Business continuity strategy

South Oxfordshire District Council
Listening Learning Leading

Vale of White Horse District Council

2009 – 2012

Table of contents

1 – Why this strategy is needed

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 The Act replaced outdated legislation governing emergency planning.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, both councils are subject to the full set of civil protection duties. These duties require the councils 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 their own business continuity management arrangements.

3. Both councils have addressed the first five of these through their emergency plans 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. Cabinet approved this agreement on 8 December 2005 and Executive delegated authority to the Monitoring Officer and Solicitor to enter into the agreement on 4 November 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". We are meeting this requirement through production of this joint strategy and by having business continuity plans in place at both councils.

5. Having business continuity arrangements in place will enable the councils to continue providing essential services to residents, following a disruption or emergency. This strategy sets out the main elements of business continuity management at both councils. The types of disruptions and emergencies that could affect the councils, and how we will address them, 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 of the strategy

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 both councils' image and reputation
- minimise general disruption to life in both districts
- ensure corporate co-operation over service priorities
- minimise the social, political, legal and financial consequences of the incident.

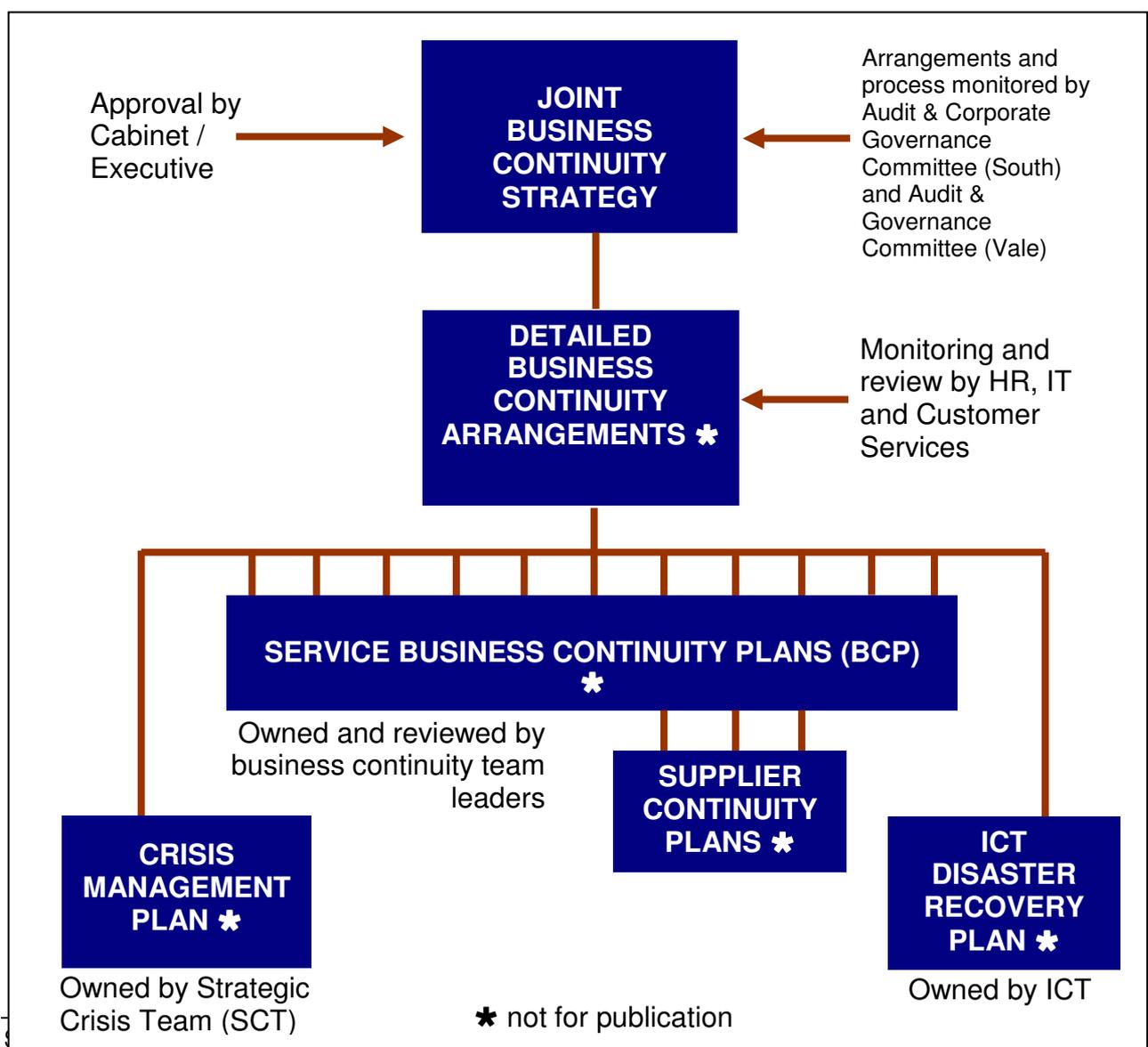# 3 – Our approach to business continuity

PROCESS

7. The diagram below shows schematically the process by which we manage business continuity.
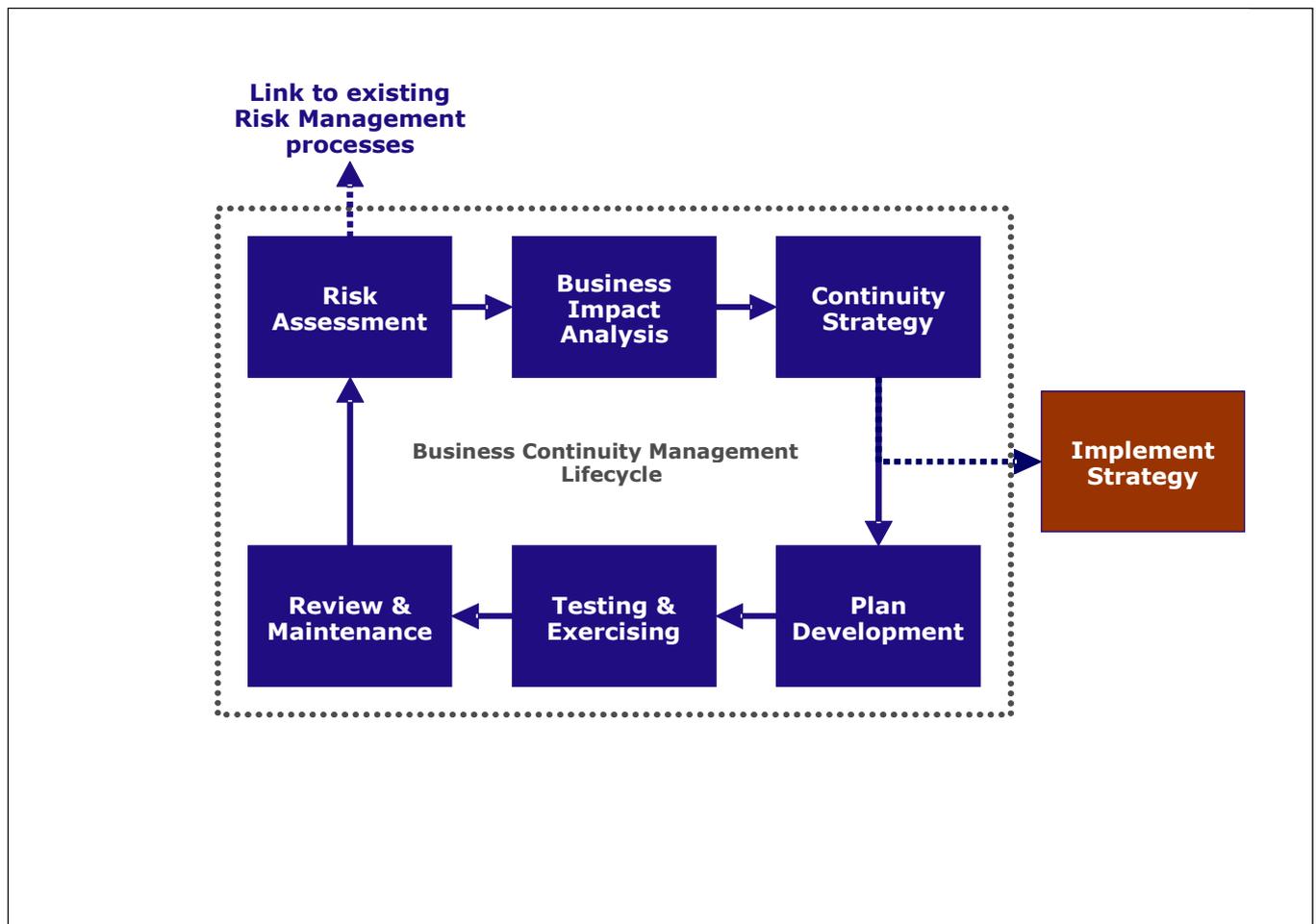
8. This shows that our approach to business continuity begins with a risk assessment using our existing risk assessment and risk management process.

