

# NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

## AUDIT COMMITTEE

17 March 2025

### BUSINESS CONTINUITY – ANNUAL REPORT

#### 1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an overview of the current business continuity (BC) arrangements for North Yorkshire Council.

#### 2 Background

- 2.1 During an emergency or incident North Yorkshire Council (NYC) is still required to deliver its critical services. Flooding incidents, heavy snow, power outage or cyber attacks are a few examples on how services could be affected and service areas need to maintain plans to ensure they can continue to operate the most essential aspects, even if they lose essential resources. This could be social care being able to reach isolated communities, highways winter maintenance operating with reduced fleet or the Customer Resolution Centre maintaining services with a loss of computer systems.
- 2.2 The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 places a statutory duty on Local Authorities as a Category 1 responder to maintain plans to ensure that they can continue to exercise their functions in the event of an emergency so far as is reasonably practicable. The duty relates to all functions, not just their emergency response functions:
- Emergency management/civil protection: Functions that underpin the Category 1 responder's capability to respond to the emergency itself, and take effective action to reduce, control or mitigate the effects of the emergency.
  - Impact on human welfare, the environment and security: The significance of services to the effective functioning of the community in the event of an emergency, or an adverse effect on the environment.
  - Legal implications: Statutory requirements on Category 1 responders and the threat of litigation if a service is not delivered, or is delivered inadequately.
  - Financial implications: Loss of revenue and payment of compensation.
  - Reputation: Functions that impact on the credibility and public perception of a Category 1 responder.
- 2.3 The NYC Resilience & Emergencies Team (RET) is tasked with ensuring that all NYC directorates and service areas have robust arrangements in place to ensure they are able to deal with a variety of impacts capable of disrupting their provision of service to the communities of North Yorkshire.

- 2.4 The BC arrangements have evolved to ensure that directorates have plans in place to mitigate and manage disruptive incidents such as a loss of staff, buildings, equipment or disruption to information technology or supply chains. Service units create an operational plan to manage the loss of these resource procedures.
- 2.5 The RET continue to consider internal audit reviews and work with NYC BC Champions via the Corporate Risk Management and Resilience Group (CRMRG) to maintain a dialogue with each service area, improving engagement and transparency, deciding on resource implications and ensuring a consistent corporate process for business continuity across the Council while keeping bureaucracy to a minimum.

### **3 NYC BC process**

- 3.1 Corporate BC and disruption to NYC services continue to be addressed through an embedded assessment considering loss of staff, equipment, technology, buildings and key suppliers. These impacts are risk assessed, and mitigation measures documented, in service area BC plans.
- 3.2 The NYC service area BC plans currently consist of two key documents for all service provision;

Business Impact Analysis (BIA) - The Business Impact Analysis looks at priority business functions and quantifies the impact a loss of those functions may have.

Incident Management Plan (IMP) - The Incident Management Plan helps a service area plan a process to respond to and work around a range of possible impacts on their resource provision of priority services during any incident.

- 3.3 The NYC corporate BC Management System is held on a Microsoft Teams Site. It is the central portal for all relevant service area and directorate documentation and is monitored and overseen by an Emergency Planning Manager (Business Continuity) from the RET, ensuring compliance and currency.
- 3.4 The Team Site is easily accessible and regularly updated providing service area practitioners and management, with up to date information, allowing informed B C decisions to be made. This also provides a framework for assurance during any disruption of service, information and required decisions for the CRMRG and a mitigation pathway for loss of priority services.
- 3.5 The NYC Corporate Business Continuity Policy, which was signed off in January 2023, states that each directorate is required to work with their allocated RET officer to assess their BC planning and their most likely risks. RET will continue to facilitate BC exercises with all directorates to raise awareness and train relevant staff. This ensures that staff are regularly provided with realistic and current scenarios and what to expect during any

relevant incident.

- 3.6 Policy adherence is overseen by an Emergency Planning Manager and named RET officers, designated with the task of reviewing service area BC arrangements. A reporting regime is in place and every directorate now has a designated Assistant Director or Head of Service who fulfills the role of BC Champion. This champion oversees their BC arrangements, to take ownership of the process and to represent their directorate at the CRMRG.
- 3.7 The Corporate Director (Resources) continues to have overall responsibility for BC within NYC, with the function co-ordinated and facilitated by the designated officers from the RET. The CRMRG oversee the BC process. The executive portfolio for resilience, emergency planning and BC continues to sit with Leader of the Council, Cllr. Carl Les.
- 3.8 The CRMRG have strategic oversight for BC and BC Champions work closely with relevant directors to ensure satisfaction with information and process to provide annual statements of assurance. Directorates report a BC RAG (Red, Amber, Green) status update to the CRMRG every quarter.
- 3.9 An Emergency and Major Incident Plan was agreed by NYC Management Board in January 2023. As well as allowing NYC to support other responding agencies and the wider community the Emergency and Major Incident Plan assists with the co-ordination of operational and tactical business continuity incidents.
- 3.10 A Corporate NYC BC Plan is in place, ratified by NYC Management Board. This document supports the Council with strategic internal incidents to ensure a consistent and co-ordinated response across the organisation during the most disruptive events.
- 3.11 The provision of a structured BC framework across NYC directorates, including links with the multi-agency Response to Major and Critical Incidents (RMCI) Plan has enhanced management of information and supported a communication strategy that informs senior management across the organisation enabling them to identify priorities in the restoration of critical services.
- 3.12 To ensure access to all NYC BC documentation during the loss of access to corporate systems there are back ups kept on Resilience Direct, a Cabinet Office system.

