Leeds CITY COUNCIL

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Report of the Director of Resources and Housing

Report to Scrutiny Board (Strategy and Resources)

Date: 7 September 2020

Subject: Business continuity planning during COVID 19

Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	☐ Yes	☒ No
Has consultation been carried out?	☐ Yes	☒ No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	☐ Yes	☒ No
Will the decision be open for call-in?	☐ Yes	☒ No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number:	☐ Yes	☒ No

1.   Purpose of this report

1.1   The purpose of this report is to inform Scrutiny Board Strategy and Resources on how LCC's Business Continuity Plans performed and supported the council's critical services during the initial days of the COVID 19 outbreak and how the outbreak will inform business continuity going forward.

2.   Background information

2.1   The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 made it a statutory duty of all Category 1 responders (which includes local authorities) to have in place Business Continuity Plans to be able to continue to deliver critical aspects of their day to day functions in the event of an emergency or disruptive incident. Category 1 responders are likely to be at the core of the response to most emergencies and along with Local Authorities includes Police, Fire & Rescue, NHS, Ambulance Service and Environment Agency etc.

2.2   In 2012 Leeds City Council initiated a Business Continuity Programme to coincide with the publication of BS ISO 22301:2012 'Business Continuity Management Systems – Requirements'. The programme was successfully completed in September 2015 and transferred into the business as usual activities of the Resilience & Emergencies Team, Resources & Housing Directorate.

2.3   Business Continuity Plans are documented procedures that guide organisations to respond, recover, resume and restore the continuity of critical/prioritised services and functions in the event of an emergency or disruptive incident. The scope of a Business Continuity Plan includes arrangements for loss of staff, loss of accommodation/work place, loss of information communication technology (including access to data), and loss of key supplies and suppliers. Services complete a Business Impact Analysis to identify any critical functions and whether a Business Continuity Plan is required.

3.   Main issues

3.1   Covid has provided an unprecedented test of business continuity for all organisations. The response from the council and partners has been significant, and members will know from their regular updates and Executive Board papers just how many council services did continue despite the pandemic. This report describes the process of what happened with business continuity issues rather than descriptions of each service.

3.2   At lockdown, the services fell into the following very broad categories:

- those where colleagues could work from home, including the contact centre and a range of other services, approximately 8000 staff worked from home
- those essential services that could continue with social distancing or PPE e.g. care and refuse
- those services which had to close e.g. sports, libraries etc.

3.3   There are currently 82 Business Continuity Plans for critical services owned and maintained by services and functions across the 5 LCC directorates. Of these 26 fall within the remit of the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board. Details of these service areas are attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

3.4   Although Business Continuity Plans were able to support critical services with the initial impact of COVID 19, as the scale of the outbreak increased at pace into an unprecedented major emergency that affected every service in many different ways, it quickly became clear that new ways or working had to be considered and implemented to support the scope of LCC's Business Continuity Plans.

3.5   On 5 March, the Resilience & Emergencies Team emailed a message to managers and officers responsible for LCC's critical services requesting them to review their Business Continuity Plans in readiness for the potential impact of COVID 19 paying particular attention to loss of staff, loss of workplace and loss of key suppliers and supplies – three areas likely to be impacted by COVID 19.

3.6   Fortunately, most Business Continuity Plans had been reviewed and updated in the months preceding COVID 19 as part of the planning for a 'no deal' EU Exit, particularly in relation to loss of staff and loss of key suppliers and supplies.

3.7   An overwhelming response was received. All Business Continuity Plans were reviewed in light of COVID 19 with many having specific COVID 19 revisions and at the very least providing confidence that all managers had to some degree considered the potential impact of COVID 19 on their service.

3.8   Also on 5 March, the Resilience & Emergencies Team issued a Leeds Alert 'warning and informing' message to businesses and organisations in Leeds providing links to COVID 19 related information from Department of Health & Social Care, NHS England and Public Health England including a link to the Government's COVID 19 Action Plan. The information aimed to provide businesses and organisations with guidance to review and prepare their Business Continuity Plans and arrangements in readiness to respond to an increase in COVID 19 cases and the potential impact.

3.9   On 17 March a small team was established by Helen Freeman, Chief Officer, Environmental Services to look at business continuity, service prioritisation and communications planning. The team included, Andy Dodman, Chief Officer HR, and officers from both the Resilience & Emergencies and Communications Teams. A key action coming out of the group was to engage Heads of Service to progress with a service prioritisation exercise for operations and functions not covered by Business Continuity Plans. This was to ensure that all services give consideration to service reduction through potential staff absence due to COVID 19, whether due to self-isolation or having staff reallocated to work elsewhere supporting LCC's more critical services.

