MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM 4

COMMITTEE REPORT

CORPORATE AFFAIRS AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

8 DECEMBER 2016

BUSINESS CONTINUITY – ANNUAL REVIEW

STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF FINANCE, GOVERNANCE AND SUPPORT, JAMES BROMILEY

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to outline the Council's approach to Business Continuity Planning and to testing those plans, present a summary of the findings from this year's tests and detail the review schedule.

BACKGROUND

2. The Council has a duty under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to develop and maintain Business Continuity plans to enable continued delivery of critical functions during a business interruption event. The council's Business Continuity plan states that Critical activities are those which, if interrupted could result in:

   ▪ risk of serious injury
   ▪ risk of death
   ▪ massive financial losses; or
   ▪ significant damage to the Council's reputation

3. Business interruption events are incidents that affect service delivery. The Council's approach is that if an interruption meets the criteria set out below, it will implement its plans:

   ▪ Is likely to last for more than half a working day
   ▪ affects a vulnerable group of service users
   ▪ impacts on the delivery of key critical activities
   ▪ restricts access to one of the key council buildings
   ▪ could generate significant damage the Council's reputation
   ▪ is highly likely to escalate into one of the above categories.

4. The Council has the following Business Continuity plans in place:

   ▪ the corporate Business Continuity plan;
   ▪ supporting departmental Business Continuity plans;
   ▪ Relocation Plan;
   ▪ Fuel Plan (held in abeyance); and
   ▪ the Flu Pandemic plan.

Business Continuity – the Council's approach

5. The Council does not publish its Business Continuity plans as they outline sensitive information around its critical processes, which could be misused. They also contain personal information relating to staff where they have agreed to share personal contact details to enable the Council to get in touch with them quickly in the event of an incident. The paragraphs below outline the content of the Council's plans in broad terms:

6. The Corporate Business Continuity plan is the overarching plan for the organisation. It sets out the structure used to identify and prioritise critical functions; the mechanisms for enacting the plan; how Business Continuity plans will be maintained, tested and reviewed; and policies and procedures in place to support Business Continuity planning.

7. For each critical activity, there is a plan which sets out information on buildings used by the service, staff information, key equipment and supplies, key records, ICT systems and other key contacts.

8. The Relocation Plan sets out how critical staff would be relocated to other buildings within the Council or sent home to work using agile working solutions if one or more building became inaccessible.

9. The Council's approach is, in the main, not to write numerous plans for the different risks, which if they occurred, could interrupt delivery of critical services. The fuel and flu plans are the exceptions to this rule, created because of the specific risks facing the organisation at that time and the scale of the interruption which national fuel shortage or a flu pandemic could cause over a period of months.

10. The Fuel plan outlines how the Council would respond to a fuel strike to ensure critical staff that need to be mobile are able to continue to work. This plan was created when there was a significant risk of a national fuel strike. At this point in time it is not part of the review schedule. If the risk of a national fuel strike was to increase, this plan would be updated.

11. The Flu Plan was created in response to the increased risk of a flu pandemic which has been widely broadcast in the media. This plan is normally updated on a yearly basis, in line with the Council's review schedule for Business Continuity. This year's review has been delayed to enable it to reflect the latest national guidance which is currently being refreshed. Once this is released, Council plans will be updated. This plan outlines how the Council would prioritise certain services and change operating practices to enable to be able to continue to deliver critical services.

Plan testing

12. The Council takes a minimum standard approach to testing. Each department is required to test its plans at least once every 12 months, or to produce a lessons

learnt report if a live Business Continuity incident has occurred during the past 12 months. As there were no live incidents, all departments completed scenario based desktop reviews of their plans in October and early November.

13. This year there was a particular focus on testing the alignment of plans with the newly created Relocation Plan. General feedback from the tests was that the Council's resilience has improved significantly as a result of the role out of agile working, however increasing reliance on ICT to deliver services does increase the importance of the Council's Disaster Recovery plans for ICT. The ICT service are taking steps to improve the resilience of Disaster Recovery plans.

Review schedule

14. Business Continuity plans are updated every six months and reviewed on an annual basis. The scale of the review is dependent on the level of organisational change that has occurred in the intervening period. In some years this means that only minor updates (e.g. contact details) are required; in others fundamental reviews will be required to reflect changes to the Council's structure or other significant developments e.g. where services have been outsourced or brought back in house. This year's review has reflected the revised management structure and the impact that agile working capabilities have had on the way services would continue to deliver critical functions.

Conclusions

15. An Internal Audit of the Council's Business Continuity arrangements conducted in April 2016 concluded that the Council had a good control environment for Business Continuity. Based on this and the actions that have been taken in the last 12 months, LMT consider that the Council's approach to Business Continuity is fit for purpose.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

16. There are no new direct financial considerations in relation to Business Continuity as a result of this report although it does reference projects and pieces of work that do have cost implications which are currently being implemented e.g. revision of the Council's disaster recovery arrangements by ICT.

RECOMMENDATIONS

17. It is recommended that the Committee considers the Council's approach to Business Continuity.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

18. Not applicable.

AUTHOR

Ann-Marie Johnstone, Corporate Strategy Manager.