Kirklees
COUNCIL

Name of meeting: CORPORATE GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE
Date: 20th JANUARY 2021
Title of report:
Appendix 1: BUSINESS CONTINUITY ASSURANCE REPORT
Appendix 2: SUMMARY REPORT OF THE COUNCIL'S BUSINESS CONTINUITY
RESPONSE TO AND RECOVERY FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Purpose of report.
To provide an update on Business Continuity

Key Decision - Is it likely to result in spending or saving £250k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards?	not applicable
Key Decision - Is it in the Council's Forward Plan (key decisions and private reports?)	not applicable
The Decision - Is it eligible for call in by Scrutiny?	not applicable
Date signed off by Strategic Director & name	**12/01/2020**
Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance IT and Transactional Services?	**not applicable**
Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning Support?	**12/01/2021**
Cabinet member portfolio	**not applicable**

Electoral wards affected: All

Ward councillors consulted: None

Public or private: Public

Have you considered GDPR?   Yes

1.   **Summary**

Appendix 1: Business Continuity Assurance Report
The business continuity assurance report summarises the findings of the annual business continuity assurance survey and provides a snapshot of business continuity preparedness across the organisation. The results of the survey were encouraging, with the following themes receiving high compliance scores:
• Risk assessment
• Business impact analysis
• Maintenance and review of business continuity plans
• Identification of critical and non-critical activities

- Content of business continuity plans.
- Plan sign off by a strategic officer
- Plan accessibility
- Testing/exercising
- Debriefing following business disruptions
- Awareness of plans existence within the service and the action to take on discovering a business disruption
- Role competence
- GDPR

A small number of themes also received low compliance scores and require further work. These are:

- Maintaining a log of information, decisions, rationale and actions.
- Assurance that critical partners, suppliers and commissioned services have adequate plans in place.

Appendix 2: Summary Report of the Councils Business Continuity Response to and Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic

This report summarises the Councils business continuity response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic (to date). It highlights both successes and learning that will be taken forward to improve future planning.

2. **Information required to take a decision**
N/A

3. **Implications for the Council**
N/A (3.1-3.6)

3.1 **Working with People**
3.2 **Working with Partners**
3.3 **Place Based Working**
3.4 **Improving outcomes for children**
3.5 **Climate change and air quality**
3.6 **Other (e.g. Legal/Financial or Human Resources)**

4. **Consultees and their opinions**

There are no consultees to this report, other than the Director level Officers that have signed the report off.

5. **Next steps and timelines**

N/A

6. **Officer recommendations and reasons**
Members are asked to discuss both reports at the forthcoming Corporate Governance and Audit Committee meeting on Wednesday 20th January 2021.

Questions relating to the content of the reports are welcome.

7. **Cabinet portfolio holder's recommendations**

N/A

8. **Contact officer**
   Name: Sean Westerby
   Job Title: Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Manager
   Tel: 01484221000

   Name:Martin Jordan
   Job Title: Senior Emergency Planning Officer
   Tel: 01484 221000

9. **Background Papers and History of Decisions**
   Previous business continuity assurance survey reports

10. **Service Director responsible**
    Rachel Spencer-Henshall

APPENDIX 1

Annual Business Continuity Assurance Report 2020

1   Purpose

1.1   This report will brief the strategic officers responsible for business continuity on the findings of the annual business continuity assurance survey. The report will highlight themes of business continuity planning that are strong within the organisation and themes that require further work.

2   Background

2.1   Kirklees Council holds and maintains business continuity plans and arrangements to ensure it can continue to provide its most critical functions (as a minimum) when normal business is disrupted, and to ensure compliance with the Civil Contingencies Act (2004).

2.2   The Emergency Planning Team develop and maintain the corporate business continuity framework, which outlines a response to a large-scale business disruption impacting on multiple teams/services across multiple directorates (such as the COVID-19 pandemic).

2.3   The Emergency Planning Team maintain an oversight of business continuity plans across the Council and support teams/services to write, maintain, review, exercise and activate their plans and arrangements in accordance with the Council's policy (when assistance is requested).

2.4   The Emergency Planning Team periodically reviews the Council's business impact analysis template and business continuity plan template to reflect changes to legislation, best practise and learning from actual business disruptions and exercises. Teams/services are advised to use these templates when writing their business continuity plans.

2.5   Business continuity plans across the Council are written at either a team level, or a service level. Senior management within each service are responsible for deciding what level their business continuity plans will be written at. Business continuity plans and arrangements are owned by each individual team/service.

2.6   Each team/service should appoint a business continuity champion to take responsibility for developing and maintaining their business continuity plan(s) and arrangements in accordance with the Council's policy. Many teams/services have appointed more than one champion.

2.7   At the time the survey was undertaken, the Council had 108 business continuity champions and 82 team/service level business continuity plans.