3.10   On 20 March, Leeds City Council declared a major incident along with the other four West Yorkshire councils and the West Yorkshire Local Resilience Forum (WYLRF).

3.11   As cases of COVID 19 rapidly increased, the definition of a major incident under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 became reality;

        "A major incident is beyond the scope of business-as-usual operations, and is likely to involve serious harm, damage, disruption or risk to human life or welfare, essential services, the environment or national security"

3.12   On 24 March a message went to the Best Council Leadership Team informing them that the Government had announced additional stringent measures to tackle the spread of COVID 19. The restrictions would affect the ability to continue to deliver certain services which is exacerbated by the increase in staff absence from work and the impact this is having on business continuity.

3.13   Managers had to activate their Business Continuity Plans and arrangements against a rapidly escalating scenario to try to maintain business as usual operations with a focus on the more critical aspects of the service. However, within 7 to 14 days, Business Continuity Plans began to require additional emergency support. This is because Business Continuity Plans are developed based on risks identified by the manager as being of a threat to the business as usual activities of the service. Even though loss of staff due to a flu pandemic is included as a generic risk, the impact of COVID 19 was far beyond expectation and had severe consequences (on a global scale) with the result that Business Continuity Plans required rapid emergency support through new ways of working and service prioritisation.

3.14   A point of learning is that as Business Continuity Plans are managed and activated at service level, it will be essential that any learning from the initial response to COVID 19 is captured by managers and used to inform the Business Continuity Plans in preparedness for any future waves. The need to review Business Continuity Plans in light of COVID 19 has already been prompted in recent correspondence to managers and will continue to be amplified going forward.

3.15 An Essential Service Planning Framework was developed to support existing Business Continuity Plans. The framework determined the distinction between essential/non-essential services and the ability to deliver each. The framework helped to identify services and functions of high priority requiring specific intervention and support. Three overarching principles were established:

- The protection of customers particularly the vulnerable; and
- The protection of the health and safety of all staff;
- Ensuring compliance with the Public Health and Government advice and guidance.

3.16 Underpinning the principles were a series of five priorities. Each service had to consider and identify which of the following scenarios they fit into, to help determine priority and action:

- **Priority 1**. Immediate action needed to resource up and/or adapt the manner in which the service is delivered, communicate changes to stakeholders (i.e. care/refuse).
- **Priority 2**. Need to adapt/scale back service delivery and communicate to stakeholders. Need to closely review staffing resources to ensure service continuity (i.e. home visits/housing/community hubs/schools).
- **Priority 3**. Need to ensure staffing numbers and infrastructure is maintained and service continued (i.e. contact centre/business support centre).
- **Priority 4**. Service resource to safely transfer to support Priorities 1, 2 & 3 + volunteering.
- **Priority 5**. Continue service delivery but redeployment of resource may be necessary to the essential services above as and when necessary.

3.17 A COVID 19 'Silver' Working Group was established, chaired by Neil Evans, Director, Resources & Housing supported by Chief Officers from each directorate in order to ensure a strong link into each of their leadership teams.

The primary responsibilities of the group was to:

- Be responsible for identifying the highest priority issues for the organisation and coordinating further necessary work to resolve them.
- Ensure that effective processes for identifying and managing related risks are maintained through the council's normal risk management and business continuity procedures, and that these processes are enhanced as required in response to specific intelligence and guidance.
- Ensure that guidance and communication received from the UK Government, NHS and Public Health England is fully considered by and acted on by council services and is incorporated in the framework for the process of service resumption.
- Ensure that guidance and communications received from the UK Government, NHS and Public Health England has been communicated to the organisation, where appropriate.
- Provide updates on the council's plans and progress around recovery and liaise with CLT, BCLT, elected members and others as appropriate.

3.18 The COVID 19 'Silver' Working Group continue to meet weekly to explore how services that have continued during the outbreak can maintain and build on their effectiveness and to oversee the resumption of services that had ceased to operate.

There is close liaison and consultation with Trade Unions regarding service resumption to the effect that a Trade Union Convenor is invited to attend each Group meeting.

The Group oversee the resumption of services by reference to the 'Service Recovery & Resumption Plan' which was initiated in May. The plan is an internal tracking document to ensure that a strategic overview is maintained for services resuming. The plan is scoped into phases or stages, commencing with services resuming in May (Phase 1) through to August (Phase 4). The plan is updated on a rolling basis and continues to remain the key service resumption progress tracking document.

