

# Executive

## London Local Government Resilience Response to the Covid 19 Pandemic

Item no: 4

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**Summary:** This report provides an overview of the London local government resilience response to the novel Coronavirus (Covid 19) to date, with a focus on the pan-London resilience arrangements.

**Recommendations:** The Executive is asked to:

- Note the collaborative response developed by London local government, working at local, sub-regional and pan-London level.
- Comment on the challenges and opportunities that are likely to arise in the next phase of the response (noting that a separate report on the distinct recovery and reconstitution phases appears on today's agenda).

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# London Local Government Response to the Covid 19 Pandemic

## Introduction

1. London Local government's response to the pandemic has been grounded in established protocols and ways of working that have been developed through our shared commitment to building London's resilience and protecting Londoners. As the UK moved from the 'containment' phase to the 'delay' phase, our response was escalated in alignment with the establishment of a formal Covid 19 Strategic Coordination Group (SCG) for London. The strategic and tactical responses at local and pan-London level were subsequently strengthened through enhanced sub-regional co-ordination - to marshal the resources of boroughs as effectively as possible.
2. This report provides more detail on the legal framework which underpins the local government response; planning; training; learning; improvement; and the bespoke arrangements that have been put in place for the Covid 19 pandemic.

## Background

3. London local government's collective resilience arrangements have grown in recent years, learning from the experience of significant events, including a series of notable emergency incidents throughout 2017. A programme of training and exercising has also helped to build resilience at a local and pan-London level, including learning from boroughs' participation in the national Exercise Cygnus in October 2016, which tested the response arrangements for a pandemic.
4. The legal basis for collaboration is rooted in the **Civil Contingencies Act 2004**, which defines local authorities as Category 1 responders. The Act places several duties on authorities, including assessing risks, preparing emergency plans and co-operating with other local and regional responders. The guidance which accompanied the Act set out specific arrangements for London, which were refreshed in July 2012 - following the Coroner's report on the 2005 London bombings. It sets the framework for London's statutory Local Resilience Forum, which is known as the London Resilience Forum.

5. The London Resilience Forum formally agrees a number of partnership plans which respond to identified risks and collectively set out a platform for collaboration. This includes **London's London Multi-Agency Pandemic Plan** which was developed in **2018** and a Strategic Co-ordination Protocol. The London Resilience Group (LRG - a central team, within the GLA group) provides the secretariat to the SCG and supports partner organisations, each of whom have specific responsibilities for preparing for, and responding to, emergencies.
6. To ensure that councils can play an effective part in the pan-London response to emergencies, chief executives play a co-ordinating role during a response, allowing the sector to be formally represented on pan-London Strategic Co-ordination Groups, as and when required.

## Emergency Planning into the 2020s

7. In 2017, Leaders Committee commissioned an independent Peer Challenge, on London local government's collective resilience arrangements. The outcome of the work – the Emergency Planning (EP) 2020 Prospectus – set out ways in which both individual and collective resilience arrangements between boroughs and sub-regional partnerships could be strengthened.
8. Leaders' considered the report in the Spring of 2018 and went on to agree a detailed implementation plan, which was received by Leaders' in July 2018. It was agreed that the Local Authorities' Panel (*LAP – which has managerial oversight of the collective borough resilience arrangements*) would oversee implementation and bring periodic progress reports to Leaders' Committee. A progress reports was duly considered in July 2019 and Leaders may wish to consider a further update from LAP later in 2020.
9. Recent initiatives that have been taken forward within the purview of the plan include.
  - Development of 'Resilience Standards for London' which form the core of a new assurance approach based on a sector-led improvement philosophy (*It relies on three tiers of assurance: regular self-assessments, sub-regional challenge sessions and a programme of external peer challenge delivered in partnership with the LGA*).

- Establishment of new local authority sub-regional arrangements to enhance collaboration and improve delivery.
- Completion of a community resilience review which highlighted some practical ways in which local government can make a difference.

10. **London Councils** officers worked over the last year with LAP colleagues, to assist delivery of the implementation plan. In the last year, this support has focussed on:

- Establishment of a Directors of Communications mutual support network including procedures, guidance and training, and maintenance of a cadre of Press Officers available to enhance capacity in affected boroughs when required.
- Working with Leading Elected Members to develop a '**Civil Resilience Handbook for Councillors in London Local Authorities**' which was approved by Leaders in July 2019.
- London Councils went on to host two half-day **training courses for Leaders**, to illustrate how the guidance can be used in practice (October 2019 and January 2020). To supplement this, officers are working on materials and course outlines to support individual boroughs in running their own courses, including:
  - i. A generic course for all councillors, which authorities can deliver locally.
  - ii. A more detailed, role-specific course for local Ward Councillors, which authorities may wish to deliver in partnership with neighbouring councils.
  - iii. A course which is focused on role of Leaders/Directly Elected Mayors and other nominated Lead Cabinet Members.

