

Lancashire Combined Fire Authority

Planning Committee

Meeting to be held on 17 November 2025

Business Continuity Planning and Testing

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Executive Summary

Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) continues to strengthen its Business Continuity Management System (BCMS) in alignment with ISO 22301:2019 and the Business Continuity Institute (BCI) Good Practice Guidelines.

Over the past year, LFRS has consolidated the progress achieved in 2023–24, embedding a mature, systematised approach to continuity planning across all levels of the Service. Key achievements include the establishment of a Business Continuity Management Group (BCMG), approval of a new Business Continuity Policy, creation of a suite of exercise scenarios and evaluation tools, and completion of multiple Business Continuity Plan (BCP) activations and exercises.

LFRS also continues to play a leading role nationally, chairing the North West contingent of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Business Continuity Group and leading on the drafting of the national Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) Business Continuity Guidance document, which is due for official NFCC adoption later this year.

The Service underwent an internal Business Continuity Audit in 2025, with feedback to date being positive and the final report pending publication, which will be presented through the Audit Committee in due course.

Importantly, the His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection referenced business continuity as an area where significant improvement has been demonstrated, recognising the Service's progress in strengthening resilience arrangements.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- (i) Note the significant progress made in strengthening LFRS's Business Continuity arrangements.
- (ii) Acknowledge the positive feedback received from HMICFRS and early findings of the internal audit.
- (iii) Endorse the continued embedding of the Business Continuity Management System (BCMS) and the forward exercise programme.

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Planning Committee on the Business Continuity Management System (BCMS) and related resilience activities undertaken since the last report to this Committee in 2024.

LFRS has continued to mature its approach to business continuity, ensuring the Service remains prepared to maintain critical activities during disruption, in line with statutory duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and sector best practice.

Progress in Business Continuity Management

Significant progress has been made since the 2024 report, delivering on all of the developments previously presented to the Committee and embedding a mature, evidence-based Business Continuity Management System (BCMS) across Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS).

A Business Continuity Management Group (BCMG), chaired by AM Tom Powell, now provides central oversight of all business continuity activity. The group includes representation from key departments and ensures alignment between operational, tactical, and strategic planning. It has approved the updated Business Continuity Policy and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), endorsed the creation of an exercise and testing suite, and initiated the development of an LFRS-specific National Power Outage Plan.

Following the introduction of standardised Business Continuity (BC) templates in 2024, all stations and departments have completed bespoke Business Impact Analyses (BIAs) and Business Continuity Plans (BCPs). This ensures consistency of structure and clarity around critical activities, dependencies, and recovery measures. An annual review cycle is now underway, supported by automated reminders and escalation via the new digital platform.

The Business Continuity SharePoint system, live since April 2025, serves as the single repository for all BC documentation. It automates plan review reminders, approvals, and version control; provides an escalation route for overdue plans; and allows plan owners and BC Reference Holders to tailor content to local needs while maintaining corporate standards. This platform has enhanced assurance, accessibility, and governance, embedding BC within day-to-day operations.

A comprehensive Exercise and Testing Suite, developed in 2024, is now routinely used to validate operational plans. In November 2024, LFRS conducted its annual service-wide tactical and strategic exercise, simulating a wide-area power loss, which successfully tested escalation, decision-making, and interdepartmental coordination. Building on this, in 2025, the Service is participating in a Tier 1 national exercise, coordinated through the Lancashire Local Resilience Forum (LRF), focused on a pandemic scenario, alongside further tactical and strategic tests before year-end. All exercises and real-world activations are logged and evaluated, with learning tracked through the Action Management System (AMS) and due to be monitored by the Operational Assurance Group (OAG). Since the last report, there has been 51 BC exercises and 42 BC incidents across the Service. Of the 42 incidents, 9 triggered a tactical plan activation which included; major incidents such as significant fires, appliance degradation due to multiple incidents ongoing at once, and North West Fire Control in fallback conditions due to partial loss of communication methods. The 33 incidents which triggered an operational plan activation included; loss of utilities on LFRS premises such as water, power and heating, station break-ins, system outages and faults on fire alarms within LFRS premises.

When a Business Continuity related issue arises and an ongoing risk is identified, this is escalated to either a department or the corporate risk register. This risk is then highlighted and can be tracked, with mitigating measures put in place to eradicate or reduce the risk.

A service-wide internal audit of Business Continuity commenced in 2025, providing positive initial feedback on governance, documentation, and exercising arrangements. The final report is pending publication and is expected to confirm continued assurance that the BCMS meets both ISO 22301:2019 and Civil Contingencies Act requirements.

At a national level, LFRS continues to lead the North West NFCC Business Continuity Group and has authored the national Fire and Rescue Service Business Continuity Guidance Document, due for formal NFCC adoption later this year. This contribution demonstrates LFRS's leadership in shaping sector-wide good practice and sharing innovation, including SharePoint automation and exercise frameworks.