3.19 A regular Councillor/MP email continues to be issued providing up to date information relating to the outbreak response and recovery including progress with service resumption.

3.20 Progress relating to service resumption is also detailed in the Executive Board Covid-19 Update Reports considered at the March, April, May, June and July meetings.

3.21 As the outbreak moves further into recovery and service resumption, it is an opportunity to reflect on the initial response capturing learning to inform review and revision of Business Continuity Plans – essential in the event of a second wave of COVID 19 occurring. The review will also be timely in preparation for EU Exit.

Key areas for many services will be:

- Loss of staff, whether through illness or having to self-isolate, or mental health issues due to new anxieties relating to feeling safe at work, job security, personal finances etc. .
- Loss of information communication technology, making sure data and systems are accessible to staff working remotely and that staff are properly equipped to work from home.
- Loss of key supplies and suppliers, social distancing has significantly changed business operating models resulting in supply chain disruption.

3.22 Each Directorate Resilience Group has a lead role in the development of their business continuity plans and arrangements – and will be reviewing the performance of their business continuity arrangements during the outbreak and using the findings to inform further development of plans. There may be additional services identified that require development of Business Continuity Plans.

3.23 The centrally managed annual review process will continue to make sure that each Business Continuity Plan is reviewed and revised as a minimum each year. The process requires managers to review the content of their services Business Continuity Plan, ensuring that it continues to reflect the needs of the service. It is also important that key contact details are reviewed and revised as part of the process as contact details (for staff and suppliers) are areas that are regularly subject to change. The Resilience & Emergencies Team complete a quick check

post review to satisfy that the annual review has been completed. Reviews may be prompted at other times for example after activation, or testing where further revisions may be identified.

3.24 Although managers are responsible for any testing or exercising carried out on their Business Continuity Plans, the Resilience & Emergencies Team can offer support in developing and facilitating testing and exercising. This includes the offer of a short table top exercise comprising of generic scenarios (loss of premises, loss of ICT etc.), but can also be adapted to include any specific scenarios requested of the manager.

3.25 The Annual Business Continuity Report to the Corporate Governance & Audit Committee due in December will provide assurances that the arrangements are fit for purpose, up to date, are routinely complied with, have been effectively communicated and are monitored. The continued encouragement and support from the Committee over the years has been instrumental in delivering and maintaining LCC's Business Continuity Programme.

3.26 There are few benefits coming out of the COVID 19 outbreak. However, having a more mobile and flexible workforce and the wider use of information communication technology are just two benefits. A third would be for COVID 19 to raise the profile and value of Business Continuity Management even further so that the council continues to develop its critical service resilience in the coming years whether for business as usual disruption or a major emergency such that as presented by the COVID 19 outbreak.

4.   Corporate considerations

4.1   Consultation and engagement

- This item is a factual report and therefore is not subject to consultation. However, Scrutiny Board Chairs were consulted on the report in July 2020 with a view to scrutiny boards reflecting on business continuity as part of their work programmes in 2020/21. Throughout Covid there has been member engagement where possible in relation to service changes, and there has been extensive communications of the impact.

4.2   Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

- There are no specific equality and diversity/cohesion issues associated with this report.

4.3   Council policies and the Best Council Plan

- Business Continuity forms part of the Council's risk management processes which underpin the achievement of the ambitions and all outcomes and priorities within the Best Council Plan.

Climate Emergency

- Since this is a factual report detailing the Council's Business Continuity during the Covid-19 pandemic there are no specific climate implications captured,

although these are captured in other reports e.g. implications of people working from home, less travel etc.

4.4   Resources, procurement and value for money

- There are no specific financial implications included in this report, there has been detailed financial reports about the pandemic to each Executive Board.

4.5   Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

- There are no legal implications arising from this report.

4.6   Risk management

- Business Continuity forms a key part of the councils overall risk management methodology and processes, ensuring that business as usual processes are maintained wherever possible during an emergency. A risk management update has been provided in the regular Executive Board report.

5.   Conclusions

5.1   The deployment of business continuity plans has played a key role in ensuring that business as usual functions have been maintained, where possible and in line with government guidance, by the Council as the pandemic escalated in March. Since that time the Council has moved to develop new ways or working that have enabled services to be delivered differently or resumed as the pandemic and the approach to it has evolved. The service changes have been reported through regular member updates, Executive Board reports and to the public as well.

6.   Recommendations

6.1   The Scrutiny Board to note the contents of this report and identify any areas for future scrutiny work related to Business Continuity and the development of new ways of working resulting from the COVID 19 pandemic.

7.   Background documents[1]

7.1   None.

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[1] The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.