



Business Continuity Plan – Exercise Report

Executive Summary

Oxford Council commissioned the Strategic Risk Practice of Zurich Risk Engineering UK to facilitate a workshop to support the Council wide understanding of their response to a business interruption event. The primary reason to exercise is to identify limitations of business continuity plans.

The changing nature of the public sector and the challenges it faces means that even mature business continuity plans may be inappropriate in a given situation or at a given time. Exercises present opportunities to consider in a safe environment how a plan would react and lessons can be learnt before a disaster happens.

Exercising supports best practice methodology and shows a commitment by the Council to enhance their organisational resilience and build on the extensive work that has been undertaken over the last 3 to 6 months. This work included desktop reviews and updates of Service Level plans.

An exercise took place on the 18th October 2017 at Oxford City Council. The purpose of the exercise was to undertake a strategic exercise of the Council's Corporate incident management response followed by a tactical exercise of the Council's service level business continuity plans.

This provided an opportunity for attendees to understand how their business continuity plans will guide them in responding to a continuity event and recover critical services with the output an identification of potential gaps or areas for improvement that should be addressed ahead of an incident to make the business continuity plan more robust and the recovery efforts more effective.

The scenario presented involved an arson attack at St Aldates Chambers. The test involved looking at 4 key stages; the initial response including the first ten minutes to establish how the plan may be invoked, the first few hours, the next day and next few days and beyond.

Attendees were asked to consider:

- How the plans guide them to react to the situation when an incident occurs?
- Is there a common understanding and awareness of the actions required?
- How robust are the business continuity plans?
- What further actions are required to make the plan more effective?

Following the initial Corporate Response Team section of the exercise, attendees were split into six groups and sat with colleagues from their service areas which allowed for discussions on individual service responses. After each stage of the exercise a feedback session was held giving attendees an opportunity to share their learnings with the wider group.

From a facilitators perspective it was a very positive exercise, attendees were engaged throughout and were open to discuss and share their learnings with the wider group.

The exercise identified a number of individual learning points which delegates were asked to log. Learnings which were shared with the wider group are recorded in section 3 of this report.

A summary of key thoughts identified by the group are outlined below:

1. ***Review and awareness of the Corporate Plan*** – whilst a Corporate Plan has been developed and this document supported the response it has not been reviewed in a number of years and was not followed as closely as it could have been during the initial response. This appeared to be due to a lack of familiarity with the plan and knowledge of its existence by Crisis Response Team members.

The plan should be reviewed, updated and all CRT members should be familiar with its contents. Plans should also be available in hard copy and kept off site.

2. ***Loss of IT equipment*** - the exercise undertaken purposely did not have a direct impact on IT services. The exercise did however highlight the risk of loss of IT equipment and the impact that this would have as the Council recovered from an incident. There were a number of areas that require consideration which are detailed in Section 3 of this report.
3. ***Critical Services / Business Impact Analysis*** - there is a need to provide more information on the critical activities of the council i.e. defining how quickly they need to be recovered, what resources are required and how the recovery process will be managed. This needs to be in a format that is easily accessible to managers when managing the recovery process. To support this, a Corporate Business Impact Analysis should be created which informs and supports individual service areas and their plans.

Next steps

It is recommended that the Council consider implementing the actions identified during the workshop. On a wider note, the Council should continue to maintain, review and exercise their Business Continuity Plan on a regular basis in order to ensure that it remains up to date and robust.

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