

# AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE



Report subject	<b>Emergency Planning &amp; Business Continuity annual update</b>
Meeting date	17 October 2024
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	Emergency planning and business continuity are statutory duties for BCP Council. The reporting period has been characterised by remaining resilient and maintaining essential response and planning activity at a local level, whilst at a national level there has been considerable scrutiny of emergency planning and response through the publication of two public inquiries reports.
Recommendations	<b>It is RECOMMENDED that Audience and Governance Committee:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>a) Note the emergency planning and business continuity activity that has taken place during the monitoring period</b></li><li><b>b) Note the issues there have been within the Emergency Planning Team and more widely regarding resource and the impact this has had on service delivery and the potential impact for response</b></li><li><b>c) Note the current resilience position locally and nationally and the implications of this with regard to future expectations of local authorities and their level of preparedness</b></li></ul>
Reason for recommendations	It is a statutory requirement for BCP Council to have effective emergency planning and business continuity planning and arrangements in place in accordance with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and to therefore ensure it can provide assistance to the communities of the BCP Council area in the event of disruption.

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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 2023 to October 2024.
2. It is a statutory requirement for BCP Council to have effective emergency planning and business continuity arrangements in place in accordance with the seven duties placed on BCP Council as a Category 1 Responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (CCA). The fundamental elements of this are:
  - plan and prepare
  - test, validate and exercise plans (to make sure they work)
  - train and exercise staff (specialist response staff and all staff)
  - maintain plans and arrangements (to ensure they are up to date)
  - respond and recover from incidents when they occur including effective warning and informing
  - debrief and learn - then feed this back into planning and preparation.
3. As part of the council's statutory duties it has to come together under the multi-agency partnership of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) to plan, prepare and train for emergencies. The LRF is not a legal entity; it is a partnership comprising the category 1 and category 2 responder organisations that operate within the footprint of Dorset LRF which is coterminous with the Dorset Police boundary. LRF members have to plan together to be able to use their collective resources in the most effective way in the event of an emergency. BCP Council is a constituent, accountable member of the partnership. LRF planning and activity should therefore not be seen as something separate and discrete to BCP Council. The council has a duty to ensure that it is fully engaged in both the development of multi-agency emergency plans and planning and, in the event of an emergency, responding alongside partner agencies, drawing on the full range of council resources to deliver both aspects.
4. Dorset LRF has a dedicated team funded by LRF partner agencies to facilitate multi-agency planning in line with the requirements of the CCA. This is called the Dorset Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU). The team currently has no legal responsibilities under the CCA. The accountability remains with the category 1 and 2 responder organisations

who essentially pay the CCU to assist with delivering these CCA multi-agency planning responsibilities.

5. Within BCP Council emergency planning and business continuity are council wide responsibilities with all services having a role to play in planning and preparation and responding when an incident occurs. The council is supported by a small team of resilience professionals.
6. In summary, there are two modes of activity: planning and preparation and response and recovery and these are carried out at two different levels, BCP Council (single agency) and Dorset LRF (multi agency). The BCP Council Emergency Planning and Resilience Team supports the council in driving resilience work forward in both modes and at both levels and acts as the everyday interface with the LRF partnership.

