

Report of:	Director of Legal and Governance Services (Monitoring Officer)
Submitted to:	Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee
Date:	16 March 2023
Title:	Business Continuity: Annual Assurance Report 2022
Report for:	Information
Status:	Public
Strategic priority:	Quality of service
Key decision:	No
Why:	Not applicable
Urgent:	Not applicable
Why:	Not applicable

Executive summary

This report sets out the arrangements in place to ensure the Council meets its legal obligations in relation to Business Continuity. The report sets out the Business Continuity governance framework, actions delivered during 2022 and planned actions for 2023.

This report provides supporting information for the Committee on business continuity activity which will be referenced in the annual governance statement.

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to outline the Council's approach to business continuity management, summarises activity in the past year and planned activity for 2023, to provide the Committee with assurance that the Council has robust arrangements in place, as required by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

Background and relevant information

2. The Council has a duty under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to develop and maintain business continuity plans to enable continued delivery of 'business critical functions' during a 'business interruption' event.
3. Business continuity planning is separate to emergency planning, which sets out how the Council responds to emergency incidents that impact on residents and businesses, though there will be times where the two disciplines interrelate.

The Council's approach

4. The Council's Corporate Business Continuity Plan defines critical functions as 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.
5. The Council will consider activating its business continuity plans if there is a business interruption event that:
 - 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 to the Council's reputation; or
 - is highly likely to escalate into one of the above categories.
6. The Council has the following plans in place to respond to the variety of events that could occur:
 - the Corporate Business Continuity plan;
 - supporting Departmental Business Continuity plans;
 - Relocation Plan;
 - ICT Disaster Recovery Plan.
 - Fuel Plan;
 - Pandemic Plan.
7. The Council does not publish its business continuity plans as they outline sensitive information around its critical functions and their recovery that could be misused and contain personal information relating to employees that have agreed to share personal contact details to enable the Council to get in touch with them quickly in the event of

an incident. Therefore, the paragraphs below outline the content of the Council's plans only in broad terms.

8. The **Corporate Business Continuity Plan** is the overarching plan for the organisation. It sets out the structure used to identify and prioritise critical functions; mechanisms for enacting the plan; how all plans are maintained, tested and reviewed; and policies and procedures in place to support effective business continuity planning.
9. Supporting **Departmental Business Continuity Plans** set out detailed recovery arrangements for each critical function or activity, by Directorate of the Council, outlining information on buildings used to deliver the function or activity, staff information, key equipment and supplies, key records, ICT systems and other key contacts.
10. The **Relocation Plan** sets out how critical functions / activity would be relocated to other buildings within the Council's estate or employees sent home to work using agile working solutions, if one or more buildings became inaccessible.
11. The Council's approach is, in the main, not to write numerous plans for risks to critical functions. The ICT Disaster Recovery Plan, Fuel Plan and Pandemic Plan are exceptions to this rule, created in response to specific risks that have faced local authorities and the scale of the interruption that such events have and could cause.
12. The **ICT Disaster Recovery Plan** focuses on maintaining ICT for business critical functions, highlighting those applications which are hosted externally, and any services supported by the Council's key partners.
13. The **Fuel Plan** outlines how the Council would respond to a fuel shortage to ensure business critical staff are able to continue to do their work.
14. The **Pandemic Plan** was created in 2022 by merging two previously separate plans in relation to flu and Covid-19. The refresh reflected learning from COVID-19 pandemic and previous pandemics including but not limited to influenza and SARS.

Plan testing

15. The Council aims to test its plans at least once every 12 months, or produces a lessons learned report if a live incident has occurred during the past year.
16. Due to the ongoing nature of the pandemic, no test was undertaken in 2022, however during 2023 a live test of business continuity is planned to ensure that senior managers understand their roles and responsibilities during an incident and to test the robustness of plans.

Review schedule

17. In a normal planning cycle, business continuity plans are updated every six months, and reviewed on an annual basis (May and November) with the scale of the review 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.

