

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE



Report subject	Emergency Planning & Business Continuity Update
Meeting date	28 October 2021
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>Emergency planning and business continuity activity in BCP Council over the reporting period has continued to be predominantly focused on the ongoing response to COVID-19 and concurrent risks, managing the consequences arising from these, and transitioning to living safely with COVID-19 as part of normal business. The BCP and Local Resilience Forum (LRF) command structures have therefore flexed considerably over this period to meet the demands of an ever-changing picture with new sets of challenges.</p> <p>The other main area of activity has been implementing the BCP Resilience Governance Framework approved by Corporate Management Board (CMB) in September 2020, the overall purpose of which is to strengthen and embed the statutory duties of emergency planning and business continuity and develop a resilience culture. The framework also provides the necessary governance to support delivery and oversight of these statutory duties.</p> <p>This report also provides an update on national developments in resilience, due in part to the experiences of COVID-19.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>Audit and Governance Committee is asked to note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The continued response to COVID-19 and the transition to business as usual • The update on the Integrated Security Review and the National Resilience Strategy • Progress in implementing the BCP Resilience Governance Framework
Reason for recommendations	<p>It is a statutory requirement for the Council to have effective emergency planning and business continuity arrangements in place in accordance with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. This is of particular significance currently during the ongoing response to the global COVID-19 pandemic as we are learning to live safely with</p>

	COVID.
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Wards	Council wide
Classification	For update and information

Background

1. This report provides an update on the emergency planning and business continuity arrangements in place across BCP Council and related activity during the period of this annual monitoring report from November 2020 to October 2021.
2. It is a statutory requirement for the Council to have effective emergency planning and business continuity arrangements in place in accordance with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (CCA).

COVID-19 and Concurrent Risks

3. Much of the emergency planning and business continuity effort since the last report in October 2020 has continued to be focused on responding to COVID-19, particularly the second wave which hit the BCP area very significantly in early 2021 with BCP at times being on the national watch list of local authorities with the highest COVID-19 case rates. Hospitalisations across the Dorset health system during this wave were significantly higher than those of April 2020.
4. The BCP Corporate Incident Management Team (CIMT) increased its frequency to three times a week in January to provide strategic management of the BCP response during the rapidly evolving second wave. A COVID-Silver/Tactical Commander had been nominated back in March 2020 and in April 2021 this responsibility was transferred to a different dedicated COVID-19 Silver with a focus more on the seasonal and community side of the ongoing response and issues.
5. The Local Resilience Forum (LRF) command structures flexed considerably in response to the evolving situation with COVID-19, concurrent risks and resultant consequence management. Many groups had reduced in frequency late in 2020, and these stood up again rapidly as the situation worsened locally in early 2021. A wide range of officers from across BCP once again contributed to the range of LRF groups.
6. A good example of the dynamic nature of the response was the very rapid stand up by BCP Council and partners of lateral flow testing of lorry drivers at Poole Port in response to the newly imposed requirement last Christmas. As the Port of

Poole was not identified as one of the national key ports under EU-Exit contingency planning, Dorset LRF was required to find its own solution rather than being given central assistance.

7. The peak from January to March brought new challenges for managing the deceased and the local authority led LRF death management group re-opened the mortality support facility at Poole Port that was developed and delivered in response to the first wave of COVID-19 but had been on 72-hour standby. This was to relieve pressures in the hospital mortuaries, particularly across Poole and Bournemouth, and in so doing to ensure funeral directors could continue to support the community effectively.
8. The Operation Topsail plan for the management of potential disruption at Poole Port arising from EU transition had to be revisited in the context of COVID-19. Key components of the contingency plan had become unavailable having been superseded by COVID-19 measures. Options were explored, but when re-assessed in the context of COVID-19 and the reduction in traffic through the port, the risk profile confirmed that the planning and remaining arrangements were proportionate to the risk.
9. Based on learning from the previous summer, an LRF Forward Look Summer Group reporting to the Tactical Co-ordinating Group (TCG) was convened to bring together more business as usual aspects such as BCP and Dorset Councils' seasonal response along with emergency planners and partner agencies. It was recognised that, whilst some of this is business as usual, the 'usual' was somewhat different this year as a consequence of the pandemic. This group used a risk-based methodology drawing on information from the police and partners on areas such as protests, the wide range of events taking place across Dorset and BCP, and pressures across the health system set against the context of COVID-19 and higher than usual visitor numbers. Its purpose was to ensure that there was good, up-to-date shared situational awareness across all partners and potential issues could be planned and prepared for on a week-by-week basis. This approach has been very positively received and as part of keeping what has been good about COVID, a trial is to be held over the period of the Winter Wonderland in Bournemouth of a multi-agency group with the same purpose but within a business as usual context rather than being under the direction of the Dorset LRF command structure.

