

North Somerset Council

Report to the Audit Committee

Date of Meeting: 23/11/23

Subject of Report: Business Continuity

Town or Parish: All

Officer/Member Presenting: Alex Stafford, Emergency and Business Continuity Manager

Key Decision: No

Reason: Information item

Recommendations

That the Audit Committee notes the update on Business Continuity co-ordination.

1. Summary of Report

Our overall Business Continuity (BC) planning, preparedness and response is co-ordinated by the Emergency Management Unit (EMU), whilst planning and response to service level disruption rests with critical services.

The paper provides an overview of the activities undertaken in the last 12 months to maintain and improve North Somerset Council's planning and response to BC events.

2. Policy

North Somerset Council's Business Continuity Management Strategy 2019-20 provides the Council's overarching strategy for Business Continuity Management (BCM) The Strategy's aim and objectives are:

- Direct available resources to ensure that the council's critical services and resources have robust, reliable and effective business continuity plans in place, which are subject to regular review and testing
- Improve the integration of business continuity management into the culture and working practices of the council, its partnerships, contracts and the civil sector
- Meet the relevant requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004
- Obtain commitment from all responsible officers for the implementation of all the actions specified in the Business Continuity Management action plan.

At a national level, the Civil Contingency Act 2004 requires all Category 1 responders, which include local authorities, to have BC management in place.

3. Details

In order to maintain and improve BC over the last 12 months, the EMU has completed the following activities.

Critical Service BC Plan Template has continued to be rolled out across critical services. Completion rate is currently 88%, however all outstanding services have committed to completing the outstanding plans by the end of November 2023. Targeted DLT sessions have been held with directorates with outstanding BC plans.

The aim and objectives of the plan are:

- To safeguard the safety and welfare of staff, service users and visitors
- To identify those critical business activities within a service which should attract priority in the allocation of limited resources
- To maintain or resume provision of critical service functions at the earliest opportunity
- To return the service to business as normal as swiftly as possible
- Provide an overview of the corporate response.

The plan provides critical services with the following:

- The principles of the council's approach to Business Continuity
- Procedures to be followed in the event of service disruption
- A Business Impact Analysis (BIA) tool to set out the target recovery times, and minimum resourcing requirements, in order to protect or re-commence minimum acceptable service delivery
- A template for service specific recovery plans for dealing with service disruption.

MS Teams areas have been implemented for all directorates which will improve access to BC plans within all directorates.

Exercise Screen Lock conducted with CLT on the 14 June 23, the aim and objectives of the exercise were:

Aim - improve the organisation's understanding of the likelihood and impacts of a cyber-attack and consider the strategic response to such an attack.

Objectives

- Share an understanding of the risks of a cyber attack
- Share information of the likely impacts of a cyber attack
- Review the strategic decision making process in response to a cyber incident
- Inform future cyber and business continuity planning.

Following a debrief of the exercise, an action plan was produced which includes 23 actions. 20 actions (86%) are complete, with the outstanding actions in progress.

A follow-up to exercise Screen lock is schedule for 20 March 2024.

BC impacts and additional requirements in preparation for the closure of Castlewood continue to be fed into the Accommodation Strategy Programme. These include:

- Back-up power generation in the Town Hall
- Location of the Emergency Control Centre.

A community resilience event with the voluntary sector was conducted in May 23. The focus of the event was to raise awareness of climate change and its impacts on BC.

The above activity was completed under resourcing pressures due to the EMU being 0.5FTE short on resources Jan 23 – May 23 and 1 FTE short May 23 – Sep 23, the team remains 0.5 FTE short. The EMU is a small (total FTE is 1.5) and specialist team which means small fluctuations such as this result in significant impact on the team's capacity.

Due to the resourcing pressures described above, the following planned activity was not completed over the last 12 months and is now scheduled for completion in the coming year.