2.8   Business continuity champions are required to undertake an annual business continuity assurance survey. The survey has the following aims:

- Assess the robustness of business continuity plans and arrangements across the Council.
- Provide a mechanism for teams and services to identify what they are doing well and how their business continuity plan(s) and arrangements can be improved.

2.9 The survey was hosted on the 'Snap Survey' platform. A copy of the questions can be provided on request by the Emergency Planning Team.

3 Assurance Survey Findings

3.1 This year, 35 business continuity plans were assessed via the survey.

3.2 Whilst this figure only equates to a 42% completion rate, it should be noted that at the time of the survey, almost all teams/services had activated their business continuity plans and were responding to the impacts of COVID-19. It is reasonable to assume that workload pressures led to some teams not prioritising the survey.

3.3 A full summary of the responses, and copies of individual team/service responses can be provided on request by the Emergency Planning Team.

3.4 The following themes of the survey received high compliance scores (over 75% compliance):

- Risk assessment
- Business impact analysis
- Maintenance and review of business continuity plans
- Identification of critical and non-critical activities
- Content of business continuity plans.
- Plan sign off by a strategic officer
- Plan accessibility
- Testing/exercising
- Debriefing following business disruptions
- Awareness of plans existence within the service and the action to take on discovering a business disruption
- Role competence
- GDPR

3.5 The following themes of the survey received low compliance scores (less than 75% compliance):

- Maintaining a log of information, decisions, rationale and actions.
- Assurance that critical partners, suppliers and commissioned services have adequate plans in place.

4 Further Work

4.1 Teams/services across the Council are responsible for addressing the gaps that were identified in their business continuity assurance survey. On completion of

the survey, business continuity champions were sent an automated email detailing the survey questions and their responses.

4.2   The Emergency Planning Team will undertake the following additional actions over the forthcoming 12 months to improve compliance towards the themes identified in Section 3.5 (in addition to the day to day business continuity work undertaken by the team).

Maintain a log of key information, decisions, rational and actions.

- Remind business continuity champions about the importance of maintaining a log during a significant business disruption.
- Remind business continuity champions that the Emergency Planning Team can deliver loggist training to management (and other appropriate officers). Please note: The Emergency Planning Team regularly deliver loggist training to teams (and partners) throughout the year.

Gaining assurance that critical partners, suppliers and commissioned services have adequate business continuity plans and arrangements in place.

- Remind business continuity champions of the importance of gaining assurance that critical partners, suppliers and commissioned services have adequate business continuity plans and arrangements in place.
- Contact commissioning and procurement teams across the Council to request that (where appropriate) contracts include a requirement for tendering organisations to hold business continuity plans.
- Undertake more work with local businesses and partners. Please note work has already begun on this. In late 2019 the team delivered a business continuity best practise event for care homes and care providers, and more recently, is working with the Council's Business Team and Communications Team to improve the accessibility and content of the information available to businesses on the Council's website.

4.3   Whilst the assurance survey has identified areas for improvement, the Emergency Planning Team is satisfied with the compliance of business continuity planning within most teams across the Council. The Emergency Planning Team will continue to engage with the small number of teams whose planning is known to be significantly behind, with a view to improving their compliance.

4.4   Although not directly associated with this report, the Team has, and will continue to debrief the team level and corporate learning from the business continuity response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the activation of almost all team level business continuity plans and the corporate business continuity framework. In general, the Emergency Planning Team is satisfied with the implementation of team level business continuity plans and the corporate framework, but as with all incidents and business disruptions we can learn lessons to improve future responses.

4.5   The business continuity assurance survey will be re-run in 12 months.

APPENDIX 2

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE COUNCIL'S BUSINESS CONTINUITY RESPONSE

TO AND RECOVERY FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Background

For several years, teams and services across the Council have maintained business continuity plans that enable them to prepare for, respond to, and recover from a wide range of business disruptions. The Emergency Planning Team assist teams and services with their business continuity preparedness through the provision of templates, advice, training and support.

At a corporate level, the Emergency Planning Team maintain the Corporate Business Continuity Framework which provides a mechanism for a corporate response to a significant business disruption that impacts on multiple teams, across multiple directorate themes.

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic led to the activation of almost all team and service level business continuity plans and the first ever activation of the Corporate Business Continuity Framework (which was activated on Tuesday, 24 March 2020).

Summary of the response following the activation of the Corporate Business Continuity Framework

It should be noted that the business continuity response to the COVID-19 pandemic is only one strand of the Councils full response. This report only covers the business continuity response, and none of the other strands.