18. During the 2022 annual review of plans, there was an increased focus on the impact loss of power could have on critical activities to ensure services planned effectively for this event.

Activity in 2022/3

19. The following actions were delivered during 2022 to ensure good governance in relation to business continuity.

Testing

20. Generator failover tests were carried out at both of the Council's data centres during the summer 2022 which involved testing the resilience of the generators, Uninterrupted Power Supply (UPS) systems and also environmental (e.g. fire suppression) systems. This test ensured that in the event of a major power outage within the town or the loss of one of the data centres entirely, the other data centre will continue to support the Council's business critical applications, with no changes required.

Documentation

21. All Corporate Business Continuity Plans were updated in November 2022, refreshing the content, updating the formatting, contacts and aligning processes with best practice.
22. An update and full review of Directorate Business Continuity plans has been undertaken within the year to reflect changes in the service, location, employee details and to reflect the additional measures that would be required to ensure resilience to any loss of electricity.

Communication

23. A Business Continuity and Emergency Planning mapping portal has been built in the Council's mapping software, including flood plains, gritting routes, schools, Council buildings, care homes, this year this included the addition of area mapping for power cuts. The next steps in the development of this work are to identify any further data sources required such as critical infrastructure and COMAH sites. Once completed, access will be provided to the relevant individuals for use in emergency and / or business continuity incidents.

Business Continuity activities for 2023/24

24. During 2023/24, further work will be undertaken to build on progress made in 2022/23 part of the Council's commitment to continual improvement in business continuity planning.

Training

- Officers plan to undertake a cyber-attack/power cut exercise on a key system as the next ICT Disaster Recovery Plan exercise to test its effectiveness.
- Increase the number of trained loggists to support Business Continuity responses in an invocation.
- Refresh training to implement an eLearning package range in relation to Business Continuity capturing basic awareness raising and advanced practice.
- Produce and deliver loggist training to all nominated loggists within the Business Continuity Teams.

Documentation

- Undertake the annual full review and update of all business continuity plans to ensure they remain fit for purpose.
- Battleboxes to be updated by business-critical services to enable service delivery to be maintained in the event of a cyber-attack or power cut.
- Revision of plans to reflect occupation of the new main offices this year.
- Establish a corporate Business Continuity room in Fountain Court and refresh plans for the relocation site to ensure both are fully equipped to respond to a business interruption.

Communication

- Communications Plan for Business Continuity to be enhanced to cover communications in the absence of ICT system.

What decision(s) are being asked for?

25. That the Committee notes the arrangements in place to manage business continuity within the Council, progress within the last year, and plans to further strengthen those arrangements.

Rationale for the recommended decision

26. To support the Committee to discharge its responsibility to maintain an overview of corporate governance within the Council, which includes business continuity management.

Other potential decisions and why these have not been recommended

27. Not applicable.

Impact(s) of recommended decision(s)

Legal

28. Business continuity is a part of corporate governance, and the Council has a legal duty to ensure arrangements comply with the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

Strategic priorities and risks

29. Business continuity management positively impacts on risks within the Council's risk registers, primarily the risk that the Council fails to achieve good governance.

Human Rights, Equality and Data Protection

30. There are no direct implications from this report on human rights, equality and diversity or Data Protection.

Financial

31. There are no new direct financial considerations in relation to business continuity management as a result of this report. By having robust plans in place, the Council will be better placed to mitigate financial impacts from any interruption event.

Actions to be taken to implement the decision(s)

32. Following endorsement of the Council's approach, actions will be taken during 2023/24 to further strengthen business continuity management, as outlined in the report.

Appendices

Not applicable

Background papers

Body	Report title	Date
Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee	Business Continuity – Annual Assurance Report	31 March 2022
Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee	Business Continuity – Annual Assurance Report	4 February 2021
Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee	Business Continuity – Annual Assurance Report	19 December 2019
Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee	Business Continuity – Annual Assurance Report	6 December 2018

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