ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Audit Risk and Scrutiny Committee
DATE	11th September 2025
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Business Continuity – Annual Report
REPORT NUMBER	CORS/25/206
DIRECTOR	Andy MacDonald, Executive Director - Corporate Services
CHIEF OFFICER	Jenni Lawson, Chief Officer - Governance
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 2024 and planned in 2025 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 if 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 essential 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 structured approach enabling 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, thereby enabling the development of comprehensive activation and recovery plans that address:

- Identification of critical services/processes
- Determination of minimum levels of service and maximum allowable disruption periods
- Specification of required minimum resources, including staff, technology and facilities
- Definition of key roles and responsibilities necessary for delivery of the plan
- Outline of 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 Emergency Planning and Resilience Team (reported annually to the Communities, Housing and Public Protection Committee) and the Business Continuity Group (BCG) reported to Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee.
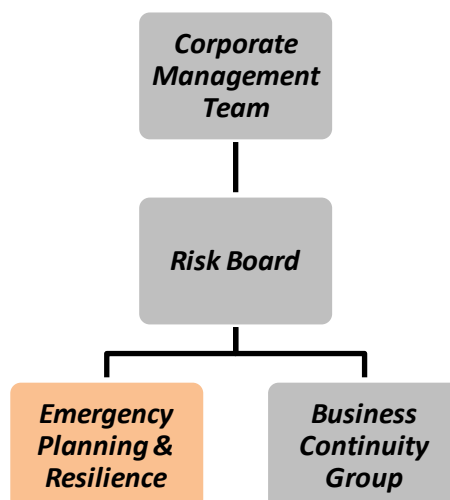
3.6   The Council's BCG is chaired by the Corporate Risk Lead (CRL) and helps to provide assurance to the Risk Board that:

- 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 2024 and 2025 (YTD)

3.7 BCP Template Review and Redesign

The existing BCP template was completely redesigned to address the improvements identified from a Quality Assurance review that had previously been conducted. The new template incorporates:

- Guidance to officers when creating plans including suggested mitigations and points for consideration.
- Additional sections for disruptive events including; extreme weather events and planned and unplanned power outages (NPO).
- Verification and assurance of BCP arrangement in place with key suppliers.
- Plan activation trigger points and associated actions.
- Impacts and consequences of disruption to critical services over specified durations.

3.8 The new template has been shared with plan owners and members of the BCG and work is now well underway to have the current plans updated to the new template by end of October 2025. Each of the Council's service areas require support from a BCP in this revised format, whether or not they involve direct delivery of services to the public. We have a heavy reliance on enabling services such as ICT, information and data, procurement, our operational assets and many others, in order to deliver outcomes through citizen facing services.

3.8 Planned and Unplanned Power Outages

The Council's National Power Outage (NPO) Preparedness Group is responsible for co-ordinating and establishing the Council's response plans to a NPO.

The BCG works closely to support the NPO Preparedness Group by ensuring that Critical Services have robust and detailed BCP arrangements in place to respond to planned and unplanned power outages within the City.

3.9 School Business Continuity Arrangements

The Education Service has maintained its practice of conducting an annual review of plans and arrangements within each school prior to the commencement of Term 1. These reviews enable Head Teachers and support staff to update and enhance existing plans, while also allowing new personnel to become aware of the location of these plans and to understand their specific roles and responsibilities in plan implementation.

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

3.10 <u>Critical Service List Annual Review</u>

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 May 2025 and reviewed by the Risk Board 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 provide or depend on 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)"

3.11 <u>Business Continuity Group (BCG)</u>

Updates to the Terms of Reference for the BCG were approved by the Risk Board in March 2025. Additionally, the group's membership was reviewed and revised to align with the current organisational structure.

3.12 <u>Business Continuity Intranet Pages</u>

Ongoing development and maintenance have been carried out on the Intranet pages that provide access to the Council's Business Continuity information, including; policies, guidance, templates, and the Critical Service list. These resources are available to staff and elected members and are linked to the Council's Risk Management Framework as well as Emergency Planning and Resilience pages.

3.13 <u>Review of Plans Activated</u>

<u>Regional Communications Centre (RCC)</u>

The RCC activated BCP plans during the course of 2024 in order to respond to I.T. system outages and fire alarm activations within Marischal College.

The existing plans in this area are being updated to reflect the implementation of new alarm receiving centre technology and the supporting operational arrangements being implemented in July 2025.

<u>Storm Eowyn</u>

A preparatory Incident Management Team (IMT) was convened to monitor Storm Eowyn in January 2025. A full IMT was not required and therefore, it was determined that activation of any of the Council's Business Continuity Plans (BCPs) was not required during this event

Planned Activity in 2025

3.14 Development and improvement activities will continue in 2025 and will focus on the continued development of the Business Continuity Framework and plan improvement through activation debriefs/lessons learned and exercising. All BCPs are being transferred to the new template which is an important step forward in making sure the Council is adequately prepared in the current risk environment. Disruption to operations is a risk which many organisations are grappling with, particularly local authorities with statutory responsibilities to meet.

3.15 Further, a Testing/Exercise plan for 2025/26 will be developed 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.

3.16 Officers are also giving consideration to the relationship between our emergency plans and BCPs. Emergency plans regulate our immediate response and short-term actions whilst BCPs ensure that services are prepared for disruption caused by an incident and that they are able to resume as quickly as possible, in part or in full. These are medium to longer term. Some dovetailing will be undertaken across all plans as part of the work described at 3.14 and 3.15 above.

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 controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match 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	Effective Business Continuity plans are designed to respond to	L	Yes

	affect delivery of Council services.	and minimise disruption resulting from weather related events as far as is practicable.		

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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