

Report title	Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Annual Update (April 2023-March 2024)	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Paula Brookfield Governance and Equalities	
Key decision	No	
In forward plan	No	
Wards affected	All Wards	
Accountable Director	David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer	
Originating service	Emergency Planning and Business Continuity	
Accountable employee	Chelsea Sibley	Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Manager
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Report to be/has been considered by	Strategic Executive Board	9 April 2024
	Scrutiny Board	16 April 2024

Recommendation for decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Agree the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Annual Report (April 2023 - March 2024) and the ongoing work of the team in continued improvement of the service.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To update members on the recent activity and progress in development of the Council's Emergency Planning and Business Continuity service over the past 12 months, particularly on its work to ensure that the City of Wolverhampton Council meets its statutory duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 ("the Act").

2.0 Background

- 2.1 This update will provide assurances to members around the work of the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Team to prepare the Council for response to a major incident or emergency.

- 2.2 The City of Wolverhampton Council has statutory duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, which identifies it as a Category 1 Core Responder. This categorisation requires the Council to meet the following statutory duties:

- To assess the risk of emergencies occurring and use this to inform contingency planning.
- To put in place emergency plans.
- To put in place business continuity management arrangements.
- To put in place arrangements to make information available to the public about civil protection matters and maintain arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public in the event of an emergency.
- To share information with other local responders to enhance coordination.
- To cooperate with other local responders to enhance coordination and efficiency.
- To provide advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about business continuity management.

3.0 Overview

- 3.1 The management of the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity service in the Council is assessed by officers as being good, following substantial progress to improve our arrangements made in 2023 as part of our continuous improvement drive. In particular, our response to emergencies and the ability to learn lessons has been improved. Employees engaged in providing the response have received a significant amount of upskilling development, along with training and information on adopting and embedding effective processes.
- 3.2 Ensuring that the city's businesses and communities are able to be more resilient in their own right remains a priority area of focus and whilst the level of resilience has improved, it is acknowledged that there is more work to do in this area.

4.0 Service objectives

- 4.1 The Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Team work to ensure that the authority is meeting its obligations under the Act, outlined above, as well as working under the direction and scrutiny of the Council's Resilience Board to deliver the necessary assurances required. The Resilience Board is chaired by the Chief Operating Officer.
- 4.2 The service works towards ensuring all levels of management across the organisation are aware of and embed emergency and continuity management policies and procedures into their strategic and operational plans, major projects, and partnership working arrangements.
- 4.3 A summary of the service's key objectives are to:
- Ensure the authority are meeting its obligations under the Act.
 - Develop, test and improve on capabilities in place for incident preparedness, response and recovery.
 - Train and prepare council responders for incident response activity in the event of an emergency.
 - Work collaboratively alongside other local partners and responding agencies to build an increasingly resilient environment to improve on response capabilities for the city.
 - Successfully embed the corporate business continuity programme across the organisation.
 - Make available advice to both local businesses and voluntary sector organisations across the city on business continuity.
- 4.4 As a business-critical service, the team have a far-reaching remit supporting residents and the city's business community who sit at the heart of what we do; whether that be developing plans and putting in place arrangements in preparation to support residents and business when needed, or ensuring that the Council has the ability to maintain critical service delivery despite any disruption that may arise.
- 4.5 As part of the development of emergency planning and business continuity arrangements, it is key to design and deliver exercises to 'test' the response plans and capabilities – both within the Council and alongside partner agencies. These tests will be debriefed in the same way an incident would be, to identify future improvement required.
- 4.6 Moreover, work is underway to provide an innovative programme of action for advice and support to local businesses, community groups and the voluntary sector, in order to develop and establish greater resilience (including self-reliance) within Wolverhampton communities themselves.

