

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Audit Risk and Scrutiny Committee
DATE	12 February 2024
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Business Continuity – Annual Report
REPORT NUMBER	COM/24/007
DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
CHIEF OFFICER	Jenni Lawson/Vikki Cuthbert
REPORT AUTHOR	Ronnie McKean
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.2

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the annual assurance report on the Council's Business Continuity arrangements that are required to comply with the requirements of a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee notes the activities undertaken in 2023 and planned in 2024 to review, exercise and improve the Council's Business Continuity arrangements.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

Legislative context

- 3.1 The Council is required to have Business Continuity arrangements in place as a Category 1 responder, as defined by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, specifically:

- To maintain Business Continuity Plans (BCPs)
- To promote business continuity by providing advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations

- 3.2 The Council's Business Continuity arrangements aim to increase the Council's resilience and minimise as far as is practicable the possible risk of disruption to Council services, particularly critical services. Given the number and range of critical services which the Council delivers, the continuing threat to these must be carefully mitigated.

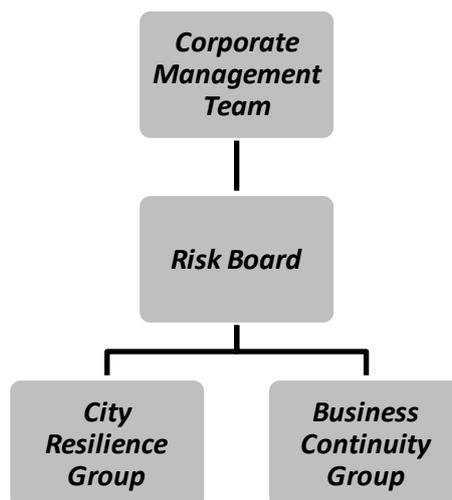
Disruptive events that may trigger activation of Business Continuity arrangements include:

- Loss of staff e.g., through illness, industrial action
- Loss of access to premises e.g., through power outage, flooding

- Loss of key I.T. systems/infrastructure e.g., through cyber-attacks or firewall failures
- Loss of key supplier/s e.g., through market disruption and wider economic forces.

Internal Governance

- 3.3 The Council's Risk Management and Business Continuity arrangements are complementary, working together to identify and manage the risk of disruption. Business Continuity Plans (BCP) are control documents that are designed to respond to, and mitigate risks identified by officers within risk registers that could affect the delivery of Council services. Our plans provide a framework that supports officers to anticipate, prepare for, prevent, respond to, and recover from disruptive events within agreed timescales.
- 3.4 Plans and the accompanying guidance are designed to support officers to assess the impact of disruptive events in order to develop robust activation and recovery plans that account for:
- Identification of critical services/processes
 - Minimum levels of service and maximum period of disruption
 - Minimum resources (staff, technology)
 - Key roles and responsibilities required to deliver the plan
 - Actions and activities required for plan activation and recovery
- 3.5 The Risk Board retains oversight of the Council's preparedness and response to incidents and emergencies which are undertaken by the City Resilience Group (reported to the Communities, Housing and Public Protection Committee) and the Business Continuity Group (BCG) reported to Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee.



- 3.6 The Council's BCG is chaired by the Corporate Risk Lead (CRL) and helps to provide assurance to the Risk Board that:
- Critical services and functions have plans in place;
 - Plans are maintained and reviewed;

- Plans are tested in accordance with the testing/exercise schedule; and
- Good practice and improvement activities can be shared and communicated with other plan holders across the organisation.

Summary of Activity in 2023

3.7 Quality Assurance Exercise

A Quality Assurance exercise was conducted on all of the Council's BCP's in January/February 2023. The purpose of the exercise was to review and assess the content and state of readiness for each plan to ensure that plans remain robust and fit for purpose.

The exercise identified areas for improvement to existing plans including updates required to the existing plan template which is used by officers to create their plans.

The areas for improvement included; the addition of arrangements and activities resulting from industrial action, power outage, verification and assurance of BCP arrangements in place with key suppliers and the actions required within plans to escalate plan activation and recovery activities.

3.8 BCP Template Review and Redesign

The existing BCP template has been completely redesigned and, in addition to the improvements identified from the Quality Assurance Exercise, the new template incorporates:

- Guidance to officers when creating plans including suggested mitigations and points for consideration.
- Additional sections for disruptive events including counter terror threats and extreme weather events.
- Plan activation trigger points and associated actions.
- Impacts and consequences of disruption to critical services over specified durations.

It is expected that new template will be issued to the BCG and Officers during the first Quarter of 2024.

3.9 Planned and Unplanned Power Outages

The Council's Winter Preparedness activities for 2023 included planning for the low risk of Rota Load Disconnection (RLD) and Demand Control OC-6. These are planned power outages for a 3-hour period in predefined geographical areas across the UK that are aligned with postcodes.

The BCG and officers updated existing BCP's to incorporate the actions and activities required in order to respond to planned and unplanned power outages with particular focus being placed on the Council's Critical Services.

3.10 School Business Continuity Arrangements

The Education Service continued to conduct an annual review of plans and arrangements in each school setting ahead of Term 1. These reviews provide Head Teachers and support staff with an opportunity to improve and update existing plans and for new staff to familiarise themselves with the locations of the plans and individual roles and responsibilities required for plan activation.

