



Resilience for Care Homes

It should be remembered that Suffolk is a rural county and help summonsed in an emergency could take some time to arrive. Residential Care Homes (RCH) should make sure they can help themselves as much as possible to compliment the response by the emergency services.

All homes should have a plan to deal with emergency situations. Solutions should have been thought through and put in place before the emergency occurs to ensure:

- Safety of staff, residents and premises.
- Ease of operation in an emergency situation.
- Fewer traumas to vulnerable people.
- Staff have confidence that the necessary emergency framework is in place.

These solutions should be tried and tested and if appropriate, backed up by contract or agreement. Remember when you use unfamiliar resource, you need to be mindful your CRB check responsibilities.

Transport

It would be expected by emergency responders that a RCH could call on additional transport if needed, especially in a non 999 event. This would entail contacting local taxi and coach companies and voluntary organisations that have specialist transport. Some of these would not run a 24 hour service so you may need to pay or accept best endeavours for a response as and when you needed it. If you have dialogue with these companies you can find out what they can offer and the likely response times at in a 24 hour period. The more transport options you have, the bigger pool you have to call on without expecting attendance by the ambulance service. Make sure your transport details are recorded in your plan.

Extra hands

It is essential that a home can call on extra help quickly in an emergency. Don't wait until it is too late before calling for back up. If necessary give people a heads up that they may be needed and put them on stand by. (Remember to stand them down again if not needed!) Use your own staff where ever possible as they have the knowledge and expertise. Again, talk to people, find out what notice they need, talk to agencies, voluntary organisations and if your RCH is in the country, contact the local parish council to see if they can sort out some volunteers. Make sure they have your home registered in their community emergency plan if they have one. Up to date contact details are essential, test the list by phoning everyone on it at least twice a year. A call tree or call plan setting out who calls who is a good idea.

Place of Relative Safety.

Evacuation from Nursing Homes, Care Homes or very Sheltered Housing should only be initiated as a last resort. The consequences of unnecessarily and suddenly displacing such vulnerable persons from their familiar environment need to be weighed against those of not doing so. But if a RCH has to be evacuated the residents will need to be taken somewhere outside the danger zone. If the evacuation has been short notice, the relative place of safety (RPOs) may not be suitable for more than a few hours. Although it is tempting to have the RPOs as near as possible to the home, this may be counter productive if the exclusion zone set up by the emergency services means that is also evacuated. A secondary RPOs further away is recommended.



Business Continuity Team

If an evacuation involves the assistance of the local authority to a rest centre or similar it should be remembered that the duty of care by the RCH extends equally to any evacuation destination and this includes the need for medication, supplies and equipment. Evacuated residents are easily left distressed and confused if left without proper management or resources in premises which are not suited to their needs.

Buddy home

Explore the possibility of setting up a buddy scheme with another home which is not too far away but outside any possible outer exclusion zone. It gives you a number of options. A reciprocal agreed RPoS or permanent place of safety (PPoS) is the most obvious. For this you can have any number of homes in your buddy scheme all willing to help out with accommodation. The buddy home can also help handling your emergency. They can place some of the calls for you such as informing relatives or medical practitioners. This will free up the incident manager on scene from the initial call placing and return calls from relatives wanting updates every few minutes. It would be a good idea to agree in advance the basis of the communication you want given out. A template communication can be drafted for use to different groups. You would need to share contact information to do this. Alternatively, appoint a member of staff to perform this function.

Test and Tell.

Once you think you have your support emergency responders all set up you will need to test the plan and tell your staff about it especially if you have given them a role or responsibility. Talk staff through the plan, they may have some helpful suggestions to make. Make sure they are comfortable with what may be expected of them. Make sure they know what the triggers are to invoke the plan and where it is kept.

Don't assume the plan will work, it needs to be tested. It can be as simple as phoning people and asking that if you had an emergency today, could they respond and how long it would take. You can write an emergency scenario such as a flood or loss of electricity and get staff to act out their response. Again they would need to phone up various responders (transport, alternative premises etc) according to what you had set them. Obviously they would need to make it abundantly clear that it is only an exercise. Contact the Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Unit if you would like some help preparing a test plan.

Time

It takes time and energy to write out a plan, set up the necessary mechanism to make it work and to make staff aware of the role they have to play. The Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Unit has produced a template plan to help you make a start and can be found on the Suffolk resilience web site. While producing your plan, consider some 'what ifs' and step through the likely responses. Talk to your buddy homes and any others in your network to see what they have in place. It is always a good idea to share best practise.

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