

**Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority**

**Item 13**

**8<sup>th</sup> December 2010**

**Business Continuity Management**

**Report by the Chief Officer**

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## **1 Summary**

- 1.1 During 2010 the Audit Commission (AC) were tasked by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) to undertake a survey of all fire and rescue authorities in England to ascertain how authorities deal with periods of disruption to normal business.
- 1.2 The Service responded to the Business Continuity Management (BCM) Survey in July 2010 culminating with the AC reporting to CLG in September 2010.
- 1.3 The survey concentrated on mass staff absence and the findings by the AC reported that all fire and rescue services have satisfactory business continuity plans in place. However, it was apparent that some services were better than others at BCM and that wider learning and further development could also be achieved across the sector.
- 1.4 HFRS have suitable and sufficient BCM arrangements in place to deal with disruptions to 'business as normal' including during periods of mass absence of staff and for ensuring that it delivers on its' statutory duties and core business functions. Our BCM arrangements have been rigorously tested through simulations and real life incidents recently such as adverse weather (snow), swine flu pandemic and the Shirley Towers incident.

## **2 Recommendation**

- 2.1 That the Authority note the content of the report and acknowledge the suitability and sufficiency of the Service's Business Continuity Management planning arrangements.

## **3 Introduction and background**

- 3.1 During 2010 the CLG commissioned the Audit Commission to conduct a detailed survey of BCM for fire and rescue authorities in England.
- 3.2 The survey concentrated on disruption to normal business processes caused by

mass staff absences due to industrial action, flu pandemic and adverse weather

- 3.3 HFRS duly completed a robust assessment of our BCM arrangements against the criteria within the survey and responded accordingly. HFRS Directors agreed the survey response content prior to electronic submission.
- 3.4 HFRS are well represented on the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) set up (particularly concerning business continuity) and we have a fully qualified business continuity auditor/peer assessor within our Contingency Planning department. This provides us with a high degree of organisational resilience.

#### **4 Audit Commission Findings (taken from the Audit Commission report)**

- 4.1 The Audit Commission did not explore the likelihood of disruptions to fire and rescue services.
- 4.2 Fire and rescue services have a strong track record of dealing with large-scale emergencies and plan well for short-term loss of staff, but longer disruptions may pose a greater risk to public safety.
- 4.3 Fire and rescue services are becoming more resilient. Since the inclusion of contingency planning for emergencies in the National Framework Document in 2005, significant progress is being made improving national resilience. This is important because the government makes it clear that services cannot rely on military support in the event of disruption.
- 4.4 All fire and rescue services have satisfactory business continuity plans in place. Some services are good at business continuity management and can ensure their services can continue when disrupted. Those services having more experience with disruption are learning a lot and are better prepared.
- 4.5 Services cannot cope with every situation indefinitely. If disruptions are sudden, involve high numbers of staff, last a long time and are widespread, there is a higher chance the risk to public safety will increase.
- 4.6 Some fire and rescue services could further improve business continuity arrangements. Not all fire and rescue services:
- Engage enough with local people to agree what is an appropriate level of service;
  - Fully consider the effects of a disruption to services on people living in vulnerable circumstances;
  - Test their plans to see if there is enough capacity and skills;
  - Do enough to make partners and staff aware of business continuity plans;
  - Make specialist equipment or specialist staff available during periods of disruption;
  - Do enough to improve the resilience of control rooms to deal with emergencies;
  - Learn from other fire and rescue services and from other organisations

outside the service.

- 4.7 HFRS has been identified in the report within a case study that identifies notable good practice around the use of new technology to good effect to inform the public (warning and informing) during emergencies.

## **5 HFRS considerations**

- 5.1 HFRS considers that it is well placed to deal with disruption caused by mass staff absence and that it can maintain its statutory duties adequately.
- 5.2 The AC report makes no mention in terms of the responsibility of central Government with regard to national resilience during periods of disruption due to mass staff absence.
- 5.3 As a learning organisation, HFRS has considered the recommendations within the report and will ensure that further improvements and efficiencies to our current arrangements are made.
- 5.4 Specific areas identified for consideration by HFRS are:
- Engaging with local people to agree what is an acceptable level of service.
  - Fully consider the effects of a disruption to services on people living in vulnerable circumstances.
  - Adoption of the principles of BS25999 for Business Continuity Management
  - Full evacuation exercise of the Service Headquarters site (planned for early 2011).
- 5.5 These areas will be considered, developed and addressed by the Service Resilience Forum and an action plan formulated.

## **6 Supporting our corporate aims and objectives**

- 6.1 Contingency planning is a duty placed upon the authority by the 2008 National Framework Document

## **7 Risk analysis**

- 7.1 None identified

## **8 Equality Impact Assessment**

- 8.1 None identified for this report. However, full Equality Impact Assessments are in place for business continuity arrangements.
- 8.2 The proposals in this report are considered compatible with the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Human Rights Act 1998, and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

## **9 Consultation**

- 9.1 Subsequent consultation between senior management and the representative bodies has taken place following submission of the survey. The representative bodies were satisfied with the approach taken by the Service and the responses made.

## **10 Conclusion**

- 10.1 HFRS are well positioned to deal with any periods of disruption caused by mass staff absence but we will regularly review our position, processes and procedures so as to ensure adequate horizon scanning, pre-planning and preparedness to optimise performance during difficult times.
- 10.2 HFRS will continue to foster positive working relationships with representative bodies to mitigate the potential of mass staff absence.

## **11 Background papers**

- 11.1 The following documents disclose the facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and has been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of the report:

Business Continuity Management – The Fire and Rescue Service – Local Government Report, September 2010, Audit Commission

Embedded document below:



Accessible from the Audit Commission website – [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/)

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