- Review, update and renew BC Corporate Strategy – Includes applying COVID learning, aligning with EM plans and guides, ensuring compliance with statutory duties and in line with best practise
- Review, update and renew BC Corporate Plan – Includes applying COVID learning, aligning with EM plans and guides, ensuring compliance with statutory duties and in line with best practise. The Plan must define BC response roles and responsibilities at Corporate, Directorate and Service level

Ongoing activities include:

- Reviewing contractors and suppliers BC arrangements
- Ongoing plan maintenance and cyclical reviews
- Exercising BC plans
- Responding to BC events
- Promotion of BC to local business and voluntary sector.

4. Consultation

The criteria for defining a critical service is agreed by CLT and contained within the corporate BC strategy and service plans. The criteria was review by each directorate's Directorate Leadership Teams (DLTs) to establish each critical services and a responsible manager.

5. Financial Implications

No financial decisions are required from this report, however failure of a critical service or failure to discharge a statutory duty may result in financial implications such as fines, litigation costs or a loss of revenue.

Costs

N/A

Funding

N/A

6. Legal Powers and Implications

The Civil Contingency Act 2004 requires all category 1 responders, which includes local authorities, to have Business Continuity Management (BCM) in place. Additionally, under the act, local authorities are required to provide BC advice and assistance to the commercial sector and voluntary organisations.

Failure to discharge this duty can have a secondary impact of NSC not discharging any other statutory duties through the failure of a critical service.

7. Climate Change and Environmental Implications

Climate change impacts will increase the number of BC impacting events due to increased severe weather events. Having robust BCM in place will not reduce the likelihood or severity of these events, however BCM will reduce their impact on critical services.

8. Risk Management

At a national level, central government produces the National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA). The NSRA identifies and assesses the most serious risks facing the UK and is used to determine the common consequences of these risks occurring.

At a local level, the Avon and Somerset Local Resilience Forum which includes NSC, localise the NSRA to produce a Community Risk Register (CRR). The CRR determines which risks require detailed and specific emergency and BC planning. For example, the EMU produces plans for fuel shortage and severe weather (heatwave and winter) which are specific BC impacting events.

Any specific or emerging risks that require corporate wide planning/mitigation are escalated via the risk management process through PHRS’s directorate risk register to the strategic risk register.

The risk to NSC if robust BCM is not in place can be scored as HIGH, likelihood “Almost certain”, Impact “critical” on the below risk matrix. However, good BCM can reduce the impacts of BC events to MEDIUM, likelihood “Almost certain”, Impact “Low”.

		← Likelihood →				
		Rare	Unlikely	Possible	Likely	Almost certain
Impact	Critical	LOW/MED	MEDIUM	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
	High	LOW	MEDIUM	MED/HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
	Medium	LOW	LOW/MED	MEDIUM	MED/HIGH	HIGH
	Low	LOW	LOW/MED	LOW/MED	MEDIUM	MEDIUM
	Neqligible	LOW	LOW	LOW	LOW/MED	LOW/MED

9. Equality Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment is not completed for the BC plans, however critical services are required to complete Equality Impact Assessments in line with policy. Not having robust BCM in place will reduce the likelihood of a critical service failing, which could disproportionately affect the most vulnerable service users.

10. Corporate Implications

The Corporate BC Strategy and Plan both need updating. The updates to the Strategy may include mandatory training, directorate roles, etc. these will be new requirements and workload across critical services.

The Corporate Plan is already in line with existing Emergency Management processes and is tested regularly by exercises and actual BC events.

11. Options Considered

Do nothing – this is not an option as BCM is a statutory duty under the CCA 2004 and underpins critical services ability to function during a BC impacting event. This approach may also result in financial implications described in section 5. No resource requirements.

Light touch – this approach can lead to gaps and short comings in planning and response to BC impacting events, it may also result in financial implications described in section 5. Minimal resource requirements.

Current approach – comprehensive and defensible approach, ensuring statutory duties under the CCA are met and that services do not fail if impacted by a BC event. Requires ongoing resource investment at the current level.

Author:

Alex Stafford (he/him)
Emergency and Business Continuity Manager
Public Health & Regulatory Services Directorate
North Somerset Council
Alex.stafford@n-somerset.gov.uk

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

Corporate BC Plan
Corporate BC Strategy
Service BC Plan Template.