## **Resilience Overview and National Update**

7. It has been a significant period nationally for resilience having seen the publication of two public inquiry reports. These are:
  - COVID inquiry module 1 report published in July which focussed on national level planning and preparation
  - Grenfell phase 2 report published in September which examined the response of the local authority and Government
8. Alongside this, there has been a focus on HM Government's National Resilience Framework published in late 2022 which set out its vision for resilience across the country including the concept of 'whole of society' resilience. In July, the new Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster announced a long-term resilience review to consider its response to the COVID 1 module inquiry and the previous Government's resilience framework. The terms of reference for this review were published in September. It will include the Government's response to both public inquiries and culminate next spring with the Government setting out its strategic approach to resilience and a renewed national resilience framework.
9. Whilst the Government response to the public inquiries is pending, both BCP Council and Dorset LRF are considering the large number of recommendations arising from a single agency and multi-agency perspective and looking to establish a longer-term programme of work to address the pertinent recommendations. There is a clear and strong message from the Grenfell report that resilience should be seen as an integral part of every local authority employee's responsibilities, not just emergency planners or senior management.
10. The publication of both public inquiry reports in close proximity is likely to be a watershed with the potential for new national and local level responsibilities and changes to legislation and requirements, all of which could bring challenges to BCP Council.
11. Under the previous Government, national grant funding had been made available to LRFs to strengthen multi-agency planning and arrangements. This funding was made available for three years on an annual basis and is now ending. Dorset LRF took advantage of this funding to temporarily increase the size of the Dorset Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU), the dedicated team funded by Dorset LRF partners to support the delivery of multi-agency planning and response. As a result of the temporary grant funding no longer being available or any future funding not being guaranteed, the Dorset LRF Executive made the decision that the CCU needed to be

able to exist using core funding from LRF partners. There will therefore be a revised, smaller and flatter structure of the Dorset CCU coming into effect from April 2025 subject to any new national funding announcements. Dorset LRF as a partnership is already in a stronger position than many other LRFs as it does fund the CCU team through individual partner agency budgets to support its collective, multi-agency responsibilities.

12. At an international level, the disruption caused by the CrowdStrike-related IT outages in July this year demonstrated our ever-increasing reliance on technology and how far reaching the impacts can be when there are issues. On this occasion BCP Council did not suffer any direct consequences, but it was a useful reminder to everyone of what can happen and the need to be prepared. The thinking generally has shifted to 'when' this sort of incident will happen to an organisation and not 'if'. This puts the emphasis on being able to manage a response rather than purely concentrating on how to avoid it occurring in the first place. A significant cyber attack similar to that experienced by Gloucester City Council or more recently, Tewkesbury Borough Council, would challenge any local authority, but the more time taken to think through these sorts of scenarios and test and practise plans, the more helpful those plans will be, and the more familiar staff will be with what to do when it does happen.

### **BCP Council Resilience Update**

13. At a BCP Council level both tiers of the resilience governance structure, the Resilience Board and the Resilience Forum, which look to monitor and embed resilience across the organisation have continued to meet quarterly. The Board recently reviewed the terms of reference to ensure they remain fit for purpose and took time to reflect on its purpose in light of the learning from the public inquiries.
14. In November 23 the Emergency Planning and Resilience Manager delivered two Member awareness training sessions on emergency planning as part of the training for the new cohort of councillors. This covered the council's statutory responsibilities in relation to resilience, an overview of how emergencies are planned for and responded to in the BCP Council and wider Dorset LRF area, and the role of councillors before, during and after emergencies.
15. A key issue over the period of this monitoring report has been resourcing. The Emergency Planning and Resilience Team, the council's small team of resilience professionals, has been carrying two vacancies for almost the entirety of this monitoring period with only the manager and senior emergency planning officer having been in post over this time.
16. This long duration of reduced resource was due to the inability to recruit appropriate staff despite having undertaken three rounds of recruitment. Both vacant senior emergency planning and resilience officer posts have now been filled. One team member started in early September and the second in early October.
17. In light of the resourcing issues, activity has centred on ensuring the council has continued to deliver the essentials in terms of planning and response. Activity has frequently had to be more reactive than proactive with some work having to be deferred or delayed. Key pieces of work that have been affected relate to the BCP Council rest centre plan and human aspects planning. These are linked to aspects of the local authority response that feature heavily in the recommendations from the Grenfell report and will be prioritised over the next six months.