Updates and improvements to plans include shared best practice identified, updates to security arrangements, structural changes to account for new pupil intake accessibility requirements, updates to school contact information including staff and key suppliers. The updates provide Head Teachers and support staff with the assurance that plans are accurate, up to date and reflect completed risk assessments.

3.11 Critical Service List Annual Review

The Council's Critical Service list details the Council's services that have been assessed by officers as being the most important to continue to be delivered as far as is practicable.

The list was reviewed and updated by Chief Officers in December 2023 to ensure that it remains relevant and up to date.

Each service added to the list is allocated with one of the following categories:

Red	Critical to the Local Resilience Partnership Response	These are services that perform activities and functions that are essential to support the Council's response as a Category 1 responder.
Yellow	Critical to protect vulnerable people	These are services that perform activities and provide services that are essential for the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable people.
Green	Critical Digital Technology	These are services that digital systems and technology to support Red, Yellow and Grey Critical Services.
Grey	Organisationally Critical	These are services upon which the red, yellow and green categories depend, as well as services which ensure the Council meets statutory obligations which still need to be met during the emergency or business continuity event(s)"

3.12 Business Continuity Policy Review

The Council's Business Continuity Policy which was approved by Committee in December 2020 was fully reviewed in order to ensure that it remained relevant and up to date. No substantive changes that would require Committee approval were made. The updated policy document will be published on the Risk Safety and Resilience intranet pages.

3.13 Business Continuity Intranet Pages

Intranet pages were developed and published during the year. These pages are accessible to staff and elected members and hosts the Council's Business

Continuity related information including; policy, guidance, templates, and the Critical Service List. These pages are also linked to the Council's Risk Management Framework and Emergency Planning and Resilience pages.

3.14 Review of Plans Activated

Regional Communications Centre (RCC)

The RCC activated Business Continuity Plans during the course of 2023 in order to respond to a number of events including; I.T. system outage, BT system/network outage, fire alarm activations, technical fault (loss of sound) and weather warnings.

The service recognised that existing plans could be improved to reflect the decisions and activities undertaken during the activation period, these updates included; updates to Incident Management Team information, creation of communication templates for the Council's website and improvements to out of hours messaging.

Storm Babet

The Incident Management Team (IMT) established for Storm Babet monitored potential plan activations via the service updates provided at each IMT meeting conducted and concluded that it was not necessary to activate any of the Council's BCP's during this event.

Industrial Action

The City's school settings and Facilities Management services were affected by Industrial Action during 2023 however, this did not result in any plan activations.

Planned Activity in 2024

- 3.15 Development and improvement activities will continue in 2024 and will focus on the continued development of the Business Continuity Framework and plan improvement through activation debriefs/lessons learned and exercising and will include:

3.16 Plan Updates – New Template

The new plan template will be issued in the first Quarter of 2024, the BCG will be used to support Chief Officers and plan owners to transfer and update existing plans from the current template to the new template with a target to complete by end June 2024.

3.17 Exercising of Plans

A Testing/Exercise plan for 2024 will be provided to the Risk Board for review and approval to enable Table-top exercises to commence upon the completion of plan updates.

The Council's Critical Service list will be used to establish the criteria and priority for plan exercising and to inform exercise and suitable combinations of plans for exercising.

3.18 Internal Audit Recommendations

Oversight and monitoring of internal audit recommendations in 2023 that related specifically to Business Continuity arrangements included the recommendation that BCP's should be updated to reflect any lessons learned from COVID-19.

The "loss of staff (Pandemic)" section of the new plan template will be used by BCG and officers to capture the information within each plan in order to close the recommendation as required.

3.19 Business Continuity Intranet Pages

The CRL will continue to maintain and develop the Business Continuity intranet pages including updates to templates and guidance, testing plans and Critical Services.

4. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

5.2 The Council's existing Business Continuity framework and arrangements support compliance with legislation including the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

6. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7. **RISK**

7.1 The Council's Business Continuity plans and supporting activities contribute to the Council's overall system of risk management.

7.2 The assessment of risk contained within the table below is considered to be consistent with the Council's Risk Appetite Statement.

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account	*Does Target Risk Level Match
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			controls/control actions	Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	None			
Compliance	Non-compliance with legislation.	Effective Business Continuity plans and arrangements in place will support compliance with legislation as required.	L	Yes
Operational	Disruptive events may affect service delivery	Effective Business Continuity plans are designed to mitigate disruption to service delivery as far as is practicable.	L	Yes
Financial	None			
Reputational	Negative publicity in media/social media platforms to Council's response to a disruptive event.	Effective Business Continuity plans and arrangements are designed to support minimum levels of service as far as is practical including communication and information sharing with citizens.	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	Severe weather events may affect delivery of Council services.	Effective Business Continuity plans are designed to respond to and minimise disruption resulting from weather related events as far as is practicable.	L	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

8.1 The proposals in this report have no impact on the Council Delivery Plan.

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	It is confirmed by the Interim Chief Officer – Governance (Assurance) that no Integrated Impact Assessment is required.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required.
Other	Not applicable.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None.

11. APPENDICES

11.1 Not applicable.

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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