

Appendix 1 - Cross Solent Contingency Plans

Background

1. In the Audit and Governance Committee meeting that took place on 18 March 2024 concerns were raised regarding the performance of cross-Solent ferry operators, specifically the risks to the Island as a result of disruption to timetables and the implementation of a “minimal service”. The Chief Executive advised that the Council’s Emergency Management Team would be asked to review and refresh the council’s contingency plans, and it was requested that a report be provided to the committee at its next meeting.
2. In light of these concerns, engagement has taken place between the Council’s Emergency Management Team with the ferry operators and multi-agency partners to review and ensure a heightened level of awareness of the plans.

Risk

3. Through work undertaken by the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Local Resilience Forum (LRF - the multi-agency partnership through which the Council fulfils its statutory duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004) it is recognised that disruption to ferry operations could present issues for agencies during a response to an emergency and / or the delivery of critical services on the Island. The causes of disruption to cross-Solent transport ferry operations include, but are not limited to:
 - Adverse weather
 - Industrial action
 - Damage to infrastructure
 - Highways congestion on the mainland and / or the Island
 - Operational issues
 - Terrorism related events

Plans

4. The ferry operators recognise that the provision of services is their responsibility and have plans in place to deal with disruption. All Blue Light agencies have arrangements in place with the ferry operators to ensure that support from the mainland to the Island can be expedited during a response to an emergency, irrespective of the implementation of a “minimal service”.
5. Additionally, Blue Light agencies have arrangements in place with other agencies which can provide cross-Solent travel; the Maritime & Coastguard Agency, Police, MoD Police – these plans are reviewed annually.
6. All responding agencies, including the Council and the NHS, maintain Business Continuity arrangements to ensure the continued delivery of critical services. This includes plans for disruption to the supply of fuel, loss of staff and disruption to the provision of essential supplies.

7. The review cycle of these plans depends on the criticality of the service provided, those with the highest criticality are reviewed annually and flexibility exists to undertake a review in line with an emerging risk (such as forecast significant adverse weather, industrial action).
8. In response to a significant period of disruption to cross -Solent operations, the LRF can establish a co-ordination structure in line with the LRF Emergency Response Arrangements (a multi-agency plan that brings partner agencies together to co-ordinate the strategic and tactical aspects of a response to an emergency).
9. This Plan, combined with the arrangements defined in the Multi-Agency Cross Solent Disruption Plan, defines how partners including the ferry operators, can establish a Logistics Cell to co-ordinate delivery of priority staff, resources and essential supplies to and from the Island by maximising available ferry capacity.
10. The core membership of the Logistics Cell can comprise of representation from:
 - Isle of Wight Council – who will undertake the role of Chair of the Cell
 - Isle of Wight NHS Trust
 - Hampshire & Isle of Wight Integrated Care Board
 - Isle of Wight Ambulance Service
 - Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary
 - Hampshire & Isle of Wight Fire & Rescue Service
 - Maritime and Coastguard Agency
 - Affected cross-Solent ferry operator(s)
11. Additional membership can include, but is not limited to:
 - HM Prison Isle of Wight
 - Environment Agency
 - Representatives from Island based supermarkets
 - Representatives from Island based fuel providers
 - National Farmers Union
 - Harbour Masters
 - Utility Providers
 - Waste Contractors
 - Island Roads
12. Within the engagement with the ferry operators, discussion took place around the “lifeline service” provided during the response to Covid-19. It was noted that through the LRF response structure, which includes representation from Government via a Liaison Officer, the capability exists for the ferry operators to request temporary exemptions from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and the Department for Transport in respect of crew hours, maintenance schedules and the carriage of dangerous goods to ensure the continued delivery of a “lifeline service”.

Planning Assumptions

13. Convention is that “planning assumptions” exist for plans to any type of emergency, to support the development of strategies and consider wider impacts. In respect of the plans for cross-Solent disruption these assumptions include:
 - a) Plans and the approach taken by agencies need to be flexible and scalable to meet the demands of both a “rapid onset” emergency (such as damage to infrastructure, operational issues) and a “rising tide” emergency (such as industrial action, forecast adverse weather)
 - b) For a “rapid onset” emergency, whilst supply chains and revised timetables align there may be short term disruption to the supply of fuel to the Island and a lack of choice in supermarkets (exacerbated by changes in buying habits – people buying more than usual and more frequently, this could be mitigated through a communications strategy, supported by those in community leadership roles)
 - c) Agencies may have to implement Business Continuity arrangements to ensure the continued delivery of critical services, and to prevent business as usual activities becoming critical. This could include working from home options (for staff living on the mainland), adjusting work patterns and positioning additional resources on the Island.
 - d) There is a continued commitment from the cross-Solent ferry operators to work together and with agencies during times of significant disruption to maintain a “lifeline service”.

Next Steps

14. Continue engagement between the Emergency Management Team and the ferry operators through business-as-usual activities.
15. Continue to involve the ferry operators in LRF training and exercising opportunities.