### **Standing up the Covid 19 Response.**

11. Public Health England colleagues provided a briefing to the London Resilience Forum at its regular quarterly meeting on 23 January 2020. This led to several workstreams being formally initiated, including the commissioning of an updated version of the **London's London Multi-Agency Pandemic Plan**, designed

specifically to respond to the emerging evidence about the novel virus. By the end of January, all borough-level Resilience Forums were starting to review their own pandemic plans considering the revised pan-London framework.

12. London's first formal cross-sectoral resilience partnership meeting took place in late February, this was a precursor to:

- A special meeting of the Mayor's Advisory Group, which the Chair of London Councils attended on 2 March 2020 and
- **The initiation of a formal Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG) on 3 March 2020.**

13. The SCG was initially chaired by Public Health England colleagues and included the regular duty London Local Authority Gold (LLAG) chief executive to represent the sector. As the scale of the incident became clearer, the structures were enhanced as follows:

- An independent chair was introduced for the SCG, in part to relieve some of the demands on PHE. Jon Barradell, chief executive at the City of London and Eleanor Kelly, chief executive at Southwark became Co-Chairs – as confirmed in the Secretary of State (MHCLG)'s letter of 24 March 2020.
- **A dedicated Local Authority Gold chief executive was then introduced for the Covid 19 response** – to provide continuity and release the regular on-call Gold chief executive to respond to any other incidents which might occur. Initially, this role was covered by Eleanor Kelly, working with the support of a number of other chief executives.
- Subsequently, Martin Esom (Chief Executive at Waltham Forest) took the role of London Local Authority Co-ordinating 'Gold' chief executive for COVID-19, representing local authorities on the SCG.
- Martin has been supported by 'Deputy Gold' chief executives who cover sub-regional resilience footprints.
- A range of Task and Finish groups have been established, led by chief executives, covering key local government issues such as Adult Social Care, PPE and Shielding.
- London's Gold response is also being supported by a wider group of chief executives, directors, professional networks, other staff and colleagues from London Councils

14. Individual boroughs have put business continuity plans into place and stood up local strategic and tactical response arrangements including setting up Borough Emergency Co-ordination Centres. There is a clear line of sight between these local arrangements, London Local Authority Co-ordinating Gold and the Strategic co-ordination Centre, which provides a channel to escalate and help resolve issues.

- This work is underpinned by arrangements that have been rapidly established to collect and analyse data on the impact of Covid-19 in every London local authority.
- Councils are leading on a range of local initiatives, including developing hubs that will provide support to vulnerable people, in liaison with the NHS, voluntary organisations and other partners.

15. In addition, **London Councils** has offered support in relation to:

- Local Government Finance. Officers have actively engaged with Treasurers, SLT and MHCLG officials, as well as advising the Lead chief executive - to support boroughs prepare and assure their assessment of the financial implications of managing the pandemic, and to analyse and understand the overall impact for London. This will help develop the case to Government around challenges for councils, particularly around loss of income (including Council Tax and business rates), as well as direct costs and undelivered savings. Clearly these issues remain vital going forward and Members may wish to reflect on finance and resource matters when they come to discuss this paper at the Executive.
- London Councils' chief executive has been a point of co-ordination with boroughs; the group of nine regional chief executives who work with MHCLG officials; and wider resilience structures.
- We have redirected internal resources to help meet the needs of the response (see Financial Implications section at the end of the report).
- We updated the Civil Resilience Handbook for London Councillors, which we first published in 2019, to reflect the latest Government safety advice considering the Covid-19 Pandemic. This has been despatched to all elected councillors in London and is also [available on our website](#).

- Communications support and advice, including providing daily updates and weekly video call briefings to borough directors of communications; co-ordinating borough participation in the #LondonTogether social media campaign, working with the SCG Comms Hub to respond to media enquiries on a pan-London basis, stakeholder engagement with the business and voluntary sectors and mortuary management leads, proactive communications support e.g. on the Proud to Care social worker recruitment campaign.
- Preparing a regular briefing for all elected members in London, which includes an overview of key issues and links to useful resources.
- Continuing our policy and influencing work, for example: on business, the economy and Community Safety. This included:
  - Monitoring key economic concerns across boroughs; making the case for support to local businesses and the self-employed and convening economic Development Leads.
  - Convened member level 'virtual meetings' in relation to Business and Economy Leads; TEC in relation to transport and the environment; Housing Leads; Community Safety; and Children's Services - including liaison with MPS leads and MOPAC.
  - Enabled statutory children's safeguarding partners, including children's services, the MPS and NHS, to meet at a London level, to consider the safeguarding and child protection risks to children and young people during lockdown, and reach collective agreement in respect of the need to heighten vigilance and maintain resourcing.
  - Worked with health partners to negotiate an advice note to borough and CCGs in respect of the operational implementation of emergency discharge funding arrangements.
  - Collated and cascaded borough innovation in practice to support households experience domestic violence and domestic abuse during lockdown.
- Harnessing London local government's collective capacity, and where appropriate, bridging to the professional networks and wider resilience structures, including:

