Consider the report a problem feedback loop to the customers making requests out of hours.*
- (c) To review the standby arrangements for some services including:
  - i. Provision of structural engineer/Building Control support*
  - ii. Planning enforcement,*
  - iii. Supporting services such as legal, communications etc*
- (d) To review the escalation process in particular relating to:
  - i. the number trained Emergency Duty Officers (EDOs)*
  - ii. the means of quickly contacting additional officers using technology*

## 6 Conclusion & Recommendations

- 6.1 The out of hours service provision from the first contact with the Council through to the delivery or not of a service out of hours has changed over the years, ensuring the provision of the Council's statutory functions.
- 6.2 It is a relatively unknown service perhaps, which may be deemed to be appropriate since the service at the moment is for emergencies out of hours and not an extension of the office hours provision.

## Customer Journey – Out of Hours

- 6.3 There are areas of improvement, which could be made put in place from a customer journey and from an emergency response point of view as detailed in 5.90 above, some of which are already in plan to progress in 2022/23.
- 6.4 It is recommended that the OSMC:
- (a) Notes the contents of this report.
  - (b) Notes the suggested improvements made by the Officers.
  - (c) Provides feedback in relation to any other improvements for Officers to consider and progress.

## 7 Appendices

- Appendix 1 Out of Hours Services provided by the Council
- Appendix 2 Statistics relating to out of hours provision
- Appendix 3 Out of Hours Emergency Website Page
- Appendix 4 OOH Contact Centre Specification and Costs
- Appendix 5 Emergency Duty Officer Job Description
- Appendix 6 Budgets
- Appendix 7 Extract from OOH Manual

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### Background Papers:

#### Subject to Call-In:

Yes:  No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
- Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only
-

**Wards affected:** ALL

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