

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL



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FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE: LESSONS LEARNED INQUIRY **WEDNESDAY 12 MARCH 2002** **SUBMISSION BY RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

BACKGROUND

Ribble Valley Borough Council is situated in north east Lancashire, and with an area of 226 square miles is the largest geographical district in the county. The Borough Council is one of 12 District Councils, 1 County Council and 2 Unitary Authorities within the County of Lancashire. Over 70% of the Borough is in the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a clear reflection of the landscape quality of the area.

The Borough has a population of around 54,000, with Clitheroe, being the main administrative centre, having 13,200 inhabitants. Clitheroe lies at the heart of the Borough, whilst Longridge, the other main town, lies in the west. Longridge has a population of approximately 7,500. The remainder of the area is mainly rural with a number of villages ranging in size from large villages, such as Whalley, Sabden and Chatburn through to small hamlets such as Great Mitton and Paythorne.

The Borough has a mixed economy, with good employment opportunities and a consistently low rate of unemployment. Given the rural nature of the area, it is not surprising that agriculture is a primary employer through the district. Large manufacturing activity is represented by major national and multi-national companies such as ICI, 3M, Castle Cement and British Aerospace.

Ribble Valley is a popular tourist area mainly for short stay visitors. The Ribble Valley has excellent communications which open up the area to the rest of the country. The A59 Trunk Road, a main artery from the west coast through to the east, dissects the Borough, and links to the M6. Main line rail services are available from Preston, which is only 30 minutes from Clitheroe. In addition, Manchester Airport is only 60 minutes away from Clitheroe and provides links to over 200 destinations worldwide.

POLITICAL MAKE UP OF THE BOROUGH

39 Local District Councillors, 49 Parish Councils, 2 Town Councils and one Member of Parliament.

WORK OF THE ORGANISATION

Ribble Valley Borough Council were responsible for the provision of the following local services linked to and affected by the foot and mouth outbreak:

- Closely liaised with other agencies more directly involved with foot and mouth control measures;
- Emergency planning response – cascading advice and handling enquiries from the public in relation to this outbreak;
- We continued to provide district council services to the rural community including refuse collection, planning, environmental health. Several services had to be suspended to farms and residential complexes containing farms;
- Assisted Lancashire County Council in the administration of footpath closures;
- Dealing with Business Council Tax Relief Scheme measures introduced by Central Government;
- We offered assistance to and represented the interests of local businesses who were significantly affected by foot and mouth in relation to the local tourism industry, eg additional promotional measures and business support.

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

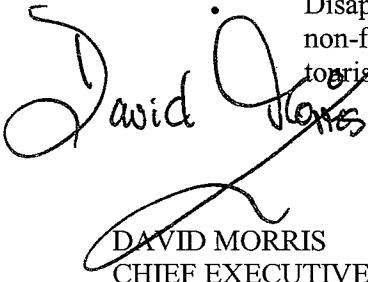
(a) Things that worked well – positive aspects:

- Communications with other agencies – excellent when coordinated by Preston DEFRA Headquarters. Well structured and informative.
- Local vehicle disinfection centres considered successful and popular.
- Very successful involvement with the Dales Recovery Scheme.
- Generally good support for farming community from the general public (eg keeping off farming land and dog exercise etc).

(b) Negative aspects:

- Poor take up of Business Council Tax Relief Scheme despite extensive publicity.
- When responsibility transferred from Preston to Leeds DEFRA, communications deteriorated significantly and became disjointed.
- Deep concern and strong objection in the local community when DEFRA/Army considered introducing a mass burning pyre into the heart of “non infected” area of Ribble Valley to dispose of carcasses imported from other infected areas outside the Borough. The area identified and proposed was at the centre of the dairy and sheep farming industry and was totally inappropriate.

- Public footpath “closure” strategy confusing and questionable as a control measure.
- The public footpath “reopening” equally confusing.
- Disappointing level of biohazard control and disregard for common sense measures by some farmers initially – situation improved with DEFRA information video release.
- Our involvement stretched our limited staff resources at times.
- Provision of essential public services difficult – producing extreme reaction from some ratepayers eg planning, refuse collection, building control.
- Disappointing level of concern and appreciation of difficulties experienced for non-farming elements of the rural community with regards to economy and tourism, eg local markets, shops and residential accommodation operators.


DAVID MORRIS
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

12 MARCH 2002