

# WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL BUSINESS CONTINUTIY POLICY



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# Document control

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## Revisions

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# 1. What is Business Continuity

Business continuity is an organisation's ability to continue providing products or services after a disruption. It involves having plans to deal with disruptive events, so Worcestershire County Council (WCC) can continue to deliver core functions and services.

Good practice business continuity involves rigorous planning, exercising, and learning using the Business Continuity cycle. The Business Continuity Management (BCM) cycle below illustrates the stages WCC will be following to improve organisational resilience.



## 2. Purpose

This document is the Business Continuity (BC) Policy for WCC (the council). It details the council's strategic-level policy and approach to conducting BC management. The policy identifies the minimum acceptable standards required. Appropriate tactical, operational and procedural guidance for the day-to-day functioning of the business continuity management framework

This policy is designed to agree and ensure effective organisation resilience guidelines designed to address the 4 key risks to the organisation. These risks relate to disruption to:

- Staff
- Infrastructure
- Critical IT infrastructure
- A demand for service significantly outside of normal operating capacity.

The policy is not designed to identify or detail the specific response arrangements for a BC incident or event. These details are contained within the WCC BC Corporate Plan and individual service area plans. This plan outlines the WCC response to a BC incident or event that impacts multiple services and directorates and therefore requires a corporate level response.

### 3. Statutory Responsibilities for Business Continuity and other guidance

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (CCA) places statutory requirements on Category 1 (Emergency) Responders, specifically for this policy document, chapter 6 of the CCA. Local Authorities are categorised as Category 1 responders due to their role in supporting welfare of individuals impacted by incidents, and their significant role in coordinating incident responses.

The CCA 2004 places seven duties on local authorities as their legal duty in relation to emergency preparedness, resilience and response. The specific activities regarding BC within chapter 6, in relation to local authorities are:

- “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”
- Category 1 responders must have regard to assessments of both internal and external risks when developing and reviewing Business Continuity Plans (BCPs)
- BCPs must include arrangements for exercises for the purpose of ensuring the plan is effective, and arrangements for the provision of training to those involved in implementing the plan. Plans must be reviewed and kept up to date.
- Have a clear process of invoking BCPs when required.
- The Local Authority must have processes in place to promote effective business continuity management to their local business and community sectors.

In addition to the legislative requirements, the government has produced several non-statutory standards, which responder agencies are expected to meet in accordance with their role.

National Resilience Standards<sup>1</sup> (NRS) 8 and 9 concern responsibilities regarding Business Continuity for local authorities. These relate to the statutory requirements regarding business continuity management and promotion, best practice and leading practice.

In addition, the Expectations and Indicators of Good Practice Set for Category 1 and 2 Responders document<sup>2</sup> details the requirements regarding business continuity, highlighting the legislative needs and what may constitute best practice.

It is the expectation that local authorities will align their activities to the National Resilience Standards, ensuring that all legal requirements are met, and that best and leading practice are aimed for.

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<sup>1</sup> [National Resilience Standards for Local Resilience Forums](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Expectations and Indicators of Good Practice](#)

## 4. Contribution to the council's strategic objectives

Operationally disruptive incidents may threaten the council's vision to deliver key council objectives. By ensuring that effective BCM processes are in place, the council will:

- Remain open for business, including through providing localised support to the business and community sector in how to be resilient to challenges. By providing coherent support to these sectors, the council will encourage engagement in the county, and demonstrate that we are a supportive county to invest in.
- Meet its requirements for effective BC within Children's and Adults Social Care, protecting its most vulnerable residents. This includes supporting the education sector, from early years through to higher education.
- Build resilience into our transport provision and ensure that any incident that may impact upon the environment has robust plans to respond to. BC also ensures that council services are resilient to incidents related to climate change, including flooding and extreme heat.
- Support health and wellbeing services, including substance misuse services, to operate despite incidents and events. It also ensures that support is in place to continue core activities during any communicable disease incidents, learning the lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## 5. Governance

The council is committed to ensuring that there are appropriate arrangements for the management, governance and reporting of its BC activities and that the overall objectives for business continuity management are closely aligned with BC best practices, as well as to the priorities and goals of the council. The council aims to embed BC within its day-to-day management processes and achieve a capability that meets its changing needs, which is appropriate to the size, nature and complexity of the organisation and is in proportion to its approach to risk management.

