

City of Wolverhampton Council
Annual Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Service Report
April 2024

1.0 Purpose of the report

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 Introduction and background

2.1 This report will focus on providing assurances to members around the work of the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Team to prepare the City Council for response to a major incident or emergency.

2.2 Overall responsibility for meeting the duties of the Act remains strategically with the Chief Executive, with delegated responsibility for the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity function now sitting with the Chief Operating Officer.

2.3 Since October 2022, the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Team have sat operationally within the Governance Directorate, reporting into the Head of Service – Health and Safety, Emergency Planning and Business Continuity, following its move from the Public Health Directorate. The team specialise in emergency planning, preparedness, and response, as well as in the practice of business continuity management.

2.4 The Act, identifies the City of Wolverhampton Council as a Category 1 Core Responder. This categorisation requires the Council to meet the following statutory duties:

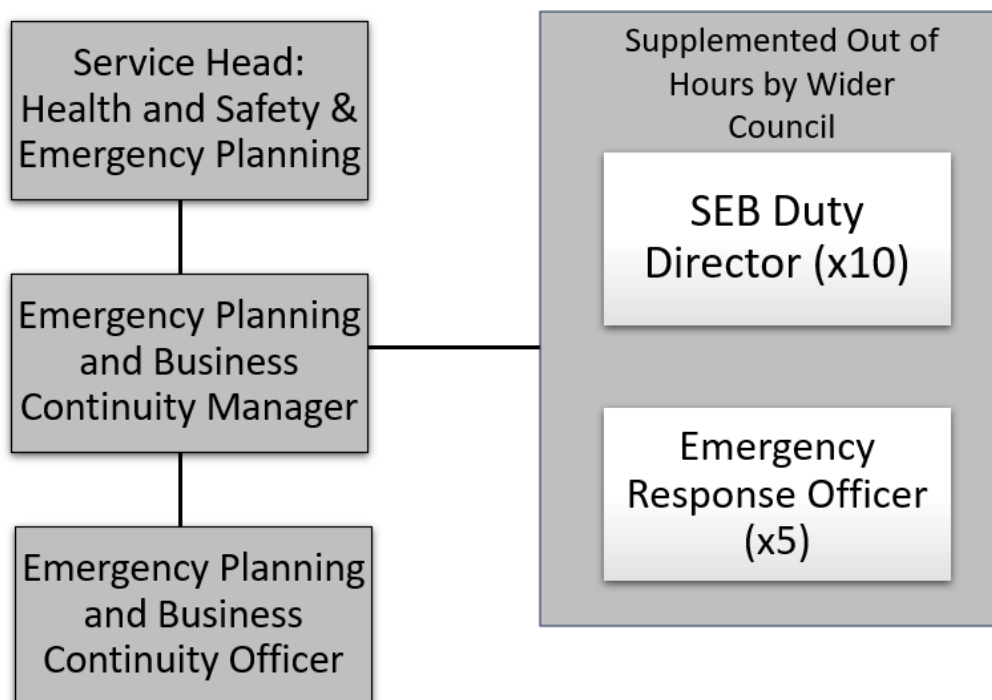
- To assess the risk of emergencies occurring and use this to inform contingency planning.
- To put in place emergency plans.
- To put in place business continuity management arrangements.
- To put in place arrangements to make information available to the public about civil protection matters and maintain 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 Executive Summary

- 3.1 In summary, 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 having been 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 business 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 The Emergency Planning and Business Continuity team

- 4.1 The Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Team consists of an Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Manager and an Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Officer. Both of which report into the Head of Service for Health, Safety and Emergency Planning.



- 4.2 The team have gone through some recent staffing changes. Significantly the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Manager resigned in August 2023, immediately reducing the 'personnel' in the team by 50%. The Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Officer postholder applied for and was appointed to the manager's role on a secondment basis, however this has resulted in the postholder's substantive post becoming vacant.

Recruitment to the manager post is currently underway, and once appointed to, steps will be taken, if necessary, to address any vacancy remaining in the team.

- 4.3 As outlined in the structure at paragraph 4.1 above, the team is supplemented by an 'out of hours 24/7 emergency response' support provided via a rota system that is managed by the service. This support consists of 10 directors and 5 council officers from varied services (one of each role on standby at any one time). The Emergency Response Officers are existing council employees who, in addition to their substantive roles, provide emergency cover in the event of an incident, and who have the requisite knowledge, skillsets and experience to undertake the role.

