

For publication

Covid 19 Emergency Planning / Business Continuity

Meeting:	Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum
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Cabinet portfolio:	Business Transformation and Customers, Governance
Report by:	Assistant Director – Customers, Commissioning and Change

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Purpose of reviewing the topic	To scrutinise Chesterfield Borough Council's Covid 19 emergency planning and business continuity.
What are the objectives of the review?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To understand the current position of the council's Covid 19 emergency planning.• To understand how Covid 19 has impacted on business continuity.• To understand what work has taken place to mediate the negative impacts on business continuity and how successful this work has been.• To review the council's plans for a second surge of cases over the winter.
Progress to date	This is a new item on the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum work programme 2020/21.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Chesterfield Borough Council has contracted with Derbyshire County Council to deliver its Emergency Planning and Business Continuity service and this relationship has been in place since 2005. The Council benefits from joint working in this area, gaining access to a larger, skilled Emergency Planning team, together with the provision of a dedicated Emergency Planning resource for 2.5 days per week.
- 1.2 To further strengthen our capacity and co-ordination of emergency or business continuity events, the Council has identified two senior officers to act in emergency planning liaison roles. These staff members work alongside the Derbyshire County Council Emergency Planning team and with the Council's Strategic Leadership Team and Corporate Management Team in responding to an emergency or business continuity event.
- 1.3 Senior officers receive regular Emergency Planning and Business Continuity training, including training on Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP) principles which are used when responding to major multi agency incidents.
- 1.4 The Council has a detailed emergency plan and business continuity plan in place, which is regularly updated. Access to the plan can be obtained by authorised personnel through Resilience Direct, which is an online private network which enables civil protection practitioners to work together across geographical and organisational boundaries – during the preparation, response and recovery phases of an event or emergency. This system meets data protection requirements.
- 1.5 It is dependent on the size and scale of the emergency or business continuity event as to the number and type of strategic and tactical groups that will be initiated to effectively 'manage' the event. This will be determined

when an emergency or business continuity event is triggered.

- 1.6 At a local level, Chesterfield Borough Council regularly reviews and updates service specific business continuity plans. The leadership team reviews, agrees and documents the priority services for protection and restoration in an emergency and this process informs the relevant activities which must be undertaken when the business continuity plan is invoked. Individual Corporate Business Continuity Plans exist in respect of winter planning, flood planning and a flu pandemic.
- 1.7 This report focuses on the actions which have been undertaken by the Council since March 2020 to address the business continuity aspects of the coronavirus pandemic, ensuring that services are maintained.

2.0 **Current position and key milestones**

- 2.1 On 23 March 2020, the government announced that a national lockdown was necessary due to the increase in deaths from covid-19 and the impact that increased infection rates were having on the NHS. The Government set out legislation which included requirements for people to stay at home and not mix with others outside of their household. It also included the requirement for the closure of all non-essential businesses.
- 2.2 These conditions and restrictions were unprecedented and required the immediate implementation of business continuity activities so that the Council could prioritise the delivery of our key services where it was legal and safe to do.
- 2.3 Whilst most emergencies or business continuity events are short lived, the Coronavirus pandemic is unique in

that we still remain in a business continuity position nine months later, with an end date as yet unknown.

2.4 In response to this, our business continuity activity has been/is currently being delivered in three phases. These phases are:

2.4.1 Response – the work we did to deal with the 1st national lockdown

2.4.2 Recovery – the work we did to reopen business and bring our workforce back in a covid-19 secure way

2.4.3 Response and recovery – the work we are doing currently to deal with the 2nd national lockdown whilst supporting our communities and businesses in longer term recovery.

2.5 The following business continuity structure has been implemented to enable the management of the coronavirus business continuity activity across Derbyshire:

- Chief Executive and Leader attendance at the Derbyshire Local Outbreak Board
- Executive Director attendance at the Local Resilience Forum Strategic Co-Ordination Group and Recovery Group
- Corporate Management Team attendance at the Local Resilience Forum Tactical Co-Ordination Group and at specific partner working groups which are focused on communications, community wellbeing including homelessness and workforce
- Tactical meetings of the CBC leadership team, initially held daily and reduced to twice weekly as we moved into the recovery phase
- Regular communications in place between the Corporate Management Team and their respective portfolio holders

- Three task and finish groups have been implemented to deliver recovery activities. These groups are focusing on the economy, community wellbeing and the safety of our workforce.

