

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

REPORT TO AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Date of meeting: 29 March 2011

Report of: Head of Policy & Performance

Title: Business Continuity Update

1.0 Report Summary

1.1 The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 requires that Local Authorities, amongst other organisations, are prepared to deliver key functions in an emergency. This report aims to provide assurance that Cheshire East Council has business continuity plans in place to provide critical services under a number of different emergency scenarios.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Audit and Governance Committee to note the requirements of the Civil Contingencies legislation and the actions in place to ensure that the Council complies with these requirements.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 Business continuity management is an essential element of risk management, helping to create a resilient organisation and one which is able to provide continuous service delivery and effective use of resources. Effective risk management can reduce the likelihood of an incident occurring, whilst business continuity planning can reduce the impact if it does occur. Because Audit & Governance Committee has a key role in providing an oversight of the effectiveness and embedding of risk management processes, it is considered good practice for this Committee to review business continuity arrangements as part of this, in order to gain assurance that the Authority is well prepared and able to continue with its service provision in the event of an emergency.

4.0 Wards affected

4.1 Potentially all.

5.0 Local Ward Members

5.1 Potentially all.

6.0 Policy Implications

- 6.1 The effects of climate change are likely to increase the instances of environmental emergencies such as heatwaves, drought and flooding, and it is important that the Council anticipates and prepares to respond to such events.

7.0 Financial Implications (Authorised by the Borough Treasurer)

- 7.1 Effective business continuity planning can lead to reduced costs by protecting assets, working more efficiently, assurance of third party providers of services (who may be required to demonstrate effective resilience as part of any tender), and lower insurance premiums, where the Council can demonstrate proactive management of continuity risks.

8.0 Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

- 8.1 As well as the requirement to be legally compliant, general principles of good governance require that the Council should identify risks which threaten its ability to achieve its strategic aims, and to operate its business, and put into place key controls in the form of business continuity plans to mitigate these risks.

9.0 Risk Management

- 9.1 Business Continuity planning is managed and coordinated by the Risk Team within Compliance. It is, therefore, an integral part of risk management within the Authority.

10.0 Background

- 10.1 The Civil Contingencies Act (2004) (CCA) provides the framework for Civil Protection in the UK, and places a number of duties on Local Authorities regarding preparation for and response to emergencies. As part of this, Cheshire East Council, as a Category 1 (front-line responder) is required to develop and maintain business continuity plans, so that key functions can continue to be delivered in an emergency. This also involves consideration of the resilience of those organisations on which the Council relies to maintain key services, including any third parties who provide services on its behalf.
- 10.2 As well as implementing Business Continuity Plans, the CCA also requires Local Authorities to promote and provide general business continuity management advice to commercial and voluntary organisations in the area. This duty aims to enable local businesses to better maintain critical elements of their service and recover more quickly should an incident arise, therefore lessening the economic and social impact on the local community.

- 10.3 As well as increased resilience, there are a number of benefits to having a structured and consistent continuity process in place. In addition to the financial benefits mentioned above, the ability to respond effectively and efficiently to internal and external events and maintain service provision through adversity should protect and enhance the reputation of the Council.
- 10.4 Business continuity requires senior management commitment and support and dedicated resource allocated within the Authority to ensure that plans are developed, maintained, reviewed and, most importantly, tested, so that they are fit for purpose. It is also necessary to build this into the change management process to ensure the implications of any change are fully considered prior to implementation, and that resilience is built into the project deliverables.
- 10.5 It is within the remit of the Corporate Risk Management Group (which comprises the Portfolio Holder for Policy and Performance, members of the Corporate Management Team and members of the Senior Management Team) to monitor the progress and status of business continuity planning and the Council's level of resilience and report quarterly to the Corporate Management Team, Cabinet and Audit and Governance Committee on this.
- 10.6 The Risk Team liaise closely with the Joint Cheshire Emergency Planning Team and the Cheshire Local Resilience Forum to ensure that the Council is aware of and fully incorporated into the regional emergency and continuity planning processes. In conjunction with senior managers from key services, the teams recently participated in Exercise Watermark. This was a nationwide exercise, involving government departments, agencies, emergency responders and communities, to test the country's response to groundwater, surface water, reservoir, river and coastal flooding. This followed a recommendation from the Pitt Review, as a result of the floods in 2007.
- 10.7 There is also close liaison with the Authority's Climate Change Officer in identifying risks associated with climate change, and supporting the services in developing plans to respond to these risks.

10.8 Developing plans

- 10.8.1 It is necessary that plans are documented and available for use within any type of emergency incident. They should also include stand-by arrangements, including accommodation and specialist equipment, as well as IT systems and telecommunications. Consequently, these plans need to link in with other plans such as the IT Disaster Recovery Plan, Cheshire East Major Emergency Plan and the Emergency Rest Centre Plan.
- 10.8.2 A significant amount of planning was carried out at the inception of Cheshire East Council in response to the threatened flu pandemic. Also,

services have been required to implement emergency and business continuity plans in response to the severe weather over the past two winters. Consequently, there is a good level of level of preparedness across the Council. Additionally, there is regular liaison with Cheshire West and Chester Council and Shared Services to ensure joint resilience.

10.8.3 It is, however, essential to review, update and test these plans on a regular basis, to ensure that the critical components of the plans are relevant and appropriate. There is also the need to have an effective education and awareness programme in place, to ensure that all staff are fully aware of the impact of an unforeseen event and their roles and responsibilities in a recovery situation. Accordingly, the Risk team is currently in discussion with all services to ensure that these actions are put into place.

11.0 Community resilience and support for local businesses

11.1 Work has been undertaken over recent months with the Emergency Planning Team and the Local Area Partnerships team in the development of Community Resilience Emergency Plans, so that communities are better prepared to respond to local incidents and can also complement the support and response provided centrally.

11.2 In order to provide support to local businesses, Cheshire East Council is a founder member of the Cheshire Continuity Forum, which was set up to provide a forum for local businesses to meet with the front-line responders in Cheshire (i.e. the Local Authorities, Police, Fire and Rescue, etc.) with the aim of sharing information and best practice in relation to business continuity. In addition, discussions are currently underway with the Cheshire East Economic Development Team to seek other opportunities to interact with and support the business and voluntary sectors in continuity planning.

12.0 Recommendation

Audit and Governance Committee to:

- Note the arrangements in place to ensure that the Council ensures compliance with the Civil Contingencies Act (2004) in relation to business continuity planning and promotion.

13.0 Access to Information

13.1 The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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