5.0 Service key objectives

- 5.1 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 City Council's Resilience Board to deliver the necessary assurances required. The Resilience Board is chaired by the Chief Operating Officer.
- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 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.
- 5.5 As part of the development of emergency planning and business continuity arrangements, it is key to design and deliver exercises to 'test' the response

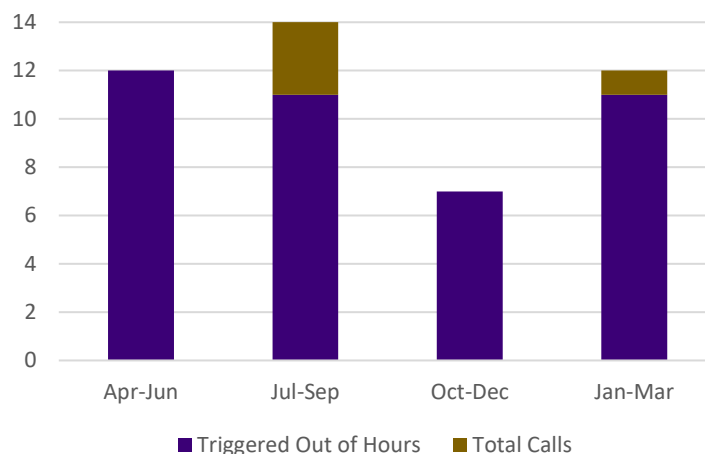
plans and capabilities – both within the Council and alongside partner agencies. These tests will be debriefed in the same way an incident would be, to identify future improvement required.

5.6 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.

6.0 Incident response

6.1 Over the past 12 months there have been 45 calls into the service using the Emergency Response activation process. These have been broken down below to demonstrate out of the total number of calls, the number received in and outside of office hours.

Call Figures April 2023- March 2024



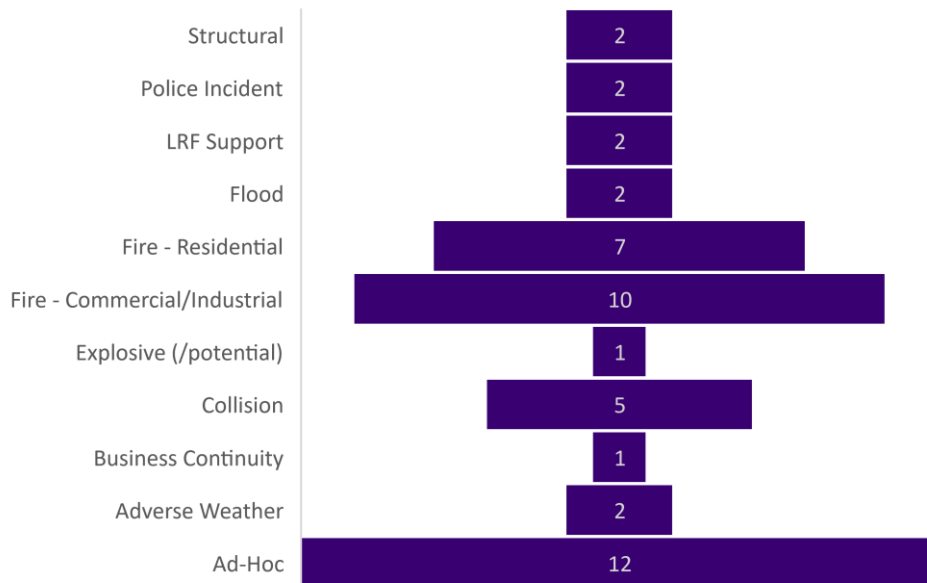
6.2 To further breakdown the calls received, the following chart highlights the percentage of calls that required a physical attendance of either a member of the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Team or an Emergency Response Officer. Out of the 45 identified calls, only 6 had a physical attendance from the team (this does not account for other services who may have been present at the time).

Emergency Response Officer - On-Site Presence



Most of the calls received were for advice or information only and did not meet trigger criteria, with others able to be coordinated remotely.

- 6.3 All Councillor and MP requests for response received outside of office hours where they cannot be resolved via an out of hours service instruction, are passed on to the SEB Duty Director via the Emergency Response Officer. Records of these calls are now being captured to ensure that where possible, unless in the event of emergency, that they are submitted via the Councillor Enquiries Unit.
- 6.4 To provide overview to members, the below highlights the range of incidents the team have been called for since April 2023:



It must be noted that not all of the above calls triggered an emergency response. Notwithstanding the trigger threshold not being met, work has been ongoing to ensure all the issues raised are addressed through other appropriate and effective avenues. For example, the approach taken to address traveller incursions and lower-level general security concerns.

