

ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service



MEETING

Audit Governance & Review
Committee

AGENDA ITEM

11

MEETING DATE

21 January 2015

REPORT NUMBER

EFA/012/15

SUBJECT

Business Continuity

REPORT BY

The Finance Director & Treasurer, Mike Clayton

PRESENTED BY

The Finance Director & Treasurer, Mike Clayton

PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report provides an in depth review for the Committee of one of the areas agreed for the 2014/15 work plan. It covers the business continuity activities carried out during 2014.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is asked to consider the business continuity activity and determine whether this provides sufficient assurance that the activities of the Service will continue after a business continuity interruption.

BACKGROUND

In January 2014 the Committee received an internal audit report on business continuity arrangements. The report made two recommendations concerning the timely provision of business continuity plans by departments and the arrangements for planned exercising and testing of the plans. The area was selected for a follow up report in 2014/15 by the Committee.

The planned disposal of the Hutton site in 2015 has sharpened the business continuity focus. With Hutton no longer providing any back-up, the need to identify temporary locations for collective working by departments in the event that Kelvedon Park becomes untenable for a period of time, has had to be matched by the realistic resources (ICT and work space) available to accommodate teams. The new build at KP and the changed ICT environment have introduced its own challenges from time to time. Business Continuity Validation and real events increase the catalogue of activity to report on to Members. This report identifies those activities.

In addition, there is an aspiration to align the Service business continuity management system to the British Standard for business continuity management systems and crisis management guidance.

Service business continuity plans are reviewed each year, and cover:

- Corporate and Departmental arrangements,
- Crisis Management,
- Industrial action and Infectious Diseases,
- Fuel, and
- Fire Stations

VALIDATION

Validation is an integral part of the business continuity management life cycle as expressed within the Business Continuity Institute's Good Practice Guidelines 2013.

The Good Practice Guidelines are the independent body of knowledge for good business continuity practice worldwide. They represent current global thinking in good business continuity practice and now include terminology from the international standard for business continuity management systems.

The six professional practices contained within the guidelines include Policy and Management; Analysis; Design; Implementation; Embedding Business Continuity and Validation. Together they make up the Business Continuity Management (BCM) life cycle which is central to good practice.

Validation is the professional practice within the BCM lifecycle that confirms that the BCM programme meets the objectives set in the Business Continuity Policy and that the organisation's Policy is fit for purpose. The purpose of validation is to ensure that the capability reflects the nature, scale and complexity of the organisation it supports and that it is current, accurate, and complete and that actions are taken to continually improve organisational resilience.

Validation is achieved through by the following three activities;

- Exercising;
- Maintenance; and
- Review.

EXERCISING.

As part of a response to the Business Continuity internal audit, an invitation from the Risk and Business Continuity Department was sent out to department heads' at the end of 2013 to participate in an exercise to validate their business continuity department plans. During 2014 nine departments have taken up this opportunity over 4 training days and have gone through a table top type exercise, the details of which are as follows;

27th January – Operations Department and Finance Department.

Representatives from these departments undertook a table top exercise with a scenario designed to gradually reduce the number of personnel available to them (severe weather lasting over a three week period).

The department heads' discussed how their business continuity plans could be adapted to maintain core activity against the loss of personnel. The Critical Incident Team (CIT) – Severe Weather was discussed in detail.

29th April – Technical Fire Safety Department and Safer Communities Department.

A similar exercise to the previous exercise but with the scenario concerning a reduction in personnel caused by Infectious Disease, in this case influenza, over a three week period.

The department heads' discussed how their plans needed adaptation to acknowledge a denial of personnel and how to maintain functions by moving personnel across departments. The CIT – Flu was discussed and the possibility of moving uniformed personnel across departments and directorates.

4th July – Human Resources and Organisational Development, Learning and Development, Occupational Health Department.

The same scenario was presented to these department heads' as the previous one.

The department heads' referred to their business continuity plans and recognised the need to adapt them for a situation which denies personnel for a medium period of time.

24th October – Health and Safety Department and Executive Department.

A similar scenario was used with these department heads' (denial of personnel in the medium term).

The department heads' discussed the impact of reduced personnel over several waves of influenza and how their plans would need to adapt to such a scenario.

Outcomes

When examining their business continuity plans department heads had concentrated their efforts on coping with a denial of premises (relocation to another service site, or working from home), or a loss of ICT (reverting to paper led systems). However although the guidance within the plan asked if a single critical person exists within the department, this was not used to further develop the repercussions of losing several personnel and how the department would keep going.