18. In addition to the issues within the Emergency Planning and Resilience Team, the pool of Emergency Planning Duty Officers, who are on a rota as the council's first point of contact in a civil emergency 24 hours a day, reduced from eight to four people in early 2024. Two of this duty officer pool are also the two members of the Emergency Planning and Resilience Team. The rota has been covered thank to staff good will, but this is not sustainable position over a longer period.
19. An organisation-wide recruitment exercise was held to increase the number of Emergency Planning Duty Officers, and to recruit to the new roles of Duty Local Authority Liaison Officer and Duty Loggist that were approved by CMB in 2023. These three roles are all specialist response roles that do not exist as everyday roles. They are only used for emergency response and therefore volunteers from across the existing staff pool are recruited to take on these roles on top of their substantive role. There have been two rounds of internal recruitment for these posts. There were no staff wishing to take on the Emergency Planning Duty Officers role although recruitment to the Emergency Planning and Resilience Team means that the pool has gone up again to seven people. A small number of officers have come forward to take on the Duty LALO role and are in the process of being trained, but no staff came forward to take on the Duty Loggist role. This is now being addressed in conjunction with the new business support function.
20. BCP Council has a statutory duty to respond 24/7/365 but arrangements have all too often relied on running around in the event of an incident and drawing on goodwill of staff to step up at the time of need. This is not a robust long-term solution, particularly out of hours. The formalising of these specific response roles through proper duty arrangements is not only recognition of their importance, but it will increase resilience as staff will be available as and when required and they will have been appropriately trained to undertake these specialist roles. Having appropriately trained staff and having staff formally on call are matters that have been raised by both the Manchester and Grenfell public inquiry reports.

## **Emergency Response**

21. The most notable incident during the reporting period were the protests and public disorder that took place outside the BCP Civic Centre over the past few months as part of wider activity nationally. These were in fact more planned events than an incident, but emergency planning principles and structures were employed. A BCP Incident Management Team was convened and a multi-agency Community Impact Group was established in line with community safety guidance. Whilst challenging, there was good multi-agency working with some particular learning points with regard to communications.
22. The other incident of note was the fire safety prohibition notice placed on the Chequers Hotel and the resultant evacuation due to safety concerns. This again was not a civil emergency per se although multi-agency emergency structures were invoked. Similar instances have been occurring recently in other local authority areas as well as BCP Council and the four councils covered by the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service are working collaboratively to explore how these incidents can be better managed as part of business as usual.
23. There have also been a handful of severe weather-related incidents beyond it generally having been a poor year for weather, the main one having been in early December 2023 which involved potential flooding. A BCP Incident Management Team was

convened and pre-emptive preparatory measures were taken should an evacuation have been required.

### **Emergency Planning Update**

24. Through the additional grant funding that has been made available to LRFs, BCP Council, in conjunction with Dorset Council, bid for a one-year fixed term post to focus on what within emergency planning is known as human aspects. This is 'those activities aimed at addressing the needs of people affected by emergencies; the provision of psychological and social aftercare and support in the short, medium and the long term'. (Eyre et al, 2007). This may include survivors of an incident, the family and friends of survivors and the deceased, those responding to the emergency, and the community living and working in the area affected. It is about ensuring timely, practical support with a sympathetic and understanding approach to enable those affected to recover both practically and psychologically. It is important that the humanitarian assistance response to any incident is considered as early as possible in response and is co-ordinated effectively.
25. Local authorities are deemed to be the lead planner and co-ordinator of human aspects planning and response along with the lead agency for recovery. The human aspects area of work and the associated plans have been identified as a gap across Dorset LRF and been highlighted on the LRF business risk register. The funding was approved and the LRF Human Aspects Co-ordinator has been in post in the BCP Council Emergency Planning Team since the end of May. An LRF Human Aspects Capability Group has been established led by the HA Co-ordinator and the group has approved development of a couple of new plans and a new approach to leading the human aspects response by introducing a Human Aspects Lead Co-ordinator (HALO). This concept has in fact been the subject of a recommendation from the Grenfell inquiry for local authorities to look at, so Dorset LRF, led by the local authorities, was slightly ahead in this respect.
26. One strand of human aspects is supporting the needs of 'the vulnerable' through planning and response. New national guidance on this topic was issued in March 24 and the Dorset LRF Data Sharing and Vulnerable People Group, chaired by the local authority emergency planners, has been continuing to work to address how we would go about gathering, sharing and making sense of vulnerable person data in the event of an emergency and how this can be used to inform the response. A Duty Data Officer role supporting the multi-agency response has been trialled by Dorset Council and this, along with new processes, are being put to the test in the Dorset LRF live exercise, Exercise Eleos, in early October.
27. Exercise Eleos is a 2-day multi- agency live exercise planned and delivered by Dorset LRF being held on 8th and 9th October. The exercise scenario is based on the response to and recovery from wide-spread coastal flooding. Day 1 is all about response, conducted virtually in line with normal response procedures, and day 2 is an in-person workshop day dedicated to recovery, which is far less well practised and understood than response, but it is where the lead agency responsibility transfers to the local authority. BCP Council has put forward a contingent of players across both days as well as using it as an opportunity to shadow key response and recovery roles for experience.
28. A new web-based dashboard tool enabling the visualisation of key response data alongside mapping within multi-agency response meetings will also be tested alongside the Dorset LRF data sharing processes. This is part of the South West LRFs data