Overall governance responsibility and accountability for BC is held by the Chief Officer Group (COG). Quarterly reports regarding BC will be taken to COG for their oversight, providing accountability for overall adherence to the council's legislative and regulatory requirements. See Corporate Programme Governance Chart in Appendices for full structural reporting details.

BC activities within individual service areas will be undertaken by nominated BC leads and supported by the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity (EP/BC) team. The EP/BC team will provide regular check in meetings with service BC leads, either by directorate or individual service areas, and will also provide a single collated area for best practice information, storage of plans and frequently asked questions.

BC within WCC is subject to internal audit, at least every three years and more regularly if required. Results of these audits will be presented to COG. The EP/BC team is committed to fully support all internal and external audits as required.

## 6. Planning Assumptions

Planning Assumptions are the core foundation to a BCP. They are the considerations that are assumed to be true in the case of a disruption and provide a basis for service level BCPs.

Planning Assumption	Explanation
<b>A loss of staff members or critical staff member</b>	A loss of staff, or critical staff (single points of failure). Caused by adverse weather; industrial action; pandemic or other communicable disease e.g. COVID-19, making service delivery difficult.
<b>A surge in demand for service significantly outpacing normal capacity and capability</b>	An unexpected increase in demand for a particular service, beyond that which is already planned for, that would result in capacity and capability to provide a safe service being reduced
<b>A loss of utilities or infrastructure</b>	An interruption to a utility making a building unusable and unable to continue operating from that location.
<b>A loss of ICT infrastructure</b>	A loss of applications critical to service delivery. This includes IT, Web based applications, and externally
<b>A loss or disruption to a critical resource that is required for service</b>	A critical resource/ factor (not listed above) that could be disrupted. This could include fuel supplies for example.

Period of Threat	Considerations
<b>0 - 1 Day</b>	Business will continue with limited disruption
<b>1 - 2 Days</b>	Can the service continue to deliver business for more than one day and night? Will disruptions have significant impact on service delivery?
<b>Up to 5 Days</b>	Can all critical service functions continue? If so in what capacity? Can noncritical functions be paused during disruption? WCC Communications and Media team to report on availability of the service
<b>5 – 30 days</b>	Potential disruption for up to a month. Do you need to request additional support? Can staff be redeployed?
<b>More than 30 days</b>	Is the threat likely to exist for a long time? Will short-term business continuity arrangements be insufficient? Consider a corporate business continuity response or emergency response? Need to consider dependencies, communications and escalation. See section 1.6 for escalation instructions.

## 7. Critical Services

Critical Services, otherwise known as critical functions, are defined as ‘The critical operational and/or business support functions that could not be interrupted or unavailable for more than a mandated or predetermined timeframe without significantly jeopardizing the organisation.’

COG attendees have identified Service areas within Directorates across the council that are deemed crucial to the organisations ability to provide effective services to the council and communities it serves. These have been validated by the EP/BC team and are the basis for BC planning across the organisation.

Each service/team is required to complete a critical services template, based upon the BC planning assumptions above, to identify their key areas of risk. These are then utilised to create service and directorate BCPs. The key critical services across the organisation form the basis of the Corporate BCP.