The impact of Covid 19 on Business Continuity

- 2.6 The Covid-19 pandemic has presented us with unprecedented risks, disruption and changes to our working practices. Whilst our business continuity plans have provided clear 'structure' and guidance on process, the Council did not have a 'ready prepared' business continuity plan which could be immediately followed and we have adapted to each situation as we have moved further into the pandemic.
- 2.7 During the initial lockdown period the Council had to temporarily close offices, services and facilities and many of our staff were asked to work from home or were redeployed into other roles.
- 2.8 Income targets have been adversely affected, resulting in a forecasted budget deficit generated by the pandemic. Regular financial returns are provided to Government and the leadership team are identifying solutions to balancing the budget in the 2020/21 financial year, as we await final confirmation of the additional funding which will be received from Government.
- 2.9 The following services were closed during the response phase of the pandemic; many of these services were reopened from July onwards, in a covid19-secure way, and have unfortunately closed once more to the public as we have moved into the second national lockdown from 5 November 2020.
 - Leisure Centres
 - Venues

- Community Rooms
- Visitor Information Centre
- Museum
- Face to Face customer access via the Customer Service Centre
- Non-emergency housing repairs
- Delivery of the Housing Capital Programme

2.10 There have been a number of challenges in reopening our services. To ensure our premises were covid-19 secure we have redesigned customer and employee flow, adjusting desk spaces and providing additional safety screens and speech transfer systems. 140 service specific risk assessments have been developed to ensure we have safe ways of working. These risk assessments have been developed alongside trade union colleagues, who have been complementary on our approach.

2.11 In addition town centre Ambassadors have been introduced to provide a helpful marshalling and information role within the community.

2.12 These activities will not need to be redone as services reopen again as the Council took the approach of a robust design which would be fit for purpose on a long-term basis.

2.13 The following new activities were required during the response and recovery phases and have been co-ordinated through our tactical task and finish teams.

- Provision of support to local pharmacies to deliver medicines and food parcels. Over 10,000 prescriptions were delivered by our staff
- Provision of marshalling at Covid-19 testing stations
- Delivery of the 'keeping people in' initiative
- Delivery of business grants to Chesterfield businesses, totalling £26.95m

- Delivery of further Test and Trace grants within the community to those who are on low income and need to self-isolate
- Delivery of the 2nd phase of business grants which are generated by the need for a 2nd national lockdown and movement to local tiered restrictions
- Co-ordination and live streaming of virtual meetings
- Development of new policies to support redeployment, furlough, flexible furlough and agile working

2.14 In support of these activities, the Council has developed a central list of available resources, co-ordinated by the HR business partners and have redirected those staff from 'closed' or low priority services to support the new activities. Those staff who were unable to work from home or be redeployed have been furloughed.

Mitigation of the negative impacts of business continuity and how successful this has been

2.15 Following the approval of the Council's ICT improvement programme in 2018, work had already begun to strengthen our ICT resilience and to provide us with the technology to enable employees to work from home. This underpinning work was critical in enabling the Council to maintain core service delivery, whilst also protecting our staff during the pandemic. Had this work not taken place in 2019, the Council would have been in a very different place at the start of the pandemic and would have been unable to provide the technology to support home working. This would have resulted in a requirement for core staff – customer services, revenues and benefits and regulatory services – to work from their office locations and the closure of non-essential services for a significant period of time. It would also have limited our ability to bring some form of normality to the Council's governance

processes as virtual committee meetings would not have been easy to implement.

- 2.16 During the 1st week of lockdown, the ICT team despatched the final set of laptops to 147 staff members working for Arvato, meaning that the Council and its core partner could maintain office based service provision from home. This activity was originally scheduled to be completed over a six-week period, later in the year. Arvato staff were grateful for our support.
- 2.17 The ICT team have continued to deliver the ICT Improvement programme as well as manage business as usual activity and support new activities generated through our pandemic business continuity work, such as grant system development. The improvement programme has been 'shuffled' to bring forward the replacement of the Council's contact centre and telephony provision and to prioritise the development and implementation of online forms such as benefit applications which were relevant to the immediate needs of the community. Replacement of the telephony system has provided employees with access to a 'soft phone' on their laptop and has enabled staff to continue to communicate with customers from home.
- 2.18 Further work has recently been completed to enable staff members to take card payments securely from home. This has enabled recovery action to take place, together with the rescheduling and refunding of theatre performances.
- 2.19 HR Business Partners have worked with employees to support them with 'new ways of working'. We have also commissioned manager seminars which focused on how to manage in a virtual world, and how to manage work when your children are at home. These were extremely popular.

- 2.20 In recognition of the assistance that our employees may need during this challenging time, for example counselling, bereavement or debt support, HR have launched an Employee Assistance Programme which is in place to enable the workforce to obtain support by telephone. This service has been very positive for the few employees who have used it, but take up is low and it requires further promotion.
- 2.21 Alternative ways to promote the museum service have been developed, including virtual chats about the collection, regular quizzes and improved use of social media. This has been well received.
- 2.22 The Council has implemented 'test and trace' procedures and it is clear from the tracking data we collect that the spread of infection has had a much bigger impact on our workforce immediately prior to the 2nd phase of lockdown than it did in March 2020. 2% of our workforce have received a positive covid test and 4% are self-isolating because they have been in close contact with someone who is positive. Implementation of robust test and trace activity across the workplace is time-consuming and resource hungry. Pleasingly, the Council has had no Covid-19 riddor reportable cases, which is testament to the hard work and rigour when developing risk assessments, safe ways of working and our test and trace activity. A recent managers seminar has been delivered, reminding staff to follow the risk assessment, wear a face covering and not to car share.

Plans for 2nd lockdown

- 2.23 On 5 November 2020, the government implemented a 2nd national lockdown and the Council has responded quickly and effectively to this.

- 2.24 Lessons learned exercises were completed at the end of the 1st lockdown and this learning has been used to support scenario planning for the second wave. In addition, work has been undertaken to review and revise risk assessments for Tier 2 and Tier 3 local restrictions so that we can implement relevant changes quickly as we move out of national restrictions and back into local restrictions.
- 2.25 A temporary grants team has now been implemented to ensure that businesses obtain grant funding quickly and efficiently. During the 1st phase of lockdown, grants were administered manually, and the data collection process was very time consuming. For the latest set of grants, administration processes have been streamlined and partially automated using the Council's CRM solution. The processes have been designed and built within a week and improved to allow for 'faster payments' to be made direct to business bank accounts.

3.0 **Barriers/obstacles**

- 3.1 Further work is required to digitise our paper-based customer records. Completion of this activity will enable agile working to be completed effectively.
- 3.2 The Council still issues a large amount of 'post'. This requires office-based staff to print, label and post out documents to customers. Implementation of the Customer Portal, 'My Chesterfield', is the 1st step toward sending correspondence electronically for those customers who choose to receive their mail in this way.
- 3.3 Restrictions in availability of staff through isolating or shielding may mean some services need to be reduced or delayed, especially in some specialist areas, where it is difficult to share resources.

- 3.4 Implementation of a range of collaboration technologies, including the popular Zoom or FaceTime applications, will enable officers to effectively collaborate with community members who may not use Microsoft Teams as a preferred tool.
- 3.5 Our workforce has worked tirelessly to deliver core services and additional activities alongside the delivery of Council Plan activities and their response to the inevitable change in ways of working has been fantastic. In some service areas, capacity has been stretched to its limits and we must be realistic that this level of output cannot be sustained, without the risk of burn out or negative impacts to employee mental health. Regular contact with employees, completion of stress risk assessments and the introduction of a Mental Health 1st aid scheme is helping to ensure that this risk is understood and controlled.

4.0 **Future plans**

- 4.1 Continuation of the Council's ICT improvement programme will address the barriers discussed in 3.1, 3.2 and 3.4. The Council's customer portal has been implemented already and an E billing solution is in place for Council Tax and Business Rates and for landlords who receive housing benefit schedules.
- 4.2 The Council's leadership team continues to focus on business continuity planning, including responding to the latest set of restrictions, whilst also working on recovery activity in parallel. Impact assessments have been completed to shape our recovery activity, in particular informing the Council's economic recovery action plan and community strategy.

5.0 **Conclusion**

- 5.1 The Council's business continuity plan has provided an effective structure for the delivery of our Covid19 business continuity activity, but the unique nature of the coronavirus pandemic has meant that the type of business continuity activity has been unprecedented and this has naturally resulted in 'reactive' activity in the short term.
- 5.2 These activities have taken place in a timely manner to ensure that core Council Services can be maintained. Where face to face services have had to close due to government legislation, the Council has responded by providing other alternative ways to access service, such as online gym activities, virtual museum tours or webchat.
- 5.3 The Council has delivered additional activities, such as grant payments, food parcel deliveries and prescription deliveries which have ensured that Chesterfield businesses and communities have been supported throughout the pandemic. This activity is expected to continue, and the Council will be responsible for grant provision through to the end of the financial year 2021/22.
- 5.4 The leadership team is focused on the delivery of core services whilst maintaining the health and safety of the workforce and risk assessments and safe methods of working are at the forefront of business continuity activity.
- 5.5 Our employees have worked tirelessly to deliver services across the borough and have adapted well to working digitally.

5.6 We have robust plans in place to support the 2nd wave and the ongoing recovery of Chesterfield Borough.

6.0 **Suggested scrutiny activity**

6.1 No further activity is suggested.

Document information

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Background documents	
These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when the report was prepared.	
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Appendices to the report	