

Report of: Strategic Director Finance and Corporate Services

Title: Business Continuity Planning (Avian Flu)

Ward: All

Report author: Mark Luntley
Contact Tel No: 01865 252394
E-mail address: mluntley@oxford.gov.uk

Key Decision: No

Lead Member: Cllr Alex Hollingsworth (risk management)

Scrutiny responsibility: Environment

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board agrees to note actions of Officers to date

Background

Earlier this month Health Scrutiny had a briefing that advised on the Council's preparedness for Avian Flu outbreak. This report sets out actions officers have been taking on this issue - and the wider area of Business Continuity Planning.

Local Authorities now need to comply with the Civil Contingencies Act, which requires local authorities to have continuity plans in case of emergencies.

Actions to date

A corporate lead

The City Council has taken its new responsibility seriously. Strategic Directors were briefed on the new Civil Contingencies Act by the late head of Business Systems (as the act had significant IT implications).

Strategic Management Board agreed we should have a lead officer at SMB level (the Strategic Director Finance and Corporate Services).

Updating IT recovery plans

Business Systems focussed on a major overhaul of the IT recovery plan as this is one of the areas we need to address in any Business Continuity Plan. Moreover an IT system failure would have significant corporate implications. That work has been recently completed (with significant help from both City Works and OBS).

The Business Systems Business Manager will be carrying out a test of the IT recovery plan in the coming financial year.

Work by Strategic Directors

Strategic Directors recently attended a one-day “Gold” emergency planning session arranged by the Thames Valley Police. This involved all the major public sector agencies in the Thames Valley area, The aim of the day was to ensure senior managers were trained about their role and responsibilities in this area. The Chief Executive has also attended earlier training sessions on this area. Further planning days for “Silver” (i.e. the next management level down) are currently being organised - and we will participate in this as well.

One of the case studies Strategic Directors looked at Gold session was a flu outbreak, and we worked through some of the issues. What was clear was that in the event of a major flu outbreak (and certainly in the event of the much less likely bird flu pandemic) the emergency planning would almost certainly be managed on a national basis.

The key issue for Oxford City would be to sustain key services when numbers of staff might not be able to come into work. This would be one focus of a Business Continuity Plan.

Business Continuity Planning

We established a team of officers from: Information Systems, Human Resources, Facility Management and Audit and Risk to address the issue of business continuity planning. The Strategic Director Finance and Corporate Services chairs this group. The team has planned its work through PRINCE project management systems.

It became clear that, like most authorities, we did not have the skills or expertise in-house to address this issue in a reasonable timescale. South Oxfordshire District Council have led on this area and have recently completed a tender exercise to buy in these skills from a specialist consultancy.

Oxford City Council was a joint participant in that tender exercise and both authorities have appointed a specialist consultant “Garrison Continuity”. Over the next few weeks this consultant will:

- Establish/confirm our key business systems and carry out a “Business Impact Analysis” (ie establish what happens if particular services aren’t working).
- Work with Business Managers and others to help us write the council-wide continuity strategy.
- Test our continuity plan.

Oxford’s share of the cost of this consultant is £17,500 and this spend will be funded from within this year’s Corporate Services cash limited budgets.

THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPROVED BY:
Portfolio Holder: (Councillor Alex Hollingsworth)
Strategic Director: (Mark Luntley)
Legal and Democratic Services: (Jeremy Thomas)

Background papers: None