### 7.1 Criteria for defining Critical Service Functions

The following are the current definition of critical service function:

A service is automatically defined as being critical if the service:

1. Loss would cause significant impact to protection of the most vulnerable in our communities
2. Underpins the capability to respond to emergency incidents and to take effective action to reduce, control or mitigate the effects of an emergency

A service may be considered critical if the service:

3. Loss of the service would cause significant threat to the delivery of legally mandated or other critical council services
4. Loss would cause significant financial implications to the organisation, loss of revenue or payment of compensation
5. Loss would lead to significant damage to the reputation of the organisation
6. Loss would cause significant impact on the health and wellbeing of residents, and council staff

## 8. Communication

As part of regular activity, the EP/BC team is engaged with the corporate communications team. This includes assisting in with corporate BC awareness activities and learning from events with an impact on all staff.

The communications team have also supported the EP/BC team in the creation of a BC newsletter. This newsletter will be issued regularly to all BC leads with key updates related to their role, updates to corporate BC activity, and ‘calls to action’ on specific areas of BC.

During a BC incident, the communications team will equally have a vital role in supporting the internal response, by communicating to staff and the public on the extent of the incident and

mitigations in place. Where communications are limited by a lack of IT, a procedure has been authorised by SLT, which will allow the use of SIGNAL as an alternative means.

## 9. Exercising

An exercise or simulation that involves a disruptive challenge and considers its impact on an organisation and tests or exercise's part or all its BCM arrangements.

BCM arrangements cannot be considered effective until they are exercised and have been proved to be workable, especially since false confidence may be placed in the integrity of a written plan.

To meet this statutory requirement the council will endeavour to undertake:

- One WCC-wide exercise every two years, that will test the organisation's ability to respond to an incident or event that will impact multiple services.
- One exercise every year run within individual services, to identify and test responses to localised incidents/events that impact the specific service.
- At least one of the Planning assumptions must be tested annually within Directorate level, through exercising. The exercises must be tested against the pre identified planning assumptions at (insert paragraph above) unless there is an operational pressure that requires testing.

This process tests the completeness of the plans and enables an assessment of:

- Staff preparedness and awareness
- Awareness, responsiveness, and effectiveness of external parties
- Appropriate allocation of staff and key resources
- Plan effectiveness

On conducting an exercise, communication too all those that are participating or affected. It is essential all disruption within the organisation is kept to a minimum whilst the exercise is conducted.

A debrief must be held following an exercise and lessons learnt must be documented and recorded, with agreed actions. These agreed actions include amendments into the Service Area plan.

## 10. Review

BCPs must be reviewed annually after completion of an exercise, upon response to a BC event within the council, or if there is a BC event outside of the organisation with key learning for the council.

Service level plans should be agreed by their service/directorate management team and be

submitted to the EP/BC team for secure electronic storage. The Corporate BCP will be submitted to COG for sign off, following a consultation process internally.

Reviews of the policy will occur every three years as a minimum, with sign off agreed by Chief Officer Group. Copies of the corporate policy will be made available online on the EP/BC pages on the council website, alongside redacted copies of the corporate BCP.

## Useful Links

Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) 2004	<a href="#">Civil Contingencies Act 2004</a>
Chapter 6 Business Continuity Management	<a href="#">Chapter-6-Business-Continuity-Management_amends_04042012.pdf</a>
National Risk Register 2025	<a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67b5f85732b2aab18314bbe4/National_Risk_Register_2025.pdf">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67b5f85732b2aab18314bbe4/National_Risk_Register_2025.pdf</a>
National Resilience Standards	<a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f4e1107e90e071c6c7d940c/NRS_for_LRFs_V3.0_Aug2020.pdf">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f4e1107e90e071c6c7d940c/NRS_for_LRFs_V3.0_Aug2020.pdf</a>
Expectations and Indicators of Good Practice Set for Category 1 and 2 Responders	<a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7c7728e5274a559005a0de/Expectation_and_Indicators_of_Good_Practice_Set_for_category_1_2_Responders.pdf">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7c7728e5274a559005a0de/Expectation_and_Indicators_of_Good_Practice_Set_for_category_1_2_Responders.pdf</a>

## Appendices