

Date: 17 October 2007

To: All members – Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland LRF Co-ordinating Group

From: David Massey
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Leicestershire County Council

Operation ‘Highbrow’ Debrief Report

Background

‘Operation Highbrow’ (the evacuation of Lebanese British Nationals to NEMA) was debriefed on Tuesday 8th August 2006. All participants from the various agencies involved were invited to contribute.

Aim of Debrief

The debrief took the form of a ‘structured debrief’, which presented the following opportunities (aims):-

- (a) to capture both the positive and the negative aspects of the operation and,
- (b) to provide a means of capturing the ‘lessons learned’ for incorporation into future planning for a similar event.
- (c) to present a series of recommendations for the LRF to consider.

Debrief Report

The details of all the tactical/operational aspects of the operation are the subject of separate reports forwarded to the LRF and will not be reiterated herein.

The discrete elements of the operation are broken down into; pre-planning, information, reception, assessment, dispersal and finance.

The recommendations are a result of the contribution of all participants in the operation.

1. Pre-planning

Although similar evacuations have been experienced previously (e.g. Kosovo) there is no resilient ‘influx plan’ for Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland. The pre-planning for this event was difficult owing to the short notice (approximately 30 hours). However, a strategic/tactical multi-agency contingency meeting was convened on Friday 21st July at 1100 to discuss the arrangements that it was anticipated would be required. A further contingency meeting was held at County Hall the same day, to discuss the operational aspects of the operation.

However, owing to lack of information/ignorance, the Red Cross were not involved at this stage. It transpired that the Red Cross could have assisted greatly with specific information as to the number of evacuees and their likely assistance requirements.

Any future plans will need to incorporate resilience arrangements. Many of the staff involved in this operation worked throughout the whole weekend and beyond and would not have been able to maintain a sustained commitment. Effective communications will be essential to maintain continuity.

The arrival of any further aircraft (as initial information from GOEM first indicated) would have required the instigation of mutual aid arrangements for a range of resource requirements, staff, accommodation, transport, finance etc. This may have necessitated *regional* mutual aid (e.g. the involvement of Nottinghamshire) to be initiated.

Organisational/Departmental business continuity issues will also have to be considered (i.e. who does the ‘day job’).

Recommendation 1. Establish a working group (working to the LRF) to develop an ‘Influx Plan’ for reception of ‘evacuees’ or displaced people (for whatever reason) via air, road or otherwise.

Recommendation 2. Consider the inclusion of appropriate Category 2 Responders in planning for similar events.

2. Information

One of the main difficulties encountered by the team assembled to manage the arrival of the evacuees was the timeliness and quality of the information received. It was not known until a short time before the aircraft landed exactly how many people were on board. The only information available was the type and capacity of the aircraft. However, the information from GOEM (based on the ‘Gatwick experience’) was that the aircraft was unlikely to be full and that very few (20%) people would need some form of assistance upon arrival. This was not the case. Similar difficulties were experienced with notification of the arrival of a second aircraft the following day. It eventually transpired that the Red Cross (who were not included in the pre-planning) could have assisted with detailed information in respect of the evacuees as their participation included representation in Cyprus.

Recommendation 3. Request GOEM to advise FO that specific information is required for ‘influx’ of evacuees, for whatever reason.

Recommendation 4. Establish whether Red Cross or any other relevant agency, are involved at the evacuation point.

3. Reception.

Initially it was decided that the evacuees would be briefed whilst on board the aircraft upon landing (airside) and then received in the arrivals hall at NEMA. , following clearance through customs and immigration.

However, following the arrival of the first aircraft on the Friday, the reception staff (from various agencies) quickly became overwhelmed. This was due to the sheer numbers involved (129) and the fact that most required some form of assistance. This situation was further exacerbated by the (then apparent) language barrier. Very few of the evacuees spoke English. Those that did were used as impromptu interpreters, protracting the assessment time. Most of the evacuees spoke Arabic, although the flight(s) included Spanish and German speakers.

The reception plan was quickly revised, and subsequent arrivals transported to a more spacious, comfortable and convenient location (the Thistle Hotel) in order that short-term assessment of needs could be facilitated in an appropriate environment. (There are arrangements to

receive a large number of people in the airport fire station. It is considered that this is not appropriate for non-military evacuees).

Recommendation 5. Arrange for the reception of evacuees remotely from NEMA.

Recommendation 6. Establish an ‘influx’ contingency agreement with the Thistle Hotel Group (other Thistle Hotels may also be appropriate, depending on the precise location of the influx).

Recommendation 7. Arrange for appropriate interpreters to be ‘on site’ upon arrival.

4. Assessment

As stated earlier in this report, assessment was initially made more difficult owing to language difficulties. This was later overcome by the use of Language Line and on-site interpreters.

The use of hotel accommodation in these circumstances is entirely appropriate. This has also been acknowledged in the London Bombings debrief. A hotel provides all the facilities that are likely to be required, a comfortable stress-free environment, catering facilities, the capacity to assemble all evacuees in one place, minimising the support resources required and providing the opportunity for family and peer group support.

The attendance of staff from; adult care and social services, housing, children and young peoples service, medical professionals, benefits agencies, and emergency management was entirely appropriate and should be incorporated into an influx plan.