- Helping interpret the data which is being collected to provide a stock-take for LLAG and the SCG.
  - Working with Housing Directors to ensure arrangements will be in place to provide multi-layered support to those rough sleepers that are currently placed in temporary accommodation.
  - Working with LEDNET to develop guidance on opening Household Waste and Recycling Centres.
  - Initiating research and data gathering on waste storage capacity and the potential to collaborate with the private sector on areas, such as waste collection and disposal.
  - Working with the private sector to support key workers, such as car club and dockless bike operators which made their fleet available free or at lower cost for essential journeys, such as those done by NHS workers.
  - Working with ALDCS to convene pan-London discussions between commissioning leads to plan for mitigation and mutual aid in relation to high risk placements and care package providers.
  - With professional networks, initiated the development of the key learning points for the future of collaborative working with the NHS in London.
- Optimised our services to contribute to the response:
    - Working with Government and relevant agencies to develop national guidance for a pragmatic approach to enforcement of parking and traffic controls, including the introduction of permits for critical key workers.
    - Agreement was reached, following DfT advice, to temporarily keep paying non-TfL bus operators at pre-lockdown rates and for them to offer 24hr a day travel to Freedom Pass holders.
    - A temporary change to the Taxicard scheme has been introduced to allow scheme members to use Taxicard subsidies to have groceries and medicines delivered.
    - Suspended enforcement of the London Lorry Control Scheme to help the freight transport sector facilitate the necessary movement of essential goods and services.



- Closed the London Tribunals hearing centre and developed a process to allow personal appeals for environment and traffic contraventions to be heard by telephone.
- Working with other funders and the voluntary and community sector to continuously assess the stability of the sector (staffing, funding, increased demand on services), support contingency plans in response to the needs of Londoners and provide links across local, sub-regional, pan-London and national support structures.
- London Ventures, the innovation partnership led by London Councils in partnership with EY, has worked with its wide range of partners and developed a range of covid-19 specific products and services to support local government.

## **Member Level Engagement**

16. London Councils' Leaders have taken part in a regular Friday call, along with the London Local Authority Co-ordinating chief executive and other senior advisers and guests, including the Minister for London and the Director of Public Health for London. A further call is scheduled for Friday 15th May, after the despatch of this report, and the Chair indicated that -subsequent to that call -there would be discussions about ongoing calls of this nature and their frequency.
17. Elected Officers (Councillors Peter John; Teresa O'Neill; Ruth Dombey; Georgia Gould and Catherine McGuinness) have continued to have regular high-level calls with senior representatives from City Hall and the SCG.
18. In addition, the Chair has joined meetings with the Secretary of State (MHCLG), along with representatives of other local government representative bodies.
19. London Councils' Group Leaders have begun outline discussions with City Hall and other partners on the shape of the transition from Lockdown; the formal Recovery work and wider Renewal and Re-constitution work that will be required following Covid-19. It is expected that this work will involve a range of partners collaborating at pan-London, sub-regional and local level. A separate report on the distinct recovery and reconstitution phases appears on today's agenda.

## **Recommendations**

The Executive is asked to:

- Note the collaborative response developed by London local government, working at local, sub-regional and pan-London level.
- Comment on the challenges and opportunities that are likely to arise in the next phase of the response (noting that a separate report on the distinct recovery and reconstitution phases appears on today's agenda).

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## **Financial Implications for London Councils**

Additional expenditure and potential reductions in income from London Councils' response to the pandemic are being identified and monitored. Each Directorate has an appointed officer responsible for recording these incidences in their respective areas of operation and an overall model is being maintained by the Finance team. This is being reviewed on a very regular basis. Most of the additional burden will have been incurred from the start of the 2020/21 financial year, so there will be significant opportunity to review income and expenditure to consider the need for any adjustments and the potential use of any uncommitted reserves.

## **Legal Implications for London Councils**

None specifically flowing from this paper.

## **Equalities Implications for London Councils**

None specifically flowing from this paper.