The exercises gave the department heads an opportunity to revisit their plans and look at how they could adapt them to maintain risk critical core functions. All of the applicable learning outcomes from the exercises have been used by department heads to enhance their planning. An example of this is the Health and Safety department head now has available to him a folder containing all aspects of business continuity including items not included in the BCP (personnel contact numbers out of hours etc.).

MAINTENANCE

An important part of the BCM lifecycle is to manage the documentation, and maintenance of the BCM programme ensures that this documentation is kept up to date and that current and relevant documentation is distributed to appropriate interested parties. In accordance with routine business, the annual plan review request went to all department heads' in the Spring asking for a revisit their business continuity plans and to submit new versions to the Risk and Business Continuity Department particularly taking account of the loss of the Hutton site.

All but one Kelvedon based departments submitted their plans in 2014 to enable a critical assessment to be undertaken. All of the submitted plans are now available on a network drive, as well as hard copy at Kelvedon Park for a CIT, in the event one is called for. In addition, each department has identified a single point of contact to feed into a CIT, recorded in plans.

REVIEW

The purpose of Review is to evaluate the BCM programme and identify improvements to both the organisations implementation of the BCM Lifecycle and its level of organisational resilience. Review occurs through annual checks on content and through validations that identify appropriate changes to plans. Business continuity is a management function that mitigates risks to service delivery, and is therefore directly linked to departmental and corporate risk management.

REAL EXPERIENCES

The Service experienced periods of strike action and two significant events in 2014 that interrupted normal business continuity.

Industrial Action

Between September 2013 and December 2014 there have been 48 periods of strike action by the Fire Brigades Union in support of a national dispute over pension arrangements. The Service's resilience plans have been used successfully on all occasions and are considered to be best practice nationally.

MDT Risk Information Data Corruption 18 June 2014

Because of an error in the data refresh process key operational and risk information was deleted from mobile data terminals on all appliances. Contingency measures were put in place to provide operational and risk information to the incident ground if required until resolution of the issue. This was a partial service loss; mapping data, hydrant information and the crash recovery system were unaffected. There was also a loss of availability of appliances while the remediation was carried out over a 2 day period, equating to a total of 129:40 hours lost availability.

ICT Server Room Power Outage 22 September 2014

A power outage on the 22nd of September resulted in five hours disruption to some ICT systems at Kelvedon Park, most people were able to work after one hour's disruption without the need to implement department business continuity plans. The issue that created the power outage did provide an opportunity to validate some ICT procedures and the learning outcomes were reported. Staff working at Kelvedon Park were kept informed throughout the power outage and were able to make decisions in a timely manner regarding their business continuity.

FUTURE PROPOSALS.

The Risk & Business Continuity Department is working towards a visible and available business continuity management system via the intranet and in hard copy. This will enable each department to quickly locate other departments should a closure of Kelvedon Park mean relocation to a range of sites as set out in the departmental plans. Validation through exercises will continue in 2015, with the emphasis on getting whole departments together and walking them through their plan. In addition to table top exercises site denial exercises are also planned.

Revised Infectious Disease and Emergency Fuel Plans will be released in 2015. These documents will concentrate on business continuity through the use of business continuity plans and critical incident teams. A revised Fuel Plan is particularly necessary as the invocation of the National Emergency Plan for fuel appears unlikely, making some parts of the existing Service Plan out of date. In addition, a collaborative arrangement with Essex Police, in the early stages of development at the time of this report, should conclude in early 2015.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

The successful application of business continuity increases an organisations resilience which, in turn, contributes to higher corporate performance. Resilience is widely defined as the ability of an organisation to absorb, respond to and recover from disruptions. Business continuity uniquely provides the framework to understand how value is created and maintained within an organisation and establishes a direct relationship to dependencies or vulnerabilities inherent in the delivery of that value.

FINANCIAL AND USE OF RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

The exercises described in this report were carried out using the existing resources of the Authority. The resilience arrangements implemented during periods of strike action had a net additional cost of £2,300 per hour with a total net additional expenditure of around £0.5m in the current financial year.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Both the Fire and Rescue Services Act and the Civil Contingencies Act, both 2004, require by implication or expressly that a Category 1 Responder is obliged to have business continuity arrangements in the event that it is the subject of a business continuity interruption. In addition, good business continuity arrangements contribute to risk mitigation, in turn contributing to good governance arrangements.

HEALTH & SAFETY, EQUALITY, ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no other implications from this report.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985	
List of appendices attached to this paper: Table of Recommendations	
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