- 6.5 There have been no major incidents that the City Council have been required to respond to over the past year. The last Major Incident for the City was in December 2022 in response to the Horseley Fields Fire.

7.0 Training

- 7.1 It is essential to ensure that Council colleagues and services are prepared to deliver their roles as part of an emergency response within the City. It is part of the team's responsibilities to facilitate any training, either by developing bespoke training or coordinating the role out of pre-existing or externally available training.
- 7.2 A training and competencies document has been developed to outline requirements and all training delivered is now captured using a Training and Exercise Record. This allows the team to monitor who has been offered the opportunity for training, who has taken it up and where training gaps may remain.

7.3 Recent training provided by the service to colleagues within the Council includes the following:

- Emergency Response Officer training sessions
- Concierge Management Centre Shift Leader training session
- SEB Duty Director training sessions
- Councillor induction training sessions
- Business continuity workshop for businesses
- Military aid to the civil authorities awareness session

7.4 Training attended by team members over the past 12 months has been extensive, to improve on skill and knowledge and build it into internal activity. The courses/awareness sessions attended were:

- Multi-Agency Tactical Incident Command course (Protect)
- Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles Commanders Course – Molineux scenario (Emergency Services)
- Military Aid to the Civil Authorities training (Ministry of Defence)
- Lockdown training for school and education providers (Counter-Terrorism Police)
- Exercising Crisis and Business Continuity Plans course (Emergency Planning College)
- Regional Protect and Prepare workshop (Counter-Terrorism Police)
- Rest Centre Management course (Emergency Planning College)
- Debrief course (Emergency Planning College)
- Operational Action Counters Terrorism (ACT) training with The Halls (Counter-Terrorism Police)
- Climate Adaption and Preparedness sessions 1 and 2 (West Midlands Combined Authority)
- Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles Commanders Course – Civic Centre scenario (Emergency Services)
- Crisis Communications course (Emergency Planning College)
- Document verification training (Counter-Terrorism Police)
- Service Director attendance at Multi-Agency Gold Incident Command course (Protect)

8.0 Exercising

8.1 In order to check that plans and arrangements are operationally effective, the team adopts a 'scenario-based test' approach wherever possible. Such an approach enables the team to apply rigour and stress test the actual operational response and identify any gaps and areas for improvement in a safe environment. Scenario based exercises can take a variety of different format; some tested via a table-top scenario and some with live activation.

8.2 Since April, the team have participated in a number of external multi-agency exercises and delivered a number locally, these include:

- Numerous Tactical Coordinating Group test activations (multi-agency response event)
- Exercise Snowfall (adverse weather event)
- Exercise Whiskey (fire/evacuation event)
- Exercise Wolves-Snowfall (adverse weather event)

8.3 The team recently tested it's out of hours activation and response arrangements through a live scenario, named Exercise Whiskey. This was a joint exercise between the Council, West Midlands Fire Service and Wolverhampton Homes, based around a fire evacuation scenario in Heath Town. It allowed opportunity to review development needs for on-call devices, tested notification and deployment procedures as well as helped familiarise colleagues with appliances at the scene of an incident and build relationships.



8.4 A multi-agency desktop exercise was also delivered in January 2024, to walkthrough arrangements for response to a severe snowfall event in the city. This enabled a wider awareness of partnership considerations in response to an event and resources available, as well as to build on relationships and networking with partner agencies within the City.

8.5 Following on from feedback in recent exercises held, there will be a higher emphasis on exercising within workplans over the next year to maximise on the benefits and outcomes of such events.

8.6 Exercises are debriefed in the same way as an incident, to capture lessons identified and recommendations for future improvements.

9.0 Response resourcing

9.1 The Council must ensure it can respond to an emergency incident within the City at any time. This requires maintenance of a duty rota to ensure cover for response 24/7, inclusive of bank holidays and weekends, which is managed by the team.

9.2 The duty rota consists of two roles at any one time: an Emergency Response Officer and a SEB Duty Director.

9.3 At time of writing this report, there are a total of 10 directors on the duty rota and a total of 5 Emergency Response Officers.