## 4 BC 2025/26 update report

### 4.1 NYC activity since the last audit report

- 4.1.1 A new role of Emergency Planning Manager (Business Continuity) was implemented, with the manager commencing in role in late January 2024. The manager built upon previous work performed by the RET to support BC activity during the 2024/25 BC cycle from March 2024.
- 4.1.2 New Business Impact Analysis and Incident Management Plan templates were produced in Excel Workbook formats to provide Heads of Service (HoS) with standardised versions of these two documents. HoS were required to complete the documentation for their service areas prior to the end of May 2024.
- 4.1.3 The BC Manager and all six RET Officers provided support to HoS during this process. Each Officer was allocated a Directorate/Assistant Chief Executive and met with their relevant HoS to introduce the new processes and documentation. They have offered continued support as HoS progressed with their completion of the documents for their service areas.
- 4.1.4 The BC Manager and RET Officers have attended the (Directorate and Corporate) Risk Management and Resilience Groups to provide updates and raise their awareness of relevant issues within their relevant service areas, enabling them to better support the BC processes.
- 4.1.5 A new critical activities list was approved at the February CRMRG meeting. The BC Manager undertook meetings with relevant HoS to challenge and confirm the addition or deletion of some activities with a view to reducing their number as far as possible, as this assists the allocation of NYC's finite resources.
- 4.1.6 Training and exercising for BC planning was offered to directorates across various forums, with the BC Manager delivering awareness training and exercises on request.
- 4.1.7 A working group was established to explore and implement approaches to develop BC promotion to small and medium businesses (SMEs). Development of the Local Resilience Forum's website was an initial focus of the group, with an updated BC plan template provided for SMEs to access and use. The BC Manager is working with the Council's Economy Business Support team to increase engagement and raise awareness of BC with SMEs across the county. Further work will ensue to further improve our engagement and support to SMEs.
- 4.1.8 An internal audit of BC has been undertaken by Veritau. The purpose of the audit was to provide assurance to management that procedures and controls within the system ensure that:
- *The Council's BC policy is produced in line with statutory requirements and best practice where appropriate.*
  - *The Council's BC policy is appropriately communicated throughout NYC senior manager's structures.*
  - *The Council's BC policy objectives are being complied with by those with identified responsibilities.*

- *Suitable governance arrangements and information management systems are in place for business continuity management.*

The proposed actions and timescales contained within the report form the basis of the approach to BCP during 2025/26, as detailed further within the remainder of this report.

4.1.9 Outside of NYC, RET Officers are currently providing BCP support to the City of York Council during the refresh of its existing BC information. The BC Manager has also been working with the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority (YNYCA) Governance and Assurance Manager to provide BC support. BC policy and plan documents have been created for the YNYCA and are currently awaiting feedback for finalisation and publication. Additional BC support is being offered once the Authority has had time to establish itself since its formation.

## **4.2 Priorities for the next 12 months**

- 4.2.1 The BC Manager will undertake more thorough analyses during the 2025/26 BCP cycle, through in-depth meetings with activity owners (HoS) who have an identified critical activity. The initial focus will be on those activities which fall within the '0–24 hour' category, before moving on to the 'within 48 hour' and 'within 72 hour' activities with the assistance of RET Officers. This will facilitate the necessary degree of analysis required to feed into the 'solutions design' phase whereby resource allocation strategies and solutions will be developed.
- 4.2.2 Those HoS who don't have any identified critical activities will be assisted by RET Officers to refresh their existing BIAs/IMPs to provide assurance that they are as self-sufficient as possible, in a similar fashion to that which was employed during the 2024/25 BCP cycle.
- 4.2.3 The BCP arrangements of Traded Services (e.g. NY Highways) have not been considered as part of the 2024/25 BCP cycle. These services form part of our critical service delivery and the BC Manager will therefore investigate the BC arrangements of these services during this year's BCP cycle.
- 4.2.4 There is a strong link between the BC Manager and Information and Communication Technology (ICT), driven by the heavy reliance on ICT across all service areas during regular operations, and the connection between BC and ICT Disaster Recovery planning. The BC Manager and ICT will continue to collaborate closely to maintain a unified approach to planning, thereby avoiding duplication and discrepancies.
- 4.2.5 The BC Manager is keen to improve the BC culture across the organisation and is working with the ICT Engagement Lead to develop comms to raise awareness of BC and DR processes.
- 4.2.6 A training and exercising schedule will be produced by the end of April 2025, with the intention of rolling out both aspects on a 3-year rolling programme.

## **5 Recommendations**

- 5.1** Audit Committee to note the recent challenging incidents that have been managed by the NYC Directorates, overseen by the Business Continuity Champions and fully supported by the Resilience & Emergencies Team and the continued efforts of all service areas at North Yorkshire Council to embed resilient practice.

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