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. Our business continuity arrangements are illustrated in the following diagram and 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.

Approval by Cabinet / Executive →

JOINT BUSINESS CONTINUITY STRATEGY

← Arrangements and process monitored by Audit & Corporate Governance Committee (South) and Audit & Governance Committee (Vale)

DETAILED BUSINESS CONTINUITY ARRANGEMENTS ✱

← Monitoring and review by HR, IT and Customer Services

SERVICE BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANS (BCP) ✱

Owned and reviewed by business continuity team leaders

CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN ✱

Owned by Strategic Crisis Team (SCT)

SUPPLIER CONTINUITY PLANS ✱

ICT DISASTER RECOVERY PLAN ✱

Owned by ICT

✱ not for publication

13. As some of our services are outsourced, it is important that the business continuity arrangements with suppliers are part of our plan. In most existing contracts, there is no contractual requirement for a supplier to have business continuity management in place. We have a programme for retrospectively introducing this as part of annual performance review of key suppliers. We also now have a policy, implemented for new contracts during the tendering process, 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 is assessed as part of the tender evaluation.

DOCUMENTATION

14. This document is the joint business continuity strategy for South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council. To produce this document, we used elements of South's existing strategy and incorporated parts of Vale's business continuity documentation.

15. We have produced a separate document containing our 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 two business continuity plans (BCP), one plan for each council. There can be more if the service contains widely differing functions from a business continuity perspective (e.g. Cornerstone is a separate function within the Economy, Leisure and Property service and therefore should have a plan of its own). 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. Both councils have the same Strategic Crisis Team (SCT) whose role is to take the lead in directing and implementing our 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, facilities, ICT and communications. The SCT will use the Crisis Management Plan to help manage business continuity in the event of an incident.

18. Both councils also have 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 to developing business continuity plans is to firstly identify different disruption scenarios (this section), and then plan how to deal with them (next section).

20. A number of incidents can affect council 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. We have 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 buildings

21. Following a business disruption or incident, either council's 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 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 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. Both councils rely 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 PROCEDURES

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 and Abbey House, Abingdon 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 either council buildings are not in use or access is denied, four distinct types of backup accommodation are in place:

- We have a designated disaster recovery centre for staff performing priority activities. The centre allows access to a workstation 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 other council premises.

- Other staff that don't perform critical functions will be asked to work from home.

ICT systems and services

29. Both councils have to be able to respond and recover from a disruption to their Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure. We have identified the IT systems critical to council services and the recovery of most systems is included in the ICT business continuity plan. The recovery of systems run by our contractors e.g. Capita, are included in their business continuity arrangements. Details of replacement servers, workplaces and telephony at the remote recovery centre are included in the disaster recovery plan.

Critical suppliers

30. Each council is heavily dependent on key suppliers to fulfil its obligations. Our 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 respective 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 either council or from an outside source. BCPs will include lists of key members of staff and how the respective 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.

- A desktop walk-through of each business continuity plan with business recovery team leaders, 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 named 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 HR, IT and Customer Services
- 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 HR, IT and Customer Services
- 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, at the very least to update staff lists as a consequence of starters and leavers

4 – Conclusion

36. Both councils recognise the importance of business continuity management so they are able to respond to an emergency or disruption. Our arrangements meet the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and provide peace of mind that either council can still provide essential services to residents following a disruption.