- 9.4 The SEB Duty Director and Emergency Response Officer are supported in response by a Duty Communications Officer managed by the Council's Communications Team. In addition, Wolverhampton Homes support with deployment of Council resources provided by a variety of services, via its Concierge Management Centre.
- 9.5 Development has been ongoing into the use of Microsoft Teams for emergency response. A site dedicated to emergency response is maintained by the team and includes electronic duty packs for use in response by on-call officers.
- 9.6 Electronic documentation has now been supported by issue of a Duty Handbook for officers to enable quick reference support in the immediate response phase.
- 9.7 This year, the Council's Incident Control Room, previously based in the Hickman Avenue offices, has relocated into the Civic Centre. This is to provide a more accessible location in the event of emergency but also to allow regular maintenance of the resources whilst not in active use.
- 9.8 Work is ongoing to review where resource is best placed to ensure the Council maximise effectiveness in response to an incident.

10.0 Learning and assurance

- 10.1 This section provides members with more information on what the team do to capture any key learning to use in improvements to the service and its arrangements.
- 10.2 After each significant incident, a Microsoft Forms feedback form is issued to request data. Where an incident is of significant size or complexity, or where inconsistencies may have been found in data provided, a formal debrief session will be arranged by the team. All data collected forms a set of recommended actions, for both elements to repeat in the future and areas where improvements are required / gaps identified.
- 10.3 A Recommendations Register has been newly developed to capture recommendations and monitor progress in actioning them. This will be accessible to the Council's Resilience Board who will be asked to agree recommendations and support where escalation may be required to make progress.
- 10.4 In addition to the work internally to monitor learning, the team also sit on the Local Resilience Forum's new Learning and Assurance group and will feed in sharing of local learning where it may be applicable.

11.0 Business Continuity

- 11.1 The Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Team manage the Council's Business Continuity Programme. The Council's Business Continuity Policy has been reviewed and updated together with a supporting Scoping

Document, as well as a new Business Continuity Framework to outline how the Council plan to progress with the latest programme.

- 11.2 Development of the new policy and framework has incorporated key learning ascertained throughout the Covid-19 pandemic response, leading to improvements in the way the team approach business continuity management.
- 11.3 The policy provides clarity on the roles, responsibilities and expectations set out across the council for the purposes of contingency planning, with emphasis on this being to embed understanding of an all-council approach. Each service will retain a responsibility for having tried and tested business continuity plans in place for their critical areas, with one-to-one support available from the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Team in development of those arrangements. The team retain a responsibility for coordination of the programme and ensuring that tools and templates are available to services when developing on arrangements.
- 11.4 The framework defines the stages that will be undertaken to build the new corporate programme. These stages have been identified in line with the good practice guidelines set out by the Business Continuity Institute, as well as the Plan, Do, Check, Act model outlined in the international standard for business continuity management systems (ISO 22301).
- 11.5 The team have been undertaking a strategic business impact assessment across directorates to establish an updated critical service list. This list helps identify time critical services when faced with an organisation, or City wide, disruption. The data captured is assisting the team in identifying priority order in which to approach and support council services.
- 11.6 Among resources made available, a Business Continuity SharePoint site is linked to the Council's intranet page, with additional resources made easily accessible to colleagues who require them. These resources are under continuous development and include a suite of 'off-the-shelf' exercises for service management teams to utilise and wider embed within teams. Introductory awareness material has also been made available via the Council's Our People Portal.
- 11.7 The one-to-one support to managers is being introduced in order to step away from the exercise of sending out individual spreadsheets for management completion, instead the team will now meet with managers to discuss service detail and complete the assessments on a central database. This way of working seeks to take away the burden of managers in completing a complex spreadsheet, enables to the team to retain a level of consistency in data collated, and most importantly embeds better understanding and awareness of services within the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Team.
- 11.8 It has also been acknowledged as part of the move into the new programme, that no 'one size fits all' and this has been recognised when developing templates for the service level continuity plans and is supported in

discussions. A good example of an area with unique requirements is the Elections Service, and the one-to-one support provided helped identify this and adapt a plan template fit for its needs.

- 11.9 The team have also worked alongside People Services to update arrangements around any potential industrial action disruption and continue to provide data as it is captured to support this.

12.0 Internal activities

- 12.1 City of Wolverhampton Council has an established Resilience Board, chaired by the Chief Operating Officer. The team coordinate this meeting and ensure all key items from within the service and relevant other areas of the Council are brought into the agendas to ensure visibility.