Following the activation of the Corporate Business Continuity Framework, the Corporate Business Continuity Team formed, and regular meetings were established. The primary aim of the Corporate Business Continuity Team is to ensure that the Council can deliver its most critical services as a minimum, when national and local priorities change, and restrictions are imposed. The Team met daily until June and now meets 3 times each week to discuss the following themes:

- Assets, venues, and human resources (Tuesdays)
- Business continuity situation reports (Wednesdays)
- Schools and other learning settings (Thursdays)

To ensure that the Corporate Business Continuity Team could achieve its primary aim, a situation reporting mechanism was established, which allows teams and services to report key information, issues, concerns, and requests. By requesting that all teams and services submit situation reports, the Corporate Business Continuity Team can control service delivery across the entire organisation. This ensures that the Council can deliver a planned, appropriate, and consistent service that adheres to changes in local priorities and restrictions. The situation reports were originally completed daily and are now completed weekly as standard and anytime by exception for urgent issues and requests. In addition to COVID-19 content, teams and services are also now also able to report Brexit related issues, concerns and requests.

To further assist the Corporate Business Continuity Team to achieve its primary aim, a workforce skills audit was completed in April 2020. This allowed the Team to understand the skills and capabilities of both officers and teams across the Council. The results from the skills audit are used alongside other intelligence to inform decisions on redeploying staff into areas that are agreed as more critical at the time. The workforce skills audit was reviewed in November 2020.

Over time, additional strands to the business continuity response and recovery have been established. Most notable was the establishment of Recovery Support and Challenge sessions, which act as a 'critical friend' to teams wishing to reinstate service delivery. The sessions not only ensure that the service restoration has been well planned; they also ensure that future service delivery is consistent with the medium to long-term service delivery strategies of the Council.

Finally, in order to ensure that the Council was prepared for the winter months, with unknown pressures, frontline services working differently and resource uncertainty, the Corporate Business Continuity Team rolled out a pre-winter survey to all teams and services. The pre-winter survey provided a mechanism for teams and services to consider pressures in advance and escalate any concerns and issues for corporate action and resolution. It also provided data on other themes, such as the resource commitment to the COVID-19 response.

Successes and Learning

As with every incident response there have been both successes and lessons to learn. In November 2020, the Emergency Planning Team debriefed the corporate business continuity response to the first wave of COVID-19. A short summary of the major successes and learning is below:

Successes

1.	Most teams and services had valid Business Continuity Plans in place, which they successfully activated and used to respond and recover.
2.	Many teams reported that they had taken transferable learning from recent business continuity exercises (written by the Emergency Planning Team) which were based on scenarios including a pandemic, loss of premises and loss of IT.
3.	Most teams and services had embraced remote working prior to COVID-19 which assisted the transition to home working.
4.	Service leads have reported that the situation report provides an effective mechanism for two-way communication between services and the Corporate Business Continuity Team.
5.	The Recovery Support and Challenge sessions ensure that service reinstatement is consistent with medium to long-term corporate service delivery strategies. This demonstrates that the Council is using the COVID-19 recovery as an opportunity to ambitiously improve future service delivery (rather than being content and recovering to pre COVID-19 delivery methods).
6.	Teams with an integral role in the business continuity response and recovery such as Emergency Planning, Asset Management, Human Resources, Communications etc can adapt quickly to priorities that change regularly. This ensures that the Council is always able to continue to deliver its highest priority functions.

| 7. | The response highlighted the resilience and flexibility of officers across the Council, many of whom were redeployed to work in unfamiliar roles. |

Learning

1.	Over time, the situation reporting template evolved from a template on Microsoft Word to an e-form, which automatically collates and displays data. Once the recovery from COVID-19 is over, the Emergency Planning Team will explore opportunities to better integrate IT systems into both business continuity planning and response. Once in place, these electronic systems will be exercised regularly at both team and corporate levels.
2.	The Council's team and service level business continuity plan template contained sections that were of significant value (such as lists of critical and non-critical activities, contact details, interdependencies, different ways of working, agendas and logging templates). However, the learning taken from the response and recovery will be applied to the template to further improve it.
3.	The Corporate Business Continuity Team responded directly to service leads on all issues and requests. In addition to this, they also produced a regular communication message that was sent to members of the Council's Management Group (CMG), which contained key information to aid the response and recovery. Over time it became apparent that it would be useful to extend the audience for these regular communications. These communication messages now reach a much wider audience that just CMG level officers.
4.	A definitive list of all critical and non-critical activities would have been useful at the start of the business continuity response and recovery. Historically, a list was maintained by the Emergency Planning Team, but due to the frequency of change within the organisation the list quickly became out of date and lost its value. The list of activities was replaced with a dynamic response procedure, which was used successfully as part of the response. However, as part of the work to explore opportunities for digitising business continuity post COVID-19, the maintenance of an automated full list of critical and non-critical activities will be explored with IT colleagues.

Conclusion

Given the size, scale and unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Emergency Planning Team is satisfied with the business continuity response to and recovery (to date) from the COVID-19 pandemic. Both team and service level plans, and the Corporate Business Continuity Framework were activated quickly, and the response and recovery were, and continue to be planned, appropriate and consistent. Whilst learning will most definitely be applied into future planning, the situation reporting process used throughout the business continuity response was successful and will remain. Other Local Authorities have approached the Emergency Planning Team wishing to learn more about the situation reporting process.