visualisation project funded by national LRF innovation funding. It is the culmination of a year-long project and the tool is being tested across each of the 5 LRFs as part of a wider evaluation process.

29. BCP Council has approved a new part-time role that will be dedicated to building community resilience across the BCP Council area. The post will sit within Communities, but the work will be jointly managed by Communities and Emergency Planning. This development is in response to the 'whole of society' approach set out in the national resilience framework. HM Government Community Resilience Development Framework June 2019 described community resilience development in the following way:

*Activity to support community resilience aims to reduce the impact of emergencies by ensuring that:*

- *Individuals, businesses, community networks and voluntary organisations are empowered to prepare, respond to, and recover from emergencies and disasters.*
- *Emergency responders understand, enable and integrate the capabilities of the public into emergency planning, response and recovery activity.*

*Community resilience is enabled when the public are empowered to harness local resources and expertise to help themselves and their communities to:*

- *prepare, respond and recover from disruptive challenges, in a way that complements the activity of Category 1 and 2 emergency responders;*
- *plan and adapt to long term social and environmental changes to ensure their future prosperity and resilience.*

30. Part of building community resilience across the BCP Council area will involve working with ward councillors and promoting the role they play in helping to build community resilience, be it at an individual, family, community or business level.
31. As part of efforts to strengthen and improve LRF community resilience activity, the BCP Director Housing and Communities had been nominated by the Dorset LRF Executive Board as the joint strategic lead for community resilience alongside a senior manager at Dorset Council. The purpose of this is to provide strategic direction to the Dorset LRF societal resilience working group. The BCP Council strategic lead proposed that there should be a separate delivery plan for the two local authorities to reflect the distinct nature and geography of the two areas. This proposal was endorsed by the LRF Executive Group. These delivery plans are in the process of being worked up. The new BCP Community Resilience Officer will work with Communities and Emergency Planning and across the whole council to deliver the actions within this plan.
32. Two new pieces of council-wide planning have been initiated by the Resilience Board during the monitoring period:
- an organisation-wide working group to lead the council's planning for a national power outage. This is deemed to be a low likelihood but extremely impactful national risk should it materialise and all Category 1 Responders and LRFs are required to plan for it. This is a complex piece of work that will be developed and delivered over the next few years as it seeks to tackle issues such as how do you respond to an emergency with a prolonged loss of communications, power and infrastructure that we take for granted. The work will not only be useful to help manage the response

to such an extreme risk but will help to enhance BCP Council's resilience and its wider emergency response capabilities in the round.

- A small working group to plan for fuel supply disruption. Fuel supply disruption happens periodically, often with no obvious cause, and has to be dealt with through business continuity measures. The council has bunkered diesel for its fleet, but contingencies have to be developed for those staff who rely on their own cars for business purposes and who would not have ready access to fuel. Hybrid and home working has reduced the impact for some services, but it could still impact heavily on certain functions delivery critical services. The output will be a BCP Council fuel supply disruption response plan including a corporate mechanism for prioritising fuel and the co-ordination of vehicles and further detailed planning for critical services.
33. The BCP Council wildfire response plan was consulted on and approved by the Resilience Governance Board in May. Some of the pre-emptive elements of this plan have been used throughout the season in response to the often elevated wildfire risk. There have been a significant number of wildfires throughout the BCP Council area but none that have required the council's emergency response structures to be activated in response.
34. The Emergency Planning and Resilience Team once again supported the staging of the final BCP Council-run Bournemouth air festival and developed and delivered the tabletop exercise to test and validate the event management plan prior to the festival. This provided a good opportunity to examine aspects of the planning and issues which could potentially come to pass including a wildfire. This did actually occur on the cliffs just before the start of flying on day 1, but it was dealt with efficiently and did not impact the event.