Operation Eagle

10. As part of the COVID-19 response, BCP is required to have planned to be able to deliver surge testing for a COVID-19 variant of concern at short notice should the need arise. This is where all those over 16 and symptom free in a specified postcode area would be encouraged to come forward to undergo a PCR test. Its purpose is to help better understand and therefore contain community transmission linked to a particular variant. This surge testing has been nicknamed Operation Eagle. This could include the need to work cross border with Dorset Council or Hampshire County Council and New Forest District Council.
11. The BCP Emergency Planning Team in conjunction with the BCP COVID Silver has developed a BCP Operation Eagle Surge Testing plan. The draft plan outlines the command structure, approaches and delivery options, but is not a

comprehensive operational plan and dynamic decisions will have to be taken at the time of activation based on the nature, location and scale of the testing required and the prevailing circumstances at the time. Detailed planning is difficult as the exact nature of the testing ask will only become known at the time of the request and the profile of the postcode area(s) will determine the best approach(es). The preferred delivery model would be through the use of additional mobile testing units (MTUs) already in use across the country.

12. An internal BCP Council briefing and scenario-based exercise was held on 1st October for Golds, Silver, Duty Officers and all those with a key role within the plan to raise awareness and validate the planning. A multi-agency briefing and awareness raising session for LRF partners on the BCP and Dorset councils plans was held on 23rd June to ensure a broad understanding of surge testing, the proposed command structure and approaches, and therefore the types of requests that might be made of LRF partners. The BCP plan was taken to Corporate Management Board (CMB) and signed off on 5th October.

Transitioning from Emergency Response to Business as Usual

13. The BCP CIMT stood down on 12th April transferring the ongoing management of any COVID-19 issues to CMB. LRF command structures continued to meet with BCP actively participating.
14. The Dorset LRF Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) made the decision to remove the major incident status for COVID-19 on 7th April although the SCG continued to meet monthly with a few exceptional meetings in late June /July in response to the 'pingdemic', making the decision to go dormant in August. The TCG continued on a two-weekly basis until early September.
15. Following the TCG and SCG debriefs in early September, the SCG decided to formally hand over to the strategic level LRF Recovery Co-ordinating Group (RCG) chaired by the Executive Director of Place at Dorset Council and the Health Protection Board. The RCG had been running in parallel to the SCG for several months in line with good practice to address a range of recovery issues through a small number of themed recovery sub groups. The RCG's purpose going forward is to oversee delivery of the remaining multi-agency recovery issues and the transition of activity to business as usual. The group will then formally stand down once this has been achieved.
16. The Health Protection Board will continue to manage the public health aspects as BCP and Dorset transition to living safely with COVID as part of wider health protection normal business with officers from BCP continuing to attend this meeting.
17. An LRF programme of debriefing and learning has been carried out across the range of groups that formed the extensive multi-agency response to capture learning from the second wave of COVI-19. A debrief report and recommendations combining all emergency response learning from COVID-19 is currently being compiled and will be shared in due course with the LRF Business Management Group and the Executive Group to take forward into the normal activity of the LRF.
18. Learning from internal debriefing was discussed at CMB in October with a series of recommendations arising.

Dorset LRF

19. The work programme of the LRF that usually drives multi-agency planning and preparedness activity has been hugely disrupted as emergency planners have all been focused on supporting the response to COVID, concurrent risks and consequence management. As with all organisations and partnerships, COVID-19 has made Dorset LRF embrace very different ways of working and the partnership is now developing a new work programme and ways of working, and is looking to refocus on developing its core capabilities to ensure it is well placed to respond to existing and emerging risks. This is being integrated with the LRF/Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU) Improvement Programme that was getting underway just as COVID-19 started.
20. Good progress has nonetheless been made in some of the improvement programme workstreams such as the technology subgroup. This group has brought in practitioners from a range of disciplines in partner agencies to work with emergency planners to improve the GIS digital mapping capability and the potential use of drones in emergency response as well as exploring how the LRF can make best use of technology.
21. The BCP GIS Team has been thanked in particular for the excellent work the team has been doing in supporting the LRF to get to grips with this important technology through the use of the nationally provided resilience platform. An example of this is all partners being able to access digital maps of specific high flood risks areas and to understand the properties and infrastructure that might be affected in the event of a significant flood. Information from a range of partners such as the location of any vulnerable people within that area, potential evacuation centres, evacuation routes etc can then be layered over the top of this to provide a useful, common response tool.

