

**LANCASHIRE COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY  
PLANNING COMMITTEE**

Meeting to be held on Monday 13 July 2020

**BUSINESS CONTINUITY TESTING**

Contact for further information: ACFO Ben Norman – Director of Strategy and Planning  
Telephone: 01772 866801

**Executive Summary**

Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) is required to test Business Continuity Plans (BCP) annually. The Service test is usually scheduled towards the end of the year once all plans have been updated and reviewed.

The 2019/20 test (Exercise Raven) had been planned in detail and was programmed to be held in March 2020. It involved a simulated pandemic influenza event combined with a fuel shortage. Planning and preparation for the impending arrival of Covid-19 within Service replaced delivery of the 'test' exercise with actual instigation of business continuity plans.

Meanwhile a significant flooding event also occurred on Sunday 9 February 2020 which triggered the LFRS BCP and led to non-essential headquarters-based staff being prevented from entering the building for the subsequent 2 days.

The scale of both events is significant enough to qualify as live tests of the business continuity plans.

**Recommendation**

Members are asked:

- (i) to accept the basement flooding event in February 2020 and subsequent debrief, as the annual BCP test for the financial year 2019/20; and
- (ii) to accept the arrangements implemented in response to the Covid-19 pandemic as the annual BCP test for 2020/21.

**Background Information**

As a named Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, LFRS is required to maintain robust Business Continuity Plans (BCP). In order to achieve this, LFRS has adopted the Business Continuity Institute's Best Practice Guidelines and have a suite of plans which are audited every 2 years. The guidelines require LFRS to test plans annually. Each year, all Heads of Department are responsible for updating their plans and submitting them for collation by the Response & Emergency Planning (REP) section.

Once all of the plans have been collated, they are tested towards the end of the year by means of a rotating series of exercises. For the 2019/20 period, 'Exercise Raven' had been planned and was due to be held in March 2020. The exercise involved pandemic Influenza which in turn led to staff absence and fuel shortages. This would have tested a number of plans including:

- The Strategic BCP;
- The Tactical BCP's for Critical Incidents, Fuel, Staff Absence and Communications;
- Operational BCP's for a number of stations and Service Headquarters (SHQ) departments.

During a period of extreme weather in February 2020 (Storm Ciara) a large number of flooding events occurred in Lancashire. On Sunday 9 February ground water ingress inundated the boiler house and ICT server rooms within SHQ. This event led to the mobilisation of fire appliances to assist in protecting LFRS assets and removing the water.

During the event, the electrical supply to the main building at SHQ was also affected. A decision was made on 9 February to prevent staff coming into work at SHQ until remedial work had been completed. Instead, non-essential staff were required to work at alternative locations or at home. This effectively tested both the Staff Absence and Loss of SHQ Business Continuity Plans.

We are currently transitioning to the managed response phase (phase 2 of 4) of a National Emergency and had already enacted the Service BCP prior to the planned exercise taking place. We have also managed two significant wildfire incidents and declared a major incident whilst the pandemic BCP has been activated. It is highly unlikely given the scale of BCP activity still ongoing, that LFRS will need to undertake further testing of plans within this financial year.

### **Learning from Storm Ciara**

The BCP event was debriefed on 20 February and a number of lessons were identified including:

- The Critical Incident Plan was enacted for the Severe Warning event and operated effectively in protecting the public from harm. For the first time, a LFRS officer was placed in the Environment Agency incident room which dramatically improved incident commanders' situational awareness out on the ground. The Command Support Room was found to be particularly resilient due to its former Control Room setting and was unaffected with the one exception of the main access door which locked shut.
- Difficulties arose in understanding the causes behind the power loss in the main SHQ building. No schematic was immediately available to staff which may have assisted in this regard. This did not affect the overall impact timescales but could prove important for future events.
- Fire crews were required to pump water out of the SHQ basement as the installed pumping capability was overwhelmed. ICT placed remote cameras in the basement to assist in monitoring the situation for the remainder of the week. The pumping system has since been re-engineered to increase pumping capacity.
- The lack of power and heating led to a decision to prevent staff from coming in to SHQ on the Monday immediately after the event. Some managers found it difficult

to access staff contact details when trying to inform them to stay at home the next day. These are available to Duty Group Managers where staff have supplied them. Managers have since updated contact numbers to improve resilience of their departments. Some staff members were able to work from LFRS locations near to their home address, others were able to log in to the network and carry out normal business from home.

- All departments had previously considered what their critical activities were and these were unaffected. ICT had already built a resilient network where staff could quickly relocate. The evacuation of SHQ had been tested recently as part of a previous BCP exercise. Remote network access from home was already in place for some staff members. This would go on to prove essential during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Learning from COVID-19**

LFRS will debrief the BCP activation for Covid-19 thoroughly in conjunction with Lancashire Resilience Forum (LRF) partners which will be a significant undertaking. We expect that a number of areas of good practice will be identified and there will be opportunities for improvements to be made within the Service Business Continuity Plans. These will be identified via the internal debrief process, combined with the multi-agency debrief capability through the LRF.

### **Business Risk Implications**

The Business Continuity Institute guidance supports a minimum impact policy from BCP testing and accordingly any additional simulated events during 2020/21, given the ongoing Covid-19 situation, are deemed an unnecessary additional burden.

### **Sustainability or Environmental Impact**

None identified at this stage

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

None identified at this stage

### **HR Implications**

Removing the requirement to carry out further tests during the current financial year would reduce staff workload.

### **Financial Implications**

None identified at this stage

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985**  
**List of Background Papers**

Paper	Date	Contact
None		
Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate:		