

Key Decision	No
Listed on Forward Plan	Yes
Within Policy	Yes
Policy Document	

BUSINESS CONTINUITY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

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1. Purpose

- 1.1. To provide an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the MKC's preparedness and response in the light of the lessons learnt from the snow difficulties and the preparedness in respect of swine and seasonal flu.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That the report be noted.

3. Issues and Choices**3.1. The weather incident**

3.1.1. It is essential that the issue be reviewed not only with the benefit of hindsight but also in the light of information known at the time. This incident was a "creeping crisis" – one which had no sudden or clear beginning and recognition of incident and thus effective invocation of plans is variable. Several key facts at that time are necessary to establish the context. (These facts provided by Emergency Planning and Winter Maintenance)

- Prior to the fall of snow on 1 February, the ground was cold and wet, and water-table high, giving little capacity for further easy absorption.
- The Met Office issued a series of Early Warnings and Flash Warnings throughout the period, starting on Sunday 1 February 2009. Early Warnings are issued up to 5 days in advance and updated daily thereafter. Flash Warnings are issued when severe weather is expected within the next 2 hours and applies to county level areas

- The initial Flash Warning predicted possible snowfall of 5 - 10cm with up to 15cm in places. Subsequent warnings predicted further snow and/or widespread icy roads as temperatures dropped below freezing. Temperatures on Civic Offices roof fell below 0°C every day until Monday 9th February, reaching as low as -5°C. Temperatures outside the central area were lower throughout the incident.
- The accumulated snowfall was approximately 30 cm (1 foot), over a number of days, often on icy patches of compacted snow or on wet, salted roads. Anecdotal reports of the worst conditions in Milton Keynes area for over 40 years suggest that while most of southern England was affected during the week, the Milton Keynes area was amongst the worst hit. The Highways Agency used in one week 7.5 times the normal annual tonnage of salt on the national motorways
- There was a significant increase in the risk of flooding. However there is little if any local knowledge of the effects of snow-melt. The first Flood Watch alert for this area was issued by the Environment Agency on Monday 9 February for the River Great Ouse and upgraded to Flood Warning for various river sections from Tuesday 10 February. Flood Warnings normally remain in force for 1 - 3 days, but in this instance Flood Warnings remained for 9 days.
- Hazardous road driving conditions contributed to a period of major disruption.
- There had been a steady demand on national reserves of salt from early December 08 however information about supply capacity had not been made available to MKC.

3.1.2.A “Response Team” was convened by the CEO in accordance with the Council’s Emergency Plan. However there was a lack of clarity of levels of responsibility and across internal and external responses.

3.1.3.As this was a “creeping incident” it had been difficult to identify a clear start to the incident and no incident was declared or log commenced at that time.

3.1.4.Some front-line staff were co-opted to meetings as required – however, and importantly, this demand sometimes diverted them from delivering their front-line response.

3.1.5.An analysis of the impacts and responses is set out in detail at Annex A. The three main conclusions that were reached by the analysis were:

- o Given the unprecedented circumstances, services coped well
- o The above was due to a combination of hard work and effort by many staff and any plans were developed on an ad-hoc basis. Whilst this enable services to be carried out this is not the correct method and preplanning is essential
- o Without publicising the events and how the Council were dealing with them, the public were unaware of how the Council were coping, the public perception was therefore excessively influenced by the media. The development of the Council Business Continuity Plan uses communication and publicity as one of its key themes.

3.1.6. Recommendations:

- 3.1.7. That a new response structure be adopted ANNEX B which distinguishes between the work that is being done to support the external incident and work needed to support the internal incident. (This structure is now being followed by the Pandemic Flu Co-ordination Group see below and in Operational BC Plans and Directorate BC Support Teams.)
- 3.1.8. There is a difference between a coping response which is often ad-hoc, is rarely sustainable and sometimes creates secondary incidents and a pre-planned and rehearsed business continuity response. Directorates should give further commitment to business continuity planning and rehearsal.

3.2. **A(H1N1) “Swine Flu” Pandemic**

- 3.2.1. Central Government’s original approach was one of containment, however by June it was no longer practical and with the declaration by the World Health Organisation that this was now a global pandemic, they moved into the “treatment” phase.
- 3.2.2. Central Government was originally collecting and supplying local data on the number of cases. This information has dried up as cases are being “self-diagnosed” or via the NHS helpline
- 3.2.3. Although the number of recorded cases is falling, both nationally and locally, a second wave of cases is predicted to occur sometime in the autumn. This second wave is likely to co-inside with cases of seasonal flu.
- 3.2.4. The Council has formed its Pandemic Co-ordination Group (in accordance with the new Response Structure) which has met since the end of July. This has been assessing the relevant national and local guidance, liaising with the PCT etc and assessing the Council’s preparedness.
- 3.2.5. The Internal BC Incident Log was opened at the end of April. This records incidents and actions associated with managing the fear of pandemic, rather than the health incident.
- 3.2.6. As far back as early 2007, Schools were being prepared for the possibility of a flu pandemic. In February 2007, 96 head teachers took part in an exercise and awareness raising day. Following this exercise the Schools and Setting Business Continuity Support Team (SSBCST) was established. This group is trained and rehearsed to deal with these events and has allowed the Council to develop plans well in advance of recent events.
- 3.2.7. It has been agreed that it will be Council Policy to keep Schools open as long as it is safe and practicable to do so. Whilst it could be argued that this will spread the virus more rapidly, discussion with all those concerned and advice from the Government Agencies have agreed this is the best course of action. Head teachers have been given delegated powers to close their Schools when they feel that there are health and safety issues if the School is kept open.
- 3.2.8. The Exercise Oink! successfully engaged 114 schools and settings in exercising their response plans and learning to use the new status reporting system and also how to get help and advice from the SSBCST.

3.2.9. All other Council services have been engaged in the business continuity process and have been designated to one of four tiers (Essential, Tier One, Tier Two and Non-Essential). Progress for each level is being monitored and a up to date schedule will be distributed at the Audit Committee Meeting (2 September)

3.2.10. The weekly PCG meeting is monitoring BC preparedness status, ensuring BC progress gaps are closed, providing corporate guidance and co-ordinating the supply of resources required to assist with the external emergency response.

4. Implications

4.1. Resources & Risk

4.1.1. If the recommendations in this report are adopted there is a high probability and low impact that services will fail and a high probability and high impact that services will be prepared to deliver services as normal during a time of unusual circumstances

	Capital
	IT

	Revenue
	Medium Term Plan

	Accommodation
	Asset Management

4.2. Legal

None

4.3. Other Implications

4.3.1. None

	Equalities / Diversity
	E-Government

	Sustainability
	Stakeholders

	Human Rights
	Crime & Disorder

Background Papers : None