Integrated Review and National Resilience Strategy

22. In March the Government published *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-britain-in-a-competitive-age-the-integrated-review-of-security-defence-development-and-foreign-policy>)
23. National resilience is a fundamental consideration within the review and the report set out the intention to develop a national resilience strategy, driven in part by the experience of COVID-19. The Paymaster General launched a call for evidence in July on the development of the national resilience strategy which also included the 5-year review of the Civil Contingencies Act, the legislation that places the statutory duties for emergency planning and business continuity on BCP Council. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/paymaster-general-speech-on-national-resilience-strategy-delivered-on-13-july-2021>)
24. The new strategy and call for evidence are focussed on three key areas:
 - Understanding risk, improving the National Security Risk Assessment and looking at emerging risks.
 - Investing in preparation – everyone is very focussed on resilience presently but how do we turn this into increased efforts to better plan, mitigate and prevent incidents in the future and ensure we have the capabilities in place to respond. Resilience should not be seen as an ‘overhead’ but a critical priority for funding and resources. Failing to prepare is a false economy.

- Whole of Society Resilience - energising and empowering everyone who can contribute to resilience to do so. Building on the legacy of volunteers from the pandemic as only together can we be truly more resilient.
25. BCP has contributed to the LRF response and participated in a range of national workshops as part of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) big resilience conversation to engage with practitioners and gain their feedback. The call for evidence closed at the end of September and the output of the call for evidence on both the review of the CCA and the national resilience strategy are due early next year.
 26. A further announcement was made by HMG of the LRF Funding Pilot for 2021/22. This pilot is a one-off in-year pot of money given to every LRF in England with a clear set of objectives that LRFs are expected to meet in spending the money. Dorset LRF received £170,856. The overall purpose of the funding is to provide evidence on potential options were funding to be provided directly to LRFs in future in line with any strengthened roles and responsibilities that may be placed on them as a result of the national resilience strategy.
 27. Strategic input was sought on how the funding should be spent and a subsequent LRF workshop was held to develop a proposal for its use which was reviewed by the LRF Governance Group and signed off by the LRF Executive. A quarterly return to DLUHC has to be made by the LRF to report on progress of the projects being undertaken by the LRF.
 28. Dorset LRF is using the money to focus on developing community resilience, improving its overall project management as an LRF to enable it to work more effectively; improving data, intelligence and information flows between the local, regional and national level and working collaboratively at a regional level where appropriate, for instance risk assessment based on the national security risk assessment.

BCP Resilience Governance Framework

29. As part of last year's monitoring report the BCP Resilience Governance framework signed off by CMB in September 2020 was shared with Audit and Governance Committee. It sets out the roles and responsibilities of the organisation and establishes two new groups to provide oversight of and ensure delivery of corporate resilience activity. Its overall purpose is to strengthen and embed the statutory duties of emergency planning and business continuity and develop a resilience culture. The two groups are:
 - Corporate Resilience Board – strategic level group chaired by the Chief Executive
 - Corporate Resilience Forum – tactical/operational group chaired by the Head of Audit and Management Assurance
30. A further element of the framework is the introduction of Service Representatives with Responsibility for Resilience. These are nominees from each service/service area to represent their service at the Forum, and in the case of response, at Incident Management Team meetings, to develop a greater understanding of emergency planning and business continuity in order to support their service and to provide the link on emergency planning and business continuity matters.