Finally, during its most recent inspection, HMICFRS identified Business Continuity as an area of significant improvement, recognising the Service's strengthened policies, processes, and governance. HMICFRS commented that "the service has good business continuity arrangements in place for areas in which it considers threats and risks to be high. The service regularly reviews and tests these threats and risks so that staff know the arrangements and their associated responsibilities. The service has introduced a new business continuity lead role and is aligned with ISO 22301, the international standard for business continuity. It has robust business continuity plans in place that include cyber security. It has a static degradation plan and evidence of worst-case scenario planning, including for industrial action. It has completed business impact analyses for all stations and departments. We also saw examples of regular exercises taking place. Debriefs take place for these exercises, and lessons learned are collated, tracked and reported to the organisational assurance group." This acknowledgement reflects LFRS's sustained commitment to resilience, assurance, and continuous learning across all levels of the organisation.

Future Developments

While the Business Continuity Management System (BCMS) is now embedded and operating effectively across the Service, continued improvement remains essential.

The focus for 2025–26 will be on consolidation, assurance, and innovation - ensuring that LFRS remains at the forefront of resilience practice within the UK Fire and Rescue sector.

1. Continuous Improvement and Assurance

- Following the forthcoming internal audit report, the recommendations will be reviewed by the Business Continuity Management Group (BCMG), with resulting actions incorporated into a new BC Improvement Plan for 2025–26.
- The annual review cycle for all BIAs and BCPs will be completed through the SharePoint automation process, ensuring plans remain current and lessons from incidents and exercises are fully integrated.

- A compliance dashboard will be explored within SharePoint to enable the BCMG and senior leadership to monitor review status, overdue plans, and exercise completion rates in real time.

2. Lessons and Learning Integration

- The Service will strengthen its approach to organisational learning by linking Business Continuity debriefs directly into the Operational Assurance Group (OAG) process. This will ensure BC learning is captured, tracked, and closed out alongside operational assurance findings.
- The BCMG will review all significant activations and exercises collectively to identify cross-cutting trends and opportunities for service-wide learning.

3. External Validation and Peer Review

- LFRS will seek to pilot a peer review framework within the North West NFCC Business Continuity Group, enabling FRSs to assess each other's BCMS against a consistent benchmark.
- This will provide external assurance, promote shared learning, and support alignment with ISO 22301 and the NFCC Fire Standards.

4. National and Regional Collaboration

- LFRS will continue to lead the North West NFCC BC Group and contribute to national working groups following the adoption of the new FRS Business Continuity Guidance Document.
- The Service will also participate in multi-agency exercising, particularly with the Local Resilience Forum (LRF), focusing on power, telecommunications, and supply chain disruption.

5. Scenario Development and Resilience Forecasting

- The Exercise Suite will be refreshed to incorporate emerging risks identified through the National Risk Register, including cyber threats, fuel supply disruption, and prolonged system outages.
- The BCMG will develop a Resilience Forecasting Register - a structured process for scanning future vulnerabilities and dependencies (technological, environmental, and social) to inform next year's BC planning cycle.

6. People, Training and Awareness

- Building on the foundation of staff training and the mandatory e-learning module, targeted BC awareness sessions will be developed for middle and senior managers, focusing on leadership during disruption, decision-making under pressure, and embedding BC thinking within projects and change programmes.
- The Service will mark Business Continuity Awareness Week 2026 with internal communications and exercises to further normalise BC practices within the organisational culture.

Conclusion

LFRS has made measurable progress in embedding business continuity as part of core governance and operational culture. The new BC Policy, centralised BCMS platform, and structured BCMG oversight framework have enhanced service-wide resilience. While LFRS has achieved a strong level of business continuity maturity, the next 12 months will focus on assurance, benchmarking, and foresight. This proactive approach will ensure the Service continues to evolve its resilience arrangements in line with emerging risks, sector standards, and national expectations.

Business Risk Implications

A robust Business Continuity Management System (BCMS) remains essential for LFRS to meet its statutory duties and sustain critical operations during disruption. The system provides assurance through completed BIAs and BCPs, regular exercising, and automated monitoring via SharePoint. The forthcoming internal audit and introduction of a Resilience Forecasting Register will further strengthen oversight by identifying emerging vulnerabilities early and integrating them into the corporate risk process.

Sustainability or Environmental Impact

Business continuity arrangements indirectly support environmental resilience by enabling the Service to maintain operations during severe weather or climate-related events. No direct environmental impact arises from the activities in this report, but environmental risks such as flooding and power instability will continue to be monitored through the Resilience Forecasting Register.

Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no direct equality or diversity implications. The updated BC Policy and SOPs ensure that continuity planning considers workforce needs, accessibility, and support for vulnerable groups, promoting fairness and inclusivity in how resilience is managed across the Service.

HR Implications

Business continuity responsibilities are now embedded across all levels of the organisation. Station and departmental leads maintain their plans through automated SharePoint reminders, supported by the BCMG. Ongoing training and exercising continue to build awareness and reinforce a culture of shared resilience.

Financial Implications

All activity described is being delivered within existing budgets. Automation through SharePoint has improved efficiency and reduced administrative burden. Minor costs associated with exercising or national participation will be absorbed within Departmental allocations.

Legal implications

The BCMS ensures compliance with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the Fire and Rescue National Framework, and ISO 22301:2019. Updated policies, SOPs, and audit processes provide assurance that LFRS continues to meet its Category 1 Responder duties for business continuity and maintains readiness for inspection or legal scrutiny.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of background papers

Paper:

Date:

Contact:

Reason for inclusion in Part 2 if appropriate: