



Listening Learning Leading

Business continuity strategy

2006 - 2009

AUGUST 2006

Table of contents

1 – Introduction	3
2 – Aim	4
3 – Approach	4
PROCESS	4
STRUCTURE	5
DOCUMENTATION	6
DISRUPTION SCENARIOS	6
Council building	7
Failure of critical IT service or system	7
Failure of a critical supplier	7
Unavailability of key or sufficient staff	7
RECOVERY STRATEGY ELEMENTS	7
Accommodation	7
ICT systems and services	8
Critical suppliers	8
People issues	8
TESTING AND EXERCISING	9
MAINTENANCE AND REVIEW	9
4 – Conclusion	9
5 – Business continuity action plan	10

1 – Introduction

1. The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (the Act) and accompanying regulations fundamentally affect the arrangements for civil contingency planning. The Act replaced outdated legislation governing emergency planning. The aim of the Act is to "improve UK's resilience through working with others to anticipate, assess, prevent, prepare, respond and recover" from an emergency.
2. Under the Act district councils are now "category one" responders on a par with county councils. Category one responders are those organisations at the core of emergency response, for example, emergency services and local authorities. As category one responders the Council is subject to the full set of civil protection duties. These duties require the Council to:
 - assess the risk of emergencies occurring and use this to inform contingency planning.
 - put in place emergency plans.
 - 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
 - share information and co-operate with other local responders to enhance co-ordination and efficiency
 - provide advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about business continuity management.
 - put in place its own business continuity management arrangements
3. The first five of these are addressed by the Council's emergency plan and by a formal agreement with Oxfordshire County Council to co-operate, communicate effectively and share information, to carry out joint risk assessment and planning where appropriate and to provide advice and assistance to external organisations. This agreement was approved by Cabinet on 8 December 2005.
4. Under the Act, the sixth of these points requires councils to "maintain plans for the purpose of ensuring, so far as is reasonably practicable, that if an emergency occurs the person or body is able to continue to perform his or its functions". This requirement is being met by this business continuity strategy and related business continuity plans. Garrison Continuity, a specialist business continuity consultancy, assisted the Council with the development of its business continuity arrangements.
5. Having business continuity arrangements in place will enable the Council to continue providing essential services to residents, following a disruption or emergency. This strategy sets out the main elements of business continuity management at the Council. The types of disruptions and emergencies that could affect the Council, and how they will be addressed, are discussed in this strategy.
6. This business continuity strategy addresses the arrangements for the first two weeks of a disruption. If a disruption is longer than two weeks, the first two weeks will be used to identify alternative arrangements and service provision.

2 – Aim

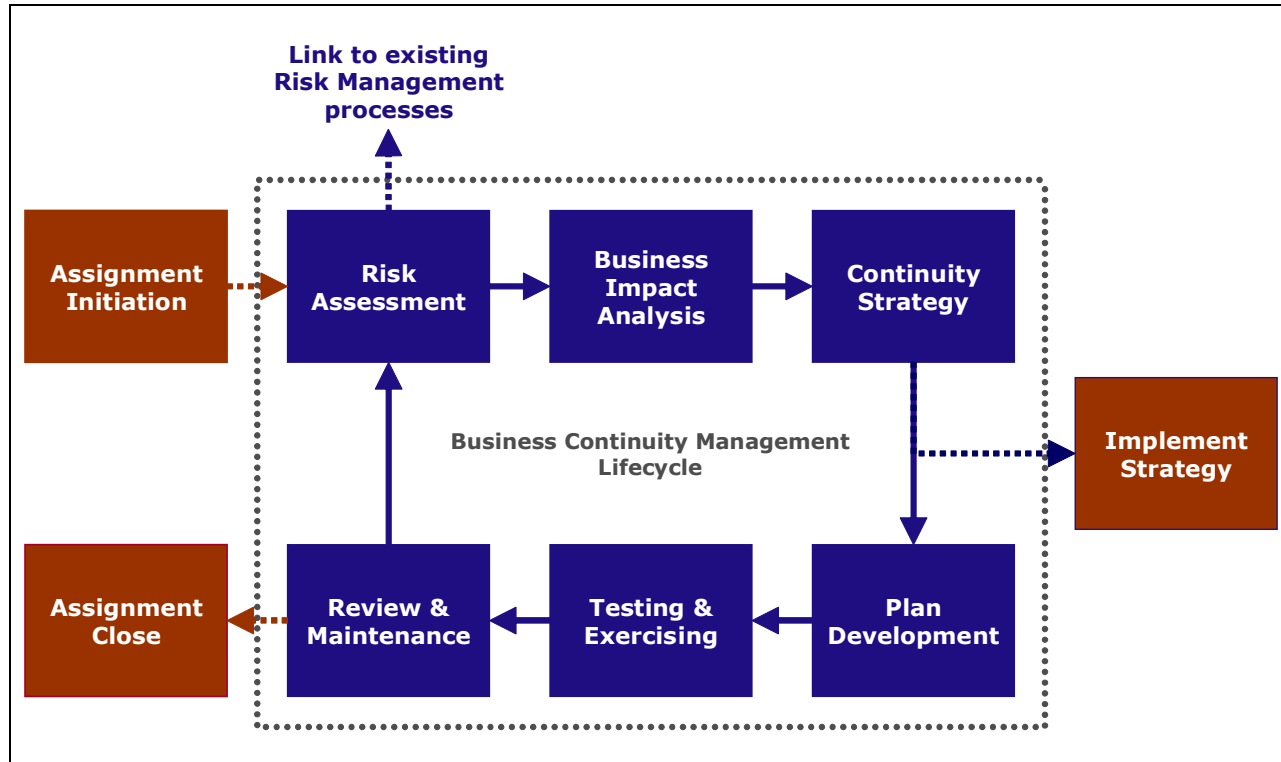
The aims of this strategy are to:

- help ensure the continuity of service provision in the event of a business disruption
- save time and reduce any initial confusion
- preserve the Council’s image and reputation
- minimise general disruption to life in the district
- ensure corporate co-operation over service priorities
- minimise the social, political, legal and financial consequences of the incident.

3 – Approach

PROCESS

7. The diagram below shows schematically the process by which the Council manages business continuity.

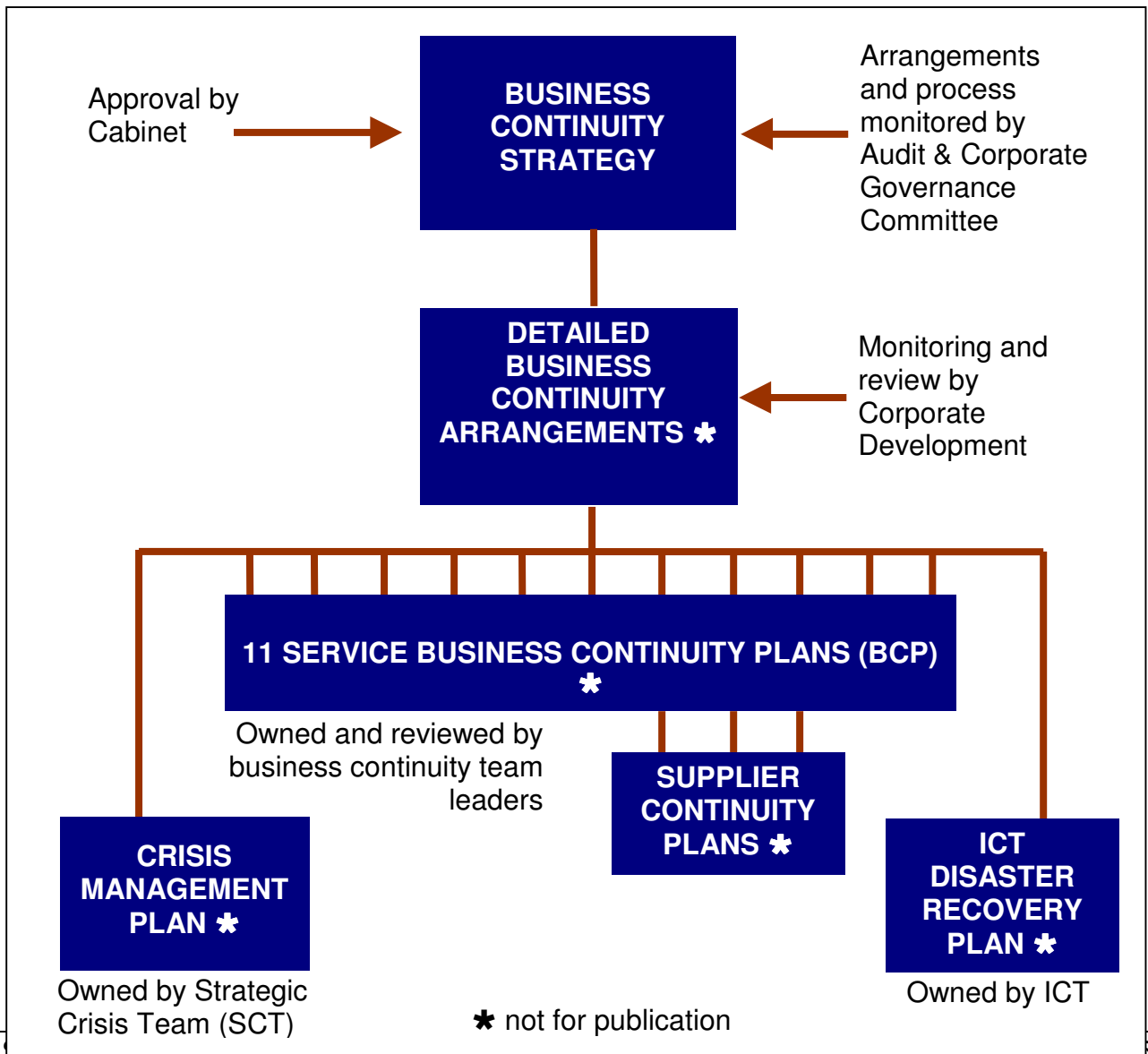


8. This shows that the Council’s approach to business continuity begins with a risk assessment using the Council’s existing risk assessment and risk management process.

9. The second stage is a business impact analysis where heads of service and line managers identify critical functions, activities, key staff and key suppliers. These are categorised into priorities one, two, three and so on.
10. Stages three and four are the development of this strategy and a set of service recovery plans along with a crisis plan, and ICT disaster recovery plan, as illustrated below.
11. Stages five and six involve desk-top walk-throughs of each plan with the officers involved, test exercises, and regular review and updating of all the plan documents.

STRUCTURE

12. The Council's business continuity arrangements are illustrated in the following diagram. Together, the plans provide a flexible framework for recovery from disruptions. They are straightforward guides designed for use by the officers involved in reinstating Council services after a business disruption. A parallel ICT disaster recovery plan provides for the recovery of essential computer, systems and telephony.



13. Because the Council outsources many of its services, it is important that the business continuity arrangements with suppliers are part of its plan. In most existing contracts, there is no contractual requirement for a supplier to have business continuity management in place. We now have a policy that requires key suppliers to have business continuity arrangements in place. The pre-qualification questionnaire used for all major procurement asks for details of the supplier's business continuity arrangements and this information will be assessed as part of the tender evaluation.

DOCUMENTATION

14. This document is the business continuity strategy.

15. The Council has produced a separate document containing its detailed business continuity arrangements. Because the release of this information into the public domain could compromise these arrangements, this information is not for publication and is not included within this strategy document.

16. Each service generally has one business continuity plan (BCP). There can be more if the service contains widely differing functions from a business continuity perspective (e.g. human resources and facilities). Each service has designated one or more senior members of staff to be business continuity team leaders, who will take the lead on implementing their BCP in the event of a disruption. BCPs are not for publication.

17. The Council has a Strategic Crisis Team (SCT) whose role is to take the lead in directing and implementing the Council's business continuity arrangements. The SCT is made up of senior managers who can call on other expertise likely to be needed in the event of a disruption, such as human resources (including office accommodation), ICT and communications. The SCT will use the Crisis Management Plan to help manage business continuity in the event of an incident.

18. The Council also has an ICT Disaster Recovery Plan the aim of which is to restore essential computer, systems and telephony services, either on-site or at a remote Disaster Recovery Centre, depending on the nature and duration of the disruption.

DISRUPTION SCENARIOS

19. The approach the Council took to develop business continuity plans was to firstly identify different disruption scenarios (this section), and then plan how it will deal with them (next section).

20. A number of incidents can affect the Council's operations for example fire, flood, server failure, acts of terrorism, flu pandemic or prolonged loss of power. Each of these could result in a disruption. The Council has grouped disruptions into four categories:

- Council building - denial of access to the building or loss of building
- Failure of IT or telephone system
- Failure of critical supplier
- Unavailability of key or sufficient staff

Council building

21. Following a business disruption or incident, the council building could be inaccessible for two main reasons:
- Denial of access, meaning that though systems and services are unaffected, staff are unable to gain access to the Council building. This could happen following incidents such as a security threat, environmental contamination, or a serious event nearby.
 - Fire, flood or structural damage could damage or destroy all or part of the Council building. This could also affect systems.
22. The plans address alternative accommodation and recovery of systems, and will be similar irrespective of the above reasons.

Failure of critical IT service or system

23. Some or all critical IT or telephone systems could be unavailable, for example a server failure or network problem, or cutting of a communications cable supplying the Council offices.

Failure of a critical supplier

24. The Council relies upon a number of key suppliers to provide important services. Examples of supplier disruption are a supplier going into liquidation, or a fire affecting the premises they operate from.

Unavailability of key or sufficient staff

25. Staff that support business critical activities could become unavailable. Examples are personal injuries to key members of staff or pandemic flu affecting a group of staff.

RECOVERY STRATEGY ELEMENTS

26. There will be four different recovery procedures in the Crisis Management Plan to address each disruption scenario. In any scenario, the Strategic Crisis Team will meet to decide whether to invoke business continuity plans, and will consider the nature, extent, likely duration and prognosis of the disruption.

Accommodation

27. The recovery strategy in the event of a disruption affecting the Council offices at Crowmarsh Gifford is that:
- Staff required to perform priority activities will relocate to their designated recovery location (see below).
 - Staff who have not been allocated places will be asked to stay at home and work there or remotely if required.

28. If part or all of the Council building is not in use or access is denied, four distinct types of backup accommodation are in place:

- The Council has up to 40 workspace positions available at an off-site Disaster Recovery Centre for staff performing priority activities. They will have access to a work-station each including a desk, PC and telephone.
- A command centre has been identified to accommodate the Strategic Crisis Team to co-ordinate the Council's response to the disruption and manage the recovery of the business.
- Staff performing specific functions will operate from locations such as Vale of White Horse District Council offices where alternative arrangements have already been agreed.
- Other staff that don't perform critical functions will be asked to work from home.

ICT systems and services

29. The Council has to be able to respond and recover from a disruption to its Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure. There are eighteen IT systems identified as critical to Council services. The recovery most of these systems is included in the ICT Business Continuity Plan. The Council's financial services contractor Capita runs the remaining systems and recovery of these will be included in their business continuity arrangements. The Council will have a Disaster Recovery Plan offering replacement servers, workplaces and telephony at the remote Disaster Recovery Centre.

Critical suppliers

30. The Council is heavily dependent on key suppliers to fulfil its obligations. The Council's strategy is to identify the key suppliers responsible for delivering priority one services.

31. These key suppliers will be required to provide details of their business continuity plans during the tender process. Assessment of the supplier's business continuity approach will form part of the tender evaluation. The successful contractor will be required to put in place arrangements to recover the Council's services.

32. In addition, heads of service will identify alternative suppliers for each service (if feasible and cost effective), in their business continuity plans.

People issues

33. Key people are those identified as being critical to the completion of key activities. This depends on people's key skills, knowledge and qualifications and whether these are available elsewhere in the Council or from an outside source. BCPs will include lists of key members of staff and how the Council will continue to provide the function they carry out. BCPs also address a large scale absence scenario where insufficient staff are available to provide priority services.

TESTING AND EXERCISING

34. To ensure that all business continuity arrangements are viable, and that staff are rehearsed in the role they may have to take at the time of a disruption, there will be an annual schedule of tests and exercises. While the overall objective is to prove the effectiveness of the arrangements, each test will have its own objectives.

- Desktop walk-throughs of each business continuity plan with business recovery team leaders, initially supported by Garrison Continuity - designed to eliminate gaps and ensure clarity and understanding
- Desktop business continuity plan exercises - ensure plans can be used to respond to a range of different disruption scenarios
- Establishing the Strategic Crisis Team Command Centre - ensure that a working environment can be established for the members of the SCT in the timescales required
- Strategic Crisis Team exercise - provides an opportunity for team members to explore and practice their crisis management roles
- Call-out cascade test - confirm that simple messages can be relayed throughout the Council (usually conducted outside normal working hours)
- IT disaster recovery test - prove key IT systems can be restored, in the timescales required, at the disaster recovery centre
- IT telephony recovery test - prove calls can be routed away from the Council's offices and answered at the disaster recovery centre
- Quarterly updating of each business continuity plan, led by the name business continuity plan administrator in each service

MAINTENANCE AND REVIEW

35. To ensure the effectiveness of the business continuity arrangements does not decay over time, there will be a formal process for keeping the arrangements up to date. The process for review and maintenance will include:

- An annual review of the Business Continuity strategy by Corporate Development
- An annual review of the 'Detailed Business Continuity Arrangements' to ensure that any change to recovery requirements is captured and can be met. The review will be led by Corporate Development
- A 6-monthly review and update of the Crisis Management Plan
- A 3-monthly review and update of each service area's business continuity plan

4 – Conclusion

36. This Council recognises the importance of business continuity management so it is able to respond to an emergency or disruption. The Council's arrangements meet the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act and provide peace of mind that the Council can still provide essential services to residents following a disruption.

5 – Business continuity action plan

The business continuity strategy and action plan are owned by Corporate Development and are included in its service plan.

Ref no	Action	Target 05/06	Target 06/07	Target 07/08	Target 08/09	Owner *	Comments
1	Business impact assessment workshop	December				GB/JW	Completed
2	Strategy workshop		January			GB/JW	Completed
3	Supplier workshop		March			GB/JW	Completed
4	Develop crisis management plan		June			GB/JW	Completed
5	Develop eleven service recovery plans		June			GB/JW	Completed
6	Establish command centre		May			JW	Completed
7	Walkthrough and testing of each service recovery plan		July	July	July	JW	Annual process
8	Train heads of service and team leaders		July			JW	
9	Review and update plans			July	July	JW	Annual process
10	Publish information on website		August			JW	
11	Host Oxfordshire County Council workshops to promote business continuity to local businesses		December				

* GB = Geoff Bushell, JW = Jo Wheeler

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Last updated 26 July 2006