5.0 Annual Report

- 5.1 Commencing this year, the service will provide an annual update on the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity service activity. The purpose of which is to provide assurances on the Teams progress in continually improving service arrangements.
- 5.2 The report provides members with an overview of incident related calls received over the past 12 months, in addition to the training and exercising undertaken (both delivered and participated in). A key emphasis is on the service's priority to take every opportunity to learn from those actual, or mock, incidents; utilising a Recommendations Register to record identified learning and to monitor progress.
- 5.3 Demonstrated within the document is the multitude of workstreams that the service either leads with or engages with; both in a multi-agency setting with emergency services and other key partners, and internally across service directorates.
- 5.4 A significant amount of improvement has been made over the last 12 months, despite changes in the team. The transfer of the team into the Governance Directorate in November 2022 provided an opportunity to refresh and review the approach to Emergency Planning and Business Continuity and build on past achievements and strengths to drive and embed further improvements.
- 5.5 Since the Covid pandemic there has been a need to refresh and review the work of the Resilience Board. The meetings of the Board are now well attended, and the attendees held to account to ensure agreed actions are implemented effectively and in a timely manner. Such rigour is essential to ensuring we continue to deliver tangible, progressive improvements in both our Emergency Planning and Business Continuity approach and arrangements. This Board is a key means of providing assurance on the governance arrangements relating to emergency planning and business continuity and ensuring improvement are delivered effectively and at pace.
- 5.6 Commitment to the emergency planning and business continuity agenda cannot be solely the responsibility of the team. In order to be effective, the team needs to be visible throughout the organisation and at all levels. The team has specifically adopted an outreach approach which has significantly increased its direct engagement and involvement with the senior executive team and also all leadership teams across the council over the last 12 months. This has increased the number of requests for service support coming into the team, which serves as an important indicator of the approach having the desired effect across the Council.
- 5.7 Over the next 12 months, the team will continue to look to ensure that wider services have greater awareness of the Council's role in emergency preparedness and response, and how their roles contribute to this. This will involve delivering training opportunities rolled out to build resilience across the organisation from the bottom up.

- 5.8 Another key area for focus next year will be embedding of the business continuity programme across all council services to increase our ability to respond to and recover from known and foreseeable interruptions to the usual service delivery.
- 5.9 Our business continuity responsibilities relate to our neighbourhoods, communities and business as well. This already identified as an area for improvement will help further fulfil our responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act. We will look to prepare a plan of engagement with this sector to boost our city's resilience.
- 5.10 Finally, the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity service has made notable progress in the last year in ensuring the Council and our communities are prepared. We have made significant progress, and acknowledge there is still much to be done, and enter the next year, confident of our plans and approach to continue to deliver to these needs and demands.

6.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 6.1 The option to do nothing and continue without recognition or discussion of emergency planning and business continuity would present an obvious failure of the organisation to adequately consider, address and plan for organisational resilience. With significant major incidents occurring across the UK in recent years, this would present a failed opportunity for the organisation to demonstrate its commitment to boosting and strengthening local response and contingency arrangements to prepare for likewise events.

7.0 Reasons for decision(s)

- 7.1 The decision to agree the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Annual Report is recommended to enable the Authority to demonstrate its commitment to developing local response and contingency arrangements, in addition to enabling opportunity for wider consideration to ongoing activity of the service to improve and strengthen organisational and city resilience

8.0 Financial implications

- 8.1 There are no direct financial implications from the recommendations of this report.
- 8.2 During the 2023-2024 financial year the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity service have had no instances of unplanned spend with regards to responding to emergencies or callouts.
[LDW/12022024/E]

9.0 Legal implications

- 9.1 As there are no decisions to be made, there are no associated legal implications with regard to this service update. The update intends to provide assurances of ongoing council activity to meet its statutory obligations under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 which it continues to meet.
[DP/15042024]

10.0 Equalities implications

10.1 Although no decision is being requested as part of this service update, it is important to note that equalities implications are an important aspect when developing city response plans. The Team over the past year have sought out involvement with the Council's variety of Equality Forums to increase awareness of ongoing concerns and considerations, with intention to have a team representative at each Board meeting. Equalities implications arising through the operational implementation of emergency planning and business continuity procedures are included as part of operational delivery.

11.0 All other implications

11.1 There are no further implications for Cabinet to consider in relation to this service update report.

12.0 Schedule of background papers

12.1 There are no additional background papers.

13.0 Appendices

13.1 Appendix 1 : Annual Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Report - 2024