

POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL REPORT

REPORT TO:	Audit Committee		
DATE:	12 October 2021		
TITLE:	Business Continuity – annual update		
TYPE OF REPORT:	Monitoring		
PORTFOLIO(S):	Leader		
REPORT AUTHOR:	Dave Robson, Environmental Health Manager		
OPEN/EXEMPT	Open	WILL BE SUBJECT TO A FUTURE CABINET REPORT:	No

REPORT SUMMARY/COVER PAGE

PURPOSE OF REPORT/SUMMARY:
The report outlines the current position of the Council's business continuity arrangements, summarises progress made since the last update on 11 March 2020 and describes work that is planned to be undertaken over the coming months.
KEY ISSUES:
The Council has a responsibility as a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to develop and maintain plans to ensure that, as far as is reasonably practicable, key services can continue to be performed in the event of a disruption or emergency.
OPTIONS CONSIDERED:
Not applicable; the Council must have plans in place under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.
RECOMMENDATIONS:
The Audit Committee are asked to <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. review progress made and endorse the approach being taken to the Council's business continuity arrangements; and 2. confirm whether annual updates on the topic are required.
REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:
To ensure that members are kept informed about the Council's business continuity arrangements.

REPORT DETAIL

1.0 Background

1.1 The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 places a duty on Category 1 responders (as defined by the act and which includes all local authorities) to develop and maintain plans for the purpose of ensuring that, so far as is reasonably practicable, if an emergency occurs they are able to continue to perform their key services / critical activities. This means that, in the event of a disruption or emergency, the Council must have plans available to ensure that it can mobilise the functions it needs to:

- deal with any emergency
- ensure that the impact of the emergency on the council's day-to-day activities is kept to a minimum, and

- ensure that, so far as possible, vital services for the community can be maintained at appropriate levels.
- 1.2 Business continuity management in the authority is based around a framework of documents as shown below:



- 1.3 The responsible officer for business continuity in this authority is an Executive Director, assisted by a group of officers from across the council – the Business Continuity Corporate Officer Group. Implementing business continuity is the responsibility of the Council's Management Team. However, all members of staff have a responsibility to be aware of the plans that affect their service area and their role following invocation of any business continuity plan.
- 1.4 Incidents are broadly of two types. An emerging incident where sufficient notice is given such as in the case of prolonged severe weather or an incident that happens without prior warning but requires immediate senior management attention. The initial Council response in those scenarios differs and is summarised in the flow chart in Appendix A.
- 1.5 A Significant Incident Team will usually be the first point of contact for an incident requiring immediate senior management attention. Such an incident may be an unexpected death or tragic event. Equally, it may be an event causing injuries, a fire in a council building or damage to a facility that could result in injury to staff and/or the public at large. It may also be an event that may attract significant or adverse media interest and is linked to the council's activities, this may include issues such as a lost child in the resort where the child hasn't been located within a 'reasonable' time and the search by our staff and police is escalated.

2.0 Current position

- 2.1 Critical activities are those services that protect life and safety, or are considered essential to support such activity and are considered critical to restore and deliver in the event of a disruption or emergency. The Council's critical activities are:
- Customer Information Centre – response to customer contacts
 - Corporate Communications – including website
 - CCTV responsive functions control room
 - Emergency Planning – response to recovery and incidents

- Homelessness
- ICT – to support other teams
- Incident Management Team – Executive Directors and support staff
- Personnel – for staff contact details (not normal business)
- Property Services – for building access/maintenance (not normal business)
- Electoral Services – if during a critical time
- Env Health – Food Safety / Health & Safety– if during an incident
- Env Health – Environmental Quality – if during an incident

2.2 A risk assessment has been undertaken to identify the potential threats to the critical activities. A 'threat card' is in place for each of the threats to guide the Incident Management Team in their consideration of response. The currently agreed threats to the critical activities are listed below. The threat cards were updated in October 2019 and include:

- Loss of Staff
- Loss of ICT
- Loss of King's Court
- Fuel Shortage

2.3 The Council's business continuity policy was agreed in 2017 by the Chief Executive under delegated powers and is due to be reviewed.

3.0 Progress since last report in March 2020

3.1 Activities undertaken by the corporate officer group since March 2020 are shown below:

- IT Infrastructure Task and Finish Group with oversight of work to ensure the IT network is resilient should the King's Court Work Area Recovery plan be invoked.
- High level 'business impact assessment' undertaken 1 October 2021 – this was a review of all business activity against a set of criteria to confirm in which order services should be recovered in the event of a disruption.
- Out of Hours Contact Card details revised and circulated.
- All critical and non-critical bronze plans reviewed in August 2021.
- METIS 19 tested the Work Area Recovery plan for King's Court and considered the staff numbers, alternative sites and IT requirements in the event Kings Court is unavailable.
- A review was undertaken of the Significant Incident Team.
- The business continuity policy and strategy were reviewed but not finalised pending the senior management restructure and pandemic.

