

ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

13 December 2000

---

**CRISIS MANAGEMENT**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To respond to the following Notice of Motion to the County Council by Mr J.N.B. Irving:

*“That Council be informed if any alterations to current procedures for emergency command and control are planned as a result of experiences gained during the recent fuel crisis.”*

**Background**

2. This report will advise the Committee on any alterations to current emergency command and control procedures as a result of experiences gained from the recent fuel crisis.
3. Fuel Crisis. During the second week of September 2000, many of the country’s fuel distribution depots were blockaded and consequently the delivery of all types of fuel to garages and depots (emergency services and local authorities) throughout the country was severely disrupted.
4. In Wiltshire, the agreed emergency operating procedures were implemented immediately under the control of the Major Incident Co-ordinating Group (MICG). This Group formed the basis of the County’s “Gold Control” and operated from police headquarters at Devizes. The MICG is a multi-agency group with the responsibility of coordinating a joint response in a crisis; the County Chief Executive and Emergency Planning Officers represented the County Council on the MICG.
5. The aim of the MICG was to ensure that staff who were responsible for providing essential services to the community received sufficient supplies of fuel in order to maintain those services and, as far as possible, to minimize the disruption to other services. The aim was achieved throughout the ten days of crisis without having to implement emergency powers.
6. Wiltshire MICG took proactive measures from the outset of the crisis that paved the way for a most successful operation; all non-essential services and council meetings were put on hold and many county employees worked from home. Ministers acknowledged the County’s success at a national level and the media, both nationally and locally, reported most favourably on Wiltshire’s mode of operation.

**Command and Control**

7. The short duration of the fuel shortage obviously influenced reaction by councils throughout the Country. Not one council declared an emergency. With an acute

shortage of petrol and derv, the possibility of calling an extraordinary council meeting was not considered: many councillors would have been unable to obtain fuel or unwilling to use it for that purpose.

8. The Emergency Sub-Committee of the Policy and Resources Committee has power to exercise all the functions of the County Council which are legally capable of being delegated, if during an international, national or local emergency it is necessary to cancel meetings of committees, sub-committees and panels (*para 13.2 of the Delegation to Committees*). Had the crisis deepened and difficult choices had to be made, the Emergency sub-committee may have been called. As it was, the powers vested in the Chief Executive and the County Emergency Planning Officer, working through the Major Incident Co-ordinating Group with other agencies were adequate. The MICG was able to ensure that the limited fuel stocks were distributed in such a way to ensure essential services continued throughout the County. Although the MICG had to deal with an ever-changing scenario and there was much conflicting information received from the various government departments involved (many useful command and control lessons were learned by the Government Cabinet Office), Wiltshire County Council issued daily bulletins on the situation (see para 10 below). Both internal and external lines of communication were enhanced by the use of e-mail, which gave operators increased flexibility with regard to the flow of information.
9. Many inter-agency command and control lessons were learned from the fuel crisis; in particular the police have adopted revised procedures to ensure the timely flow of strategic policy decisions to tactical and operational commanders to ease the situation for the operators (at the pumps on the garage forecourts).

### **Communications and Information**

10. The timely flow of information was a problem throughout the fuel crisis; the situation was changing so quickly that often the detail was out of date within minutes of being issued. The daily briefings referred to in para 8 above were faxed to the party group leaders and any other members who had a fax facility, as well as on a wider scale to the media etc. Unfortunately, one group leader's fax was not receiving the data and so he was unable to update colleagues in his group in the way other leaders were spreading information amongst colleagues. In a repeat emergency improved communications would be implemented by sending e-mail messages to all councillors with the capability to receive them (at the time of the crisis the County Council's e-mail system was being commissioned. It is more a part of everyday communication now). The establishment of a help line for people to call, would also be considered.

### **Procedures and Protocols**

11. The fuel crisis was short-lived, but had it been protracted new procedures and protocols would have been required to ensure the maintenance of essential services. Since September, more robust national emergency fuel delivery plans have been formulated. These plans involve the use of military personnel, national fuel pipelines and closer working arrangements between Government and the fuel companies.

12. At County, a more accountable essential fuel user system has been prepared by emergency planning officers. Business continuity plans for departments providing essential services have been formulated and emergency fuel cards have been printed; some have been pre-issued to the larger organisations and departments.

### **Conclusion**

13. The County has a clear command and control policy that was followed during the recent fuel crisis and there are no proposals to change the structure or procedures relating to that policy. However, some internal communications problems between officers and members were highlighted during the recent fuel crisis whereby some members did not receive timely updates in a fast changing operation.

### **Recommendation**

14. To recommend County Council to note the report in response to Mr Irving's Notice of Motion.

**David Head**

County Emergency Planning Officer

---

**The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:**

None

**Environmental impact of Recommendations contained in this Report:**

None