

16 January 2024

<b>Report of</b>	<b>Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Hayley McGrath</b> ☎ 508902
<b>Title</b>	<b>Annual Review of Business Continuity</b>		
<b>Wards affected</b>	Not applicable		

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Colchester City Council provides a wide range of services to the local community. Any unexpected interruption to those services can have a negative impact on both the community and the authority. As such, the Council has established a business continuity process to minimise, as far as possible, the likelihood of an incident occurring and the potential impact if it does happen.
- 1.2 This report provides Members with an overview of the of the Council's business continuity activity for the period from 01 January 2023 to 31 December 2023.

## 2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 Consider and comment on the business continuity work undertaken during the period.
- 2.2 Endorse the Business Continuity Strategy for 2024.

## 3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 The Risk Management Strategy, which forms part of the policy framework, identifies the Governance & Audit Committee as being responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of the risk management process and reporting critical items to Cabinet as necessary. Business continuity is an integral part of the risk management process and it is appropriate that a detailed progress report is provided to this Committee.

## 4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 There are no alternative options to consider.

## 5. Background Information

- 5.1 Whilst business continuity primarily relates to the delivery of the Council's own services, it sits alongside the Council's responsibilities for Emergency Planning, where the Council is required to assist the emergency services in dealing with events in the city (such as flooding) as set out in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. Under the act there are two duties relating specifically to business continuity:
  - 1. To be able to carry on providing its own services in the event of a disruption
  - 2. To provide advice and guidance relating to business continuity to local businesses and voluntary organisations.

- 5.2 The responsibility for ensuring that the Council has effective business continuity plans rests with the Chief Operating Officer and the function is delivered by the Corporate Governance Team. The role is to provide advice and guidance to services including the co-ordination of individual service plans as well as the overall Council plan. Issue specific plans, such as responding to a flu pandemic, are also required.
- 5.3 Business continuity issues are primarily reported to the 'First Call Officer' group, this consists of managers and key staff. The primary role of this group is to provide the strategic management of any emergency – either internal or external. The group meets every two months to review plans and consider emergency planning and business continuity issues.

## **6. Summary of Work Undertaken**

- 6.1 Following the restructure of Council services the Resilience Officer has been working with the new Heads of Service to produce revised Business Impact Assessments (BISs) and Business Continuity Plans (BCPs).
- 6.2 A programme of testing the revised BCP's has been deployed during the year. The responsibility to test a plan rests with the relevant Head of Service, but the Resilience Officer provides support with the testing and oversees the programme to ensure that the testing is completed.
- 6.3 Following the restructure of the Senior Management Team it was decided that the membership of the First Call Officer (FCO) group should be revised. Members of the Senior Leadership Board previously acted as FCO's, however it was felt that the initial response to an incident would be better undertaken by managers within relevant services, ensuring that SLB members were able to undertake a more strategic role during a major incident. This is also in line with other Essex authorities.
- 6.4 There are seven new FCO's and all have received Tactical Command training. They operate on a two-week rota basis, acting as the first point of contact for any Emergency Planning and Business Continuity issues.
- 6.5 There have been several Emergency Planning/ Business Continuity issues that the Council has had to respond to during the year, including:
- Support to Essex Police during the Royal visit in March, with overseeing emergency evacuation plans and working alongside the Police Silver officer on the day.
  - Arrival of over 1000 evacuees from Sudan at Stanstead Airport in May, where mutual aid was requested to be able to process the evacuees and offer housing and support.
  - Emergency evacuation of tenants from flats in the Hythe in June, where Essex Fire and Rescue has issued an immediate prohibition notice following a fire inspection.
  - Several Essex wide teleconferences relating to weather impacts including flooding and wind.
- All of these issues had significant impacts on Council service delivery from officers not being able to perform their normal role, as they were required to provide emergency support, through to services not being delivered due to the impacts of the event, such as closing parks due to severe weather issues.
- 6.6 The Business Continuity function was audited in September 2023, it achieved a reasonable assurance rating and two recommendations were made - completion of the remaining BCP's, following the reorganisation, and, the Resilience Officer to follow up on the four areas where testing of plans was due to take place. Both recommendations have been accepted and implemented.

## **7.0 Business Continuity Strategy for 2024**

- 7.1 The Business Continuity Strategy was agreed for the first time in 2009. A requirement within the strategy, and also of the regular internal audit assessment, is that it is reviewed annually to ensure that it is still appropriate to the Council's needs.
- 7.2 Therefore a review has been undertaken and the strategy has been updated for 2024. The revised strategy is attached at appendix A. It is considered that the strategy continues to meet the needs of the organisation and therefore there are no changes to the strategy or the business continuity process.

## **8. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications**

- 8.1 There are no equality, diversity or Human Rights implications as a result of this report.

## **9. Strategic Plan References**

- 9.1 The ability of the Council to carry on providing critical services, even when dealing with a major disruption, is fundamental to ensuring the achievement of the strategic plan objectives.

## **10. Risk Management Implications**

- 10.1 The failure to adequately manage a business interruption may have an effect on the ability of the Council to achieve its objectives and operate effectively.

## **11 Environmental and Sustainability Implications**

- 11.1 There are no environmental or sustainability implications as a result of this report.

## **12. Other Standard References**

- 12.1 There are no particular references to consultation or publicity considerations or financial; community safety or health and safety implications.

## **Appendices**

Appendix A – Business Continuity Strategy for 2024.