

<b>Report of</b>	<b>Chief Operating Officer</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Dan Gascoyne</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Brexit – governance and business continuity</b>		<b>☎ 282577</b>
<b>Wards affected</b>	Not applicable		

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Panel requested an update on the Council's governance and business continuity arrangements for Brexit. A verbal update will be given alongside this report.
- 1.2 Please also see [Governance and Audit Committee 7 March 2019](#) and at [Cabinet 4 September 2019](#) (item 8 risk management), with copies also shown as Appendices A and B to this report, which set out these arrangements and the context for this update.
- 1.3 The UK's withdrawal from the European Union continues to create a number of uncertainties for the Council, our communities and businesses. There are different potential risks depending on the eventual exit arrangements. The Council is continuing to monitor the Government's announcements on the implications of the exit from the EU and to bring them to the attention of decision makers at the appropriate level. This includes the potential implications of a 'no deal' Brexit.
- 1.4 The EU's chief Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier, has said of a 'no deal' Brexit that it "still exists. It could happen at the end of January, should Parliament fail to ratify the Brexit deal. It could also happen at the end of 2020, following the end of the transition period, if no new trade deal is agreed between the UK. The risk of Brexit happening without an agreement still exists. We still need to prepare."
- 1.5 The recently-announced General Election on 12 December, its outcome and the impact on agreeing a deal will also be key factors to be considered as these situations develop.
- 1.6 Council officers are in regular contact with Government departments, other local authorities and partner organisations to understand and prepare for Brexit and, where possible, mitigate risks. The Essex Resilience Forum is coordinating preparation and communications in the event of a range of scenarios in terms of civil contingencies. Essex Chief Executives are discussing Brexit planning at the county-wide level. The Council is contributing to information gathering, reports and county-wide planning events.

## 2. Action required

- 2.1 To scrutinise the update on the current arrangements.

## 3. Reason for Scrutiny

- 3.1 To provide an update on the current position regarding Brexit.

## 4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 Not applicable.

## 5. An overview of Brexit-related arrangements – update since previous reports

- 5.1 Councils have a key role in continuity planning across concerns which may have an impact on their communities. This sort of contingency planning is normal for councils, for issues as diverse as bad weather, major disasters, terrorist incidents or health crises like a flu pandemic. Brexit is one such area where councils aim to be as prepared as they can be in the light of 'what if' uncertainties.
- 5.2 Whatever the issue is, the Council seeks to properly prepare, plan and implement as that is the best way to provide continuity for businesses, residents and employees. The Council is preparing for a range of outcomes relating to Brexit. This will help us to continue delivering services both on a daily basis and over the longer term.
- 5.3 Communications
- New 'one stop shop' webpages have been created and added to CBC's website:
    - [Brexit and You](#) (residents/EU Settlement Scheme)
    - [Prepare for Brexit](#) (for businesses).
  - CBC continues to work with partner organisations across the county on communications, media, information sharing, message development and building capacity as appropriate.
  - The Government's public information campaign has been reflected as appropriate.
  - CBC's intranet has been used to signpost staff to relevant information and resources.
  - Members of CBC's Communications Team attended Essex-wide 'Crisis Comms' training.
- 5.4 EU Settlement Scheme
- CBC has arranged for information and guidance to be available at the Community Hub in Colchester's main library. From 11 November, staff are helping EU nationals who may not have the necessary technology/scanner/IT skills to be assisted to apply online via a CBC secure mobile device. This will complement the proposed introduction of a verification service to be offered by the Registration Service (County Council).
  - CBC has added [Home Office step-by-step videos](#) on how to apply to its website, as suggested by the [LGA Brexit Task Force](#).
  - CBC has also highlighted the scheme to its own employees via internal communications.
- 5.5 Resilience
- A Resilience Officer was appointed in August to cover the substantive postholder's maternity leave to ensure CBC's capacity to prepare and respond was maintained.
  - CBC has continued with partnership working and preparations for a range of outcomes – for example, since August 2018, the [Essex Resilience Forum](#) (the LRF for Essex) has been actively planning to mitigate any disruption that could be caused by EU Exit.
  - CBC took part in Essex-wide teleconferencing calls and information returns as requested and has plans to do so again as required.
  - CBC has considered various operational issues such as fuel and environmental health.
  - 'Longer Term Preparedness' – this day-long event was attended by key organisations across Essex, including CBC officers, to look at potential issues post-Brexit.
  - The [Local government Brexit preparedness](#) web resource is also facilitating advance planning at national, regional and local levels for councils, partners and other agencies. It provides links to current government guidance to aid ongoing Brexit preparations, is organised into areas of responsibility, and is updated and added to regularly.
- 5.6 Businesses
- CBC's Business Enterprise team has worked with businesses to promote the [Best Growth Hub](#)'s resources signposting helplines, guidance and events available on them.
  - [Prepare for Brexit](#) is a new section on CBC's website and is tailored for businesses.
  - Uncertainty around Brexit continues to be a key concern for businesses and their future plans.

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

- 6.1 The Council's existing Equality Impact Assessments are published on its website [here](#). These assessments would be reviewed in the event of legislative or other changes to policies, procedures and practices that have an impact on customers and employees.

## **7. Strategic Plan References**

- 7.1 How the Council governs its business is an underpinning mechanism in the Council's Strategic Plan which sets out the direction and future potential for our borough.

## **8. Consultation**

- 8.1 There are no consultation references at this point.

## **9. Publicity Considerations**

- 9.1 Individuals, organisations and employers can use the [GOV.UK website](#) as a 'one stop shop' for information about EU Exit including the article 50 process, negotiations, and announcements about policy changes as a result of EU Exit. It is the key reference resource, as it is continually updated and anyone can [sign-up for e-mail alerts](#).
- 9.2 Councils across Essex are working together on communications – see section 5.

## **10. Financial implications**

- 10.1 The Government has said that it will assess and, if appropriate, fund any potential new burdens arising on councils as part of EU Exit work they are undertaking.
- 10.2 The Government has also secured the UK's participation in EU Funding programmes ([ESIF](#)) until the end of 2020, and committed to a domestic fund, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund SPF, post 2020. to replace the money that local areas currently receive from the European Union.
- 10.3 As a share of the £40 million [allocated](#) to local authorities to help prepare for Brexit, each district council received £35,000 over two years. The Council has used this funding to support and develop its resilience arrangements. Examples are shown at 5.5 above.

## **12. Health, Health and Safety, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications**

- 12.1 The Government and the NHS have been making plans to ensure continued access to [medication](#), along with [operational readiness guidance for the health and social care system in England](#).
- 12.2 Wellbeing can include many factors such as planning, housing, licensing, environmental health protection, health and safety and economic development. Officers are keeping abreast of technical notices and guidance based on a range of potential scenarios.
- 12.3 The [Safer Colchester Partnership](#) consists of the Council, Police, Probation, Health and Fire Services. It works to 'protect, reduce and address' community safety or community cohesion concerns, including anything with the potential to raise any such concerns.

## **13. Risk Management Implications**

- 13.1 The Annual Reviews of Business Continuity and Risk Management have been considered and approved by Governance and Audit and by Cabinet (and full Council in the case of Risk Management). All services within the Council have their own Business Continuity Plan and these have been reviewed during 2019 to ensure they are fit for purpose. The Council also has an Incident Management Plan which covers the entire organisation. These plans would be activated by the Council's senior management team if needed. The Council is taking part in relevant meetings and training.