However, the following additional resources should also be incorporated in the first instance; transport (whether LA or contracted, interpreters (as above recommendation), appropriate faith leaders (NEMA had Church of England, Roman Catholic and Jewish Chaplains available. However, a significant majority of the evacuees were Muslim), and appropriate volunteer groups (Red Cross, WRVS etc.).

Recommendation 8. Influx plan to include staff from all appropriate Cat 1 and Cat 2 responders.

A further significant difficulty was that some of the evacuees needed repatriation to other countries. This resulted in protracted telephone conversations with; GOEM, the Foreign Office and Foreign Consulates. These conversations and negotiations were undertaken by staff who were better placed dealing with the immediate needs of the evacuees. A representative from GOEM in attendance would have relived this additional burden and facilitated the requirement for regional information

updates and facilitated any necessary regional response/mutual aid arrangements. Had further aircraft been received, the arrangements in place would have been overwhelmed.

Recommendation 9. A GOEM representative to attend future ‘influx’ operations.

5. Dispersal.

The subsequent relocation and accommodation of the evacuees was managed dynamically rather than structured. An influx plan should include an ‘exit strategy’. That is, to determine when the ‘emergency phase’ is complete and a medium to long term accommodation policy can be implemented.

Furthermore, most of the evacuees (without family and friends in the UK) expressed a wish to travel to London, where there is a small, but significant Lebanese Community. However, after the dispersal of approximately 51 evacuees to London, the London Boroughs refused to accept any further evacuees. This seems contrary to the requirements of the Emergency Regulations introduced by Central Government to cater specifically for this operation.

Recommendation 10. GOEM to be requested to seek direction from Central Government with regard to the compliance with Emergency Regulations by all Local Authorities.

6. Financial.

Difficulties were experienced at an ‘operational’ level in respect of finances. Some evacuees could be quickly relocated/repatriated to destinations of their choosing, via taxi, coach or aircraft. However, travel warrants were quickly exhausted and travel by air was only facilitated by



staff paying with their own credit card and applying for reimbursement. This situation could be alleviated by access to a ‘corporate credit card’ or some other appropriate means of access to financial resources 24/7. Obviously, protocols and safeguards will have to be ‘built-in’.

Additionally, colleagues from the Department of Work and Pensions found that the ‘crisis loan’ float was becoming inadequate.

Recommendation 11. 24/7 Access to financial resources at ‘Bronze’ level is essential, for all agencies.

Despite information from Central Government, the costs of this operation, particularly to Local Authorities, were significant. It is difficult, at present, to establish the final exact cost, as some invoices are still being audited. However, the approximate cost, thus far, experienced by Leicestershire County Council and North West Leicestershire District Council is as follows:

LCC	£54,000.00
NWLDC.....	£14,160.00

These are ‘direct’ costs and do not account for indirect costs, staff time, administration etc.

Recommendation 12. GOEM to be requested to vigorously pursue (via LGA?) reimbursement of all costs associated with ‘Operation Highbrow’.

Positives

Notwithstanding the above comments and the ensuing recommendations, it was not all bad news!

Given the circumstances, the operation was very successful. All evacuees were treated with respect and compassion in the most challenging of circumstances.

The multi-agency team, many of whom had never worked together previously, all had a good awareness of their roles and responsibilities and worked together extremely well.

External agencies also performed very well and provided valuable support to the operation, e.g. NEMA staff, hotel(s) staff, transport providers, the media, and the local community.

The evacuees themselves were extremely grateful for the sympathetic manner of their reception and subsequent treatment.

Conclusion.

‘Operation Highbrow’ was an unusual and challenging event for all those involved. As stated earlier, despite the ‘lessons learned’ now evident, it was a successful operation that benefited all involved (including the evacuees) and has received acclaim from the highest level (DCLG).

Although the operation has resulted in a number of recommendations for the planning for future similar events, this can be readily resolved by the very first recommendation; i.e. the formulation of a Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland LFR Influx Plan.

Accordingly, this report, and associated recommendations are hereby submitted to the LRF CG and subsequently the LRF for approval and implementation of the recommendations.

David Massey
Head of Emergency Management
Leicestershire County Council

On behalf of the ‘Operation Highbrow’ multi-agency team.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Establish a working group (working to the LRF) to develop an ‘Influx Plan’ for reception of ‘evacuees’ or displaced people (for whatever reason) via air, road or otherwise.

Recommendation 2. Consider the inclusion of appropriate Category 2 Responders in planning for similar events.

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Appendix II

Summary of Assistance to Evacuees

No. of evacuees received at NEMA Friday.....	129
No. of evacuees received at NEMA Saturday.....	66
<u>Total No. of evacuees received.....</u>	<u>195</u>
No. of evacuees accommodated from Friday.....	76
No. of evacuees accommodated from Saturday.....	26
<u>Total No. of evacuees accommodated.....</u>	<u>102</u>
No. of evacuees given transport assistance (coaches & taxis).....	51
No. of evacuees repatriated to Belfast.....	3
No. of evacuees repatriated to Germany.....	9
No. of evacuees repatriated to Spain.....	3
No. of evacuees still under the care of Leicestershire Council(s).....	34