3.2 Periodic updates on business continuity have been published in Internal Affairs and the Members Bulletin that remind staff and members of the importance of business continuity and how to access the Council's business continuity portal following an incident.

- 3.2 The particular officers involved in leading and supporting the Council's Covid-19 operational activities and those arising from structures established by the Norfolk Resilience Forum are also involved in corporate business continuity arrangements.
- 3.3 Elements of the pandemic have been in the Council's Business Continuity plan (within the threat cards) although the scale and impact could not have been predicted. Business continuity is essentially about the management of risk and the pandemic is an example where severity is extremely high whereas the likelihood was very low. The world last experienced a pandemic in 1918 with the Spanish Flu. Accordingly, any significant investment in preparedness is unlikely to have been met with wholesale support.
- 3.4 An example would have been the equipping of officers with laptops versus the cost of desk-top PCs. The financial benefit and life expectancy of a PC is typically far greater than a laptop. The financial costs are particularly greater for laptops given the requirements for additional hardware such as dual display screens and docking equipment.
- 3.5 That said, with what we now know to be true, the likelihood of a pandemic occurring has changed as has the technology to support mobile and flexible working and that may change our emphasis on future investments and mitigation.
- 3.6 Awareness of the business continuity plans was used to help reallocate officer resources from non-critical activities to focus on the immediate Covid-19 response and relocation of staff to alternative work locations. This was important in the early stages of the pandemic in Spring to Summer 2020 to ensure staff could focus on community engagement, processing business grants, support to the vulnerable, corporate coordination, participation with activities lead by Norfolk Resilience Forum and preparations for later phases of the pandemic such as deployment of virtual meeting software, development of flexible working approaches and support to the vaccination programme.
- 3.7 Officers undertake periodic assessments of elements of our business continuity arrangements. METIS 18 was a table top exercise to help embed business continuity arrangements and raise awareness of our response mechanism. METIS 17 was a table top exercise to test the senior management response to extreme weather incidents (heavy snow disruption). Each METIS exercise culminates in a learning report to Management Team.
- 3.8 The Covid-19 pandemic is being treated as a live test environment (METIS 20) for our business continuity arrangements. As the Committee is aware, whilst the focus is on restoration of services and recovery, the pandemic and response is ongoing and resilience arrangements are ready to be stood up where required. As such, a formal review and learning exercise has not yet been undertaken although consideration will be given to this in due course.

4.0 Forward work plan

- 4.1 The corporate officer group has a work plan in place for the next 12 months. Our planning and exercise programme is based upon the agreed threats and is cyclical in nature. Work to be undertaken includes:
- Progressing actions agreed by Management Team following exercise Metis 19.

- Reviewing live incidents after the event and ensuring the lessons learnt are implemented in future planning.
- Planning for the review of METIS 20.
- Reviewing the Council's Incident Response Plan, which following the streamlining exercise, now contains all threat cards.
- Reviewing bronze level business continuity plans.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 The Council's business continuity arrangements are aligned to the principles of ISO22301 – which aims to minimise the impact of disruptive incidents. Business continuity is not a static process; it is therefore important that, as the nature of the organisation changes, our business continuity arrangements reflect those changes.

6.0 Recommendation

6.1 The Audit Committee are asked to note progress made, endorse the approach being taken to the Council's business continuity arrangements and confirm that annual updates are required.

7.0 Corporate Priorities

7.1 Not applicable, statutory requirement.

8.0 Policy Implications

8.1 Policy last reviewed in 2017, review commended in 2019 but publication initially delayed to 2020 pending the senior management restructure and then by the ongoing requirements of the Covid-19 response.

9.0 Financial Implications

9.1 None in this update.

10. Personnel Implications

10.1 None in this update.

11.0 Statutory Considerations

11.1 The Council is a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and therefore has a duty to develop and maintain plans of this nature.

12.0 Equality Opportunity Considerations

12.1 None in this update.

13.0 Risk Management Implications

13.1 Business continuity arrangements are included on the council's risk register.

14.0 Environmental considerations

14.1 None in this update.

15.0 Declarations of Interest / Dispensations Granted

15.1 None in this update.

Background Papers

Business Continuity Policy Statement and Strategy
Civil Contingencies Act 2004
ISO22301 Business Continuity Management Standard

Appendix A Flowchart summarising overview of response to an incident