### **Business Continuity Update**

35. Business continuity is a complementary duty to emergency planning in that it is inward facing, looking at how the council responds to an internal disruption to its everyday running. It is ultimately designed to ensure that the council can still continue to deliver critical services and support its communities, even in the event of an emergency. COVID was an example of this with cyber attacks being another one.
36. During the first half of the monitoring period the focus was on completion of service business continuity impact assessments (BIA) and service level business continuity plans in line with the corporate deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. A BIA is the method by which you identify what you need to continue to deliver in terms of critical services at times of disruption, what resources you need, and then the plan sets out how you will go about that in response to a range of losses including loss of staff, premises, ICT, electronic and hard copy data, fuel supply, utilities including electricity, gas and water and loss of providers, supply chain or resources.
37. Services have largely completed this initial planning which provides a broad level of preparedness. The focus for business continuity has now shifted to maintaining plans to keep them up to date and conducting testing and exercising against a range of scenarios based on real life to make sure they are fit for purpose. The Resilience Governance Board will be seeking assurance that services have been carrying out periodic testing in line with the Resilience Governance Framework. Business continuity planning is also included in the annual assurance process.
38. To assist with raising awareness of the importance of planning and the impact a disruption can have, the Managing Director of Gloucester City Council addressed the



Senior Leadership Network in May to share his experience of the cyber attack his council experienced and were still dealing with 18 months after the event. He provided a very candid and personal insight into what it is like and the emotional toll it takes on you and your staff.

### **Summary of financial implications**

39. There are no direct financial implications of this report. The council's Emergency Planning and Resilience Team has an operating budget of £341,800 for 2024/25. This budget provides the funding for 4 staff as well as standby and call out payments for the 24/7/365 pool of Emergency Planning Duty Officers (Bronze) and the other specialist emergency response roles discussed in paragraph 19. Gold and Silver duty holders are not paid to be on call or if called out, this having been evaluated within the pay and grading of their core roles. There is also a £72,900 budget for the council's contribution to the Dorset CCU as described in paragraph 4.

### **Summary of legal implications**

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

### **Summary of human resources implications**

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

### **Summary of sustainability impact**

42. There is no direct sustainability impact from this report. However, it should be noted that the frequency of emergencies related to severe weather, be it extreme heat, drought, wildfires, storms or flooding, is likely to increase over coming years as a result of climate change. Having seen the range of extreme and intense weather-related incidents experienced around the globe in the past year, the council needs to ensure it is well prepared to respond to the consequences of these through its emergency planning and preparedness alongside any mitigation and adaption measures through its climate change programme.

### **Summary of public health implications**

43. There are no direct public health implications from this report. Having emergency and business continuity plans in place in line with the council's statutory duties means that it will be better placed to respond to public health emergencies or public health consequences of incidents as and when they occur.

### **Summary of equality implications**

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

### **Summary of risk assessment**

45. 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.

46. Failure to address the recommendations within the Grenfell public inquiry report could be damaging to BCP Council as this is a benchmark against which the council will be judged in future.
47. As resource becomes more stretched across the council, the engagement from services in the planning side of emergency planning and business continuity becomes increasingly pressured. Resilience activity is often seen as an 'add on' to the day job rather than being seen as part of it and this intensifies when services are under significant pressure. This means that it is harder to progress work and that the timeframes for completing work are becoming longer. This can lead to gaps in plans and capability. It also means that staff often do not engage in or withdraw at the last minute from training and exercising although this is part of the organisation's legal responsibilities under the CCA.

### **Background papers**

None

### **Appendices**

There are no appendices to this report.