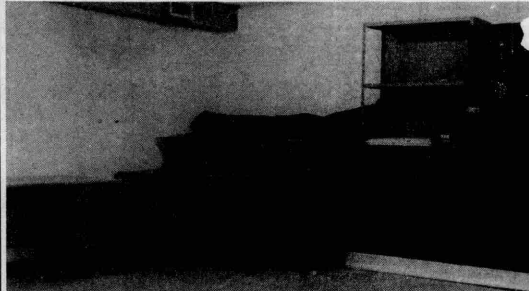


New HQ for peacetime emergencies

Reigate's nuclear bunkers shutdown



NOT one but two emergency headquarters are housed in Reigate Town Hall's basement. One is Reigate and Banstead's own HQ in the old cells, dating back to the days when the town hall was a police station. The other beneath the west wing, is Surrey County Council's larger HQ which is a back up to the principal one underneath County Hall in Kingston. Both would have been staffed with "key personnel" in the event of nuclear war.

But now, with the Cold War over and the threat of global nuclear conflict almost gone, the Home Office is unwilling to pay for the upkeep of County's standby Reigate HQ, and in April, County quit its tenancy.

Facilities

By agreement, all the equipment and facilities were left behind for the borough to take over in a planned move into the larger HQ. Its present one in the cells are to be dismantled and the space used for much needed storage.

The former County HQ is impressive, if faintly unnerving. Steel doors to the entrance can seal off the shelter for 14 days, with its own self-contained generator and back-up and air filter, to protect the occupants from nuclear fallout.

Long, gloomy corridors encircle the bunker, extending beneath the town hall car park. Uncomfortable bunk beds, a small kitchen and chemical toilets provide meagre facilities.

But the place is not designed for comfort. The walls of the control room are covered with maps. Most important of all, in the full range of back-up communications systems plugged into a national emergency communi-

ONE would not have thought it possible, but the end of the Cold War, and the possibility of an East-West nuclear conflagration, has shed some fallout... for Reigate Town Hall emergency planners.

For with the arrival of glasnost, and the burying of the hatchet between the Super Powers, it became obvious that the emergency headquarters housed beneath the century-old building in Castlefield Road, designed to become a bunker for the area's top brass in the event of nuclear war, had become obsolete.

By PAUL NICHOLLS

cations network.

But emergency planners are reluctant nowadays to talk about their preparations for war, contained in an unpublished "war plan" for each locality. Instead the emphasis is on peacetime contingencies, the threat of major accidents or meteorological disaster. The back-up HQ was manned during the 1987 Hurricane.

So near to Gatwick Airport, the possibility of catastrophic mid air collision is played out in numerous scenarios. And the continuing threat of further Chernobyls and nuclear terrorism cannot be discounted.

The courts have ruled, in the aftermath of the Lockerbie Disaster, that principal responsibility for the response to such disasters lies with the district and county councils. The evacuation of thousands of people from endangered areas would be their responsibility.

Local councils are required by law to maintain emergency headquarters, which became something of a cause celebre for certain anti-nuclear councils in the 1980s. Reigate and Banstead's current annual civil defence budget is £3,000, mostly for civil defence training.

Similar HQs are to be found beneath the Tandridge Council Offices in Oxted and the Mole Valley Offices in Dorking. Council officers and some councillors receive special train-

ing in civil defence and in other kinds of peacetime emergency requirements.

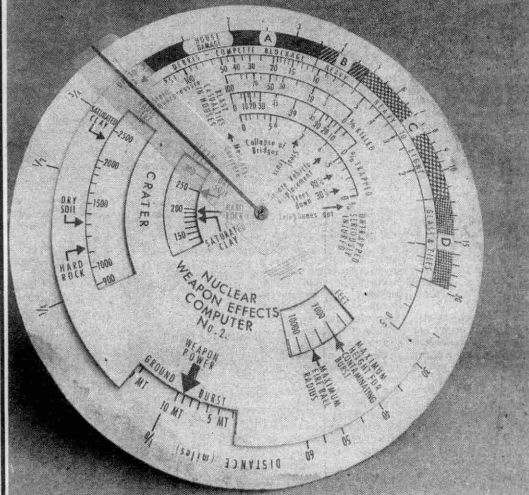
Similar emergency HQs are maintained by the police, fire and rescue services and by various central government departments across the country.

Thursday's General Purposes and Property committee supported the plan to move into the back-up

HQ. Cllr Ted Goodman (Lab, Reigate South West) asked who would be required to man the HQ in emergencies such as war.

He was told it would be certain key officers and councillors from political groups. Some of their families would also be sheltered, it was added.

The Surrey Mirror would like to thank district emergency planner, Mr Alfred Cassar, for showing us around the former County back-up HQ.



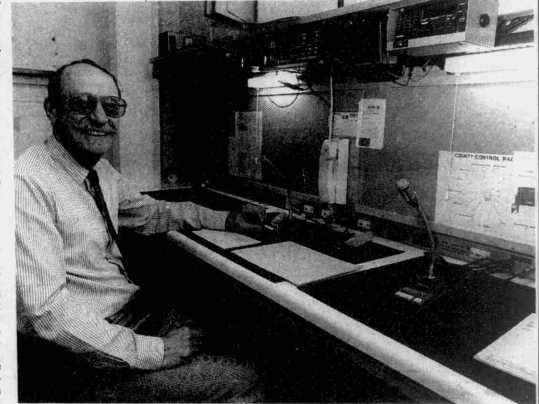
Hopefully a relic of the past. A nuclear "slide-rule" used for training purposes. It displays the likely effects of a nuclear explosion depending on its power.

Photo No: BA/4056/M/KW



During a full-scale emergency "key personnel" would be expected to seal themselves in and sleep on these uncomfortable bunks.

Photo No: SA/4056/M/KW



Mr Cassar demonstrates the full range of emergency communications equipment, plugged into a national emergency communications network.

Photo No: 364/4056/M/KW