- 12.2 The team continues to respond to requests for support from a variety of internal services where its advice can contribute to workstreams. Some recent accounts of this include:

- Business continuity
 - Supporting on local elections planning
 - Support to housing on advice to tenant management organisations
 - Advice to schools
 - Advice to local voluntary organisations
 - Advice to businesses via Aim for Gold workshops

- 12.3 Workstreams that the team have been working upon over the past 12 months have been of wide variety. In addition to Business Continuity work, there has been considerable focus on various emergency planning and response workstreams. Some of these include:

- Cyber response coordination
- Corporate condolence / Operation Bridge coordination
- Flood, severe weather response coordination
- Emergency mortuary considerations
- Evacuation and rest centre response
- On-call resourcing proposals
- Emergency incident logging system development
- Community Safety discussions over police reporting of incidents

- 12.4 In 2023, the Flood Scrutiny Task and Finish Group was re-established in follow up to the previous scrutiny undertaken in 2019. The team have actively engaged with each meeting to provide updates and assurances on changes implemented in response to learning identified in previous years. The group have provided positive feedback and some further areas for future consideration which the team will reflect upon following receipt of a final recommendations report.

- 12.5 Emergency Planning and Business Continuity is regularly included on the Agenda for the weekly SEB Forward Planning meetings. This enables an

opportunity to provide SEB with key information when awareness needs raising to specific activities.

- 12.6 This year, the team have also taken on the role of coordination of 'Out of Hours Service Instructions' for the Concierge Management Centre at Wolverhampton Homes, who deliver the Council's out of hours customer service function. This was in response to some areas of concern around ownership of the processes and some examples of 'uncoordinated responses'.

The team carried out a comprehensive review to develop new system for service instructions, all service instructions allocated an owner responsible for updating the instruction, (which are reviewed by the instruction owner on a monthly basis) and training was delivered to Wolverhampton Homes CMC.

Since the review there have been significantly less errors or confusion in responding to calls.

13.0 Multi-Agency Engagement

- 13.1 The Council, as a Category 1 responding body under the Civil Contingencies Act, play an active role in the West Midlands Conurbation Local Resilience Forum. The team represent the authority at all the relevant sub-groups of the Forum, (including undertaking the vice-chair role on the Business Continuity group), these include:

- Risk Assessment Working Group
- Command, Control and Coordination Group
- Training and Exercising Group
- Learning and Assurance Group
- Mortality Group
- National Power Outage Group
- Sudden Influx Group
- Severe Weather Group
- Cyber Preparedness Group
- Business Continuity Group (the team vice-chair this)
- Manchester Arena Inquiry Group
- Recovery Group
- Funding Group
- Fuel Disruption Group
- Operation Bridge Group
- Telecommunications Group

- 13.2 In addition to the contributions to the Local Resilience Forum, the service locally support the Wolverhampton multi-agency Protect and Prepare Board which looks specifically at planning around counterterrorism, with much focus on future potential for the implementation of Martyn's Law.

- 13.3 The Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Manager has taken up chairship of the newly established Training, Exercising and Learning sub-group of the Protect and Prepare Board. The vice chair is from West Midlands Police. Terms of reference have already been developed and agreed, with the group's membership also confirmed. The team will contribute to preparation and delivery of an exercise under the Prepare remit but will also work with the group to collate data on training and exercising undertaken and available across member organisations; with the intention of providing assurances and/or identifying gaps. The group reports directly into the Protect and Prepare Board, chaired by the Director of Public Health.
- 13.4 Representation is also provided by the team to the Wolverhampton Health Protection Forum to feed in any emergency preparedness discussions where necessary.

14.0 Councillor engagement

- 14.1 The role of elected members is a critical part of response and recovery to emergencies within Wolverhampton; recovery being an aspect of response that the local authority leads with. Councillors, although not given a specific role within the operational response due to the need for immediate decisions, have a key role in leadership: civic, political and community. Communication and community engagement is a vital role played by elected members and it is of key importance to prepare and embed understanding of this responsibility among members prior to an incident occurring.
- 14.2 The Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Team provide an induction session offer to all new councillors each year, this session accompanies a general introduction to the team shared within the corporate Councillor's Handbook. Using the national guidance provided by the Local Government Association '[A Councillors Guide to Civil Emergencies](#)', further resource will continue to be developed upon to provide increased awareness and preparedness of elected members to their role during, and after, an emergency.
- 14.3 To quote the Local Government Association; "experience has shown that where respective roles have not been clearly established prior to an emergency, or where agreed roles are exceeded or disregarded, the coherence of the council's position is undermined". This will drive a key focus to ensure emphasis on Councillor engagement over the coming months, and will be tied into the next steps of development in local recovery planning and the support made available to members.

15.0 Conclusion

- 15.1 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.

- 15.2 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.
- 15.3 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 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.
- 15.4 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.
- 15.5 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.
- 15.6 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.
- 15.7 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.