31. The inaugural meeting of the Corporate Resilience Board took place on 26th January 2021. The full cycle of meetings was established for 2021-22 with the first Corporate Resilience Forum, which meets quarterly, having taken place on 19th May and the Resilience Governance Board, which meets twice a year, having taken place on 22nd June.
32. At the January Board meeting the following work priorities for the 2021/22 year were agreed:
- Rest/reception centre plan
 - Welfare plan
 - Flood plan
 - Coastal pollution
 - Cyber
 - Business continuity
 - Training and exercising programme
33. At the June Board meeting a workshop was held to identify a set of high-level corporate business continuity priorities to underpin business continuity impact assessments and business continuity planning across the Council. The outcome of this workshop can be found at Appendix 1. The corporate priorities will also be incorporated into the corporate business continuity strategy currently under development.
34. Examples of topics covered by the Forum are the national transition by 2025 of the analogue public telephone switched network to digital using VOIP and the impacts of this on the vulnerable, on telephony in lifts, on telecare services and on traffic signals; the recent Protect Duty consultation, and learning from the Cleveland and Redcar Council cyber attack.
35. The introduction of the framework is a really positive and important step in achieving the stated aims and providing the governance to support this important statutory duty.

Emergency Response

36. As the management structure of the Council has continued to evolve there have been new people inducted into the roles of Duty Gold and Silver and also the Emergency Planning Duty Officer. They have been supported with internal familiarisation sessions as well as LRF training, where currently available.
37. An additional emergency response role, the Local Authority Liaison Officer, had until recently been provided by Duty Neighbourhood Services as a legacy from Poole. However, this arrangement has now ceased and new LALOs are being recruited from across the Council through staff volunteering to take on the role. So far four staff have signed up alongside the pool of Emergency Planning Duty Officers who could also be called on to undertake this role. Staff go on the call-out list on a reasonable endeavours basis. BCP and LRF training and familiarisation have been provided to the new recruits.
38. Throughout the period the Emergency Planning Team has continued to maintain the various duty schemes across the Council as part of the command structure. These have continued to be maintained separately from the COVID Gold and

Silver, the seasonal response structure and the command structure for the Air Festival.

39. A number of smaller scale incidents such as residential fires requiring evacuation have been responded to, but the three key events that have required the mobilisation of the Council command structure have been:

- Operation Forth Bridge in response to the death of His Royal Highness, The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh in April 2021
- The plane crash on day 3 of the Bournemouth Air Festival in early September 2021
- The fuel demand issues in late September 2021. The LRF set up the TCG and multi-agency fuel cell to monitor and manage the situation locally and a BCP Incident Management Team meeting was convened on 29th September to understand the impacts across the Council and take any necessary action. The LRF response was stood down on 5th October. Debriefing will take place to capture learning and this will feed into fuel planning activity scheduled to be a BCP focus for business continuity planning next year.

Team Resilience

40. The past 18 months have been a very intense period for the Emergency Planning and Resilience Team supporting the Council and LRF response to COVID as well continuing to maintain a capability to respond to any concurrent risks, responding to incidents, and keep progressing the corporate resilience agenda and governance framework. There has been a degree of instability in the team during this period. A new Senior Emergency Planning and Resilience Team Officer started in November 2020 and since then a further 2 team members have left to take up new roles in other organisations and one has retired. All three have been successfully replaced through recruitment, but the cumulative effect is 4 out of 5 team members have joined in the past year and this does place challenges on what is quite a small team.

Forward Look

41. BCP Council and partner organisations across Dorset have had their resilience tested over the past 18 months. What the winter season may hold is unknown. It has the potential to be very challenging and the usual emergency planning and business continuity risks still remain. Workforces are very tired and capabilities stretched and therefore what may have been dealt with in previous years by organisations could collectively pose more of a challenge this winter.

Summary of financial implications

42. There are no direct financial implications from this report although COVID-19 and the Council's response has continued to have a financial impact on the Council.

Summary of legal implications

43. Failure to have in place effective emergency planning or business continuity arrangements may result in the Council not meeting its statutory requirements under the Civil Contingencies Act.

Summary of human resources implications

44. There are no direct human resources implications from this report.

Summary of sustainability impact

45. There are no direct sustainability implications from this report.

Summary of public health implications

46. Whilst acknowledging the current public health issues posed by the COVID- 19 pandemic and the Council's response to that, there are no direct public health implications from this report.

Summary of equality implications

47. There are no direct equality implications from this report.

Summary of risk assessment

48. Failure to have in place effective emergency planning and business continuity arrangements could result in the Council not being able to effectively respond to an emergency affecting Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole or not being able to deliver critical services in the event of disruption. The potential for concurrent risks over coming months has been outlined in the main body of this report.

Background papers

None

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Corporate Business Continuity Priorities