

**Chichester District Council**

**CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE**

**30 June 2011**

**Business Continuity Strategy – Telecoms Disaster Recovery**

**1. Contacts**

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**2. Recommendation**

- 2.1. That officers be instructed to work in partnership with neighbouring authorities to finalise a mutual aid plan that may be invoked in the event of an incident resulting in the loss of telecoms, accommodation and/or resources.**
- 2.2. That Cabinet be recommended to approve that £13,550 of the original £20,452 revenue approved for telecoms disaster recovery by Executive Board on 13 April 2010 be repurposed to increase online services in recognition of the website's role as a key communication tool in a disaster recovery situation.**
- 2.3. That the revenue balance of £6,902 be returned to reserves.**
- 2.4. That officers review the Business Continuity Management Strategy to ensure that telecoms recovery is reflected in accordance with recommendation 2.1.**

**3. Background**

- 3.1 The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 places a duty on the authority to maintain plans to ensure that it can continue to exercise its functions in the event of an emergency so far as reasonably practicable. A Business Continuity Management Strategy (BCMS) provides the framework to be implemented by the Council in order to mobilise its response to prevent or mitigate the severity of potential disruptions. Consequently, at their meeting on 13 April 2010 Executive Board recommended to Council the adoption of a Business Continuity Management Strategy for the authority.
- 3.3 Part of this Strategy recommended improved resilience for the recovery of telecoms in the event that the Council's main switch were damaged to the extent

of being inoperable. The solution approved provided for equipment being sited within the BT exchange to re-route calls to the Council's main number and direct dial numbers to alternative sites and mobile phones in accordance with a pre-determined plan.

- 3.4 Capital provision of £3,000 was approved and £20,452 revenue commitment was built into base budget to fund this solution. One supplier exclusively manufactured the identified solution and, as such, an exception to tender was authorised in July 2010. Since that time, the Council has been in extended contractual negotiations but it has not been possible to reach agreement to the Council's satisfaction. During this period of time, the Council has also undertaken a process of prioritising service delivery to ensure resources are focussed on those statutory and essential services in the light of funding restrictions.
- 3.5 At their meeting on 25 May 2011, the Council's Corporate Management Team considered five options as a way forward. These options are outlined in the Appendix. Options D (seek partnership arrangement with neighbouring authority) and E (repurpose funding to build resilience in other channels) were the preferred combination in the light of the current economic climate, coupled with the low likelihood of a major event. Should Members approve these options, the Council's Business Continuity Management Strategy will need to be updated to reflect this alternative approach.

#### **4. Outcomes to be achieved**

- 4.1 The proposal outlined in Option D will enable the authority to redirect high volume calls to a neighboring authority in the event of prolonged telecoms downtime. This solution will be delivered by working in partnership to provide mutual aid without incurring an annual revenue commitment to mitigate what is a low likelihood risk.
- 4.2 The ICT service has a current project addressing a number of initiatives to support the BCMS of which telecoms recovery is one element. A project evaluation report will be presented to the IT Advisory Group twelve months after the completion date of this project. This report will enable the Panel to assess the effectiveness of the solutions delivered against the stated business case.
- 4.3 The website is the Council's second highest communication channel. In the event that the Council's telecoms are unavailable, the website is a key tool, enabling customers to gain information and continue to do business with the Council. With this in mind, it is essential for the website to support as many services as possible online, part of which requires integration into back office systems. Repurposing a proportion of the revenue commitment for the original telecoms project as outlined in Option E will give additional resilience should telecoms be limited or unavailable.

#### **5. Proposal**

- 5.4 This proposal would provide a cost effective solution to telecoms recovery and support two of the Council's key communication channels in the event of a business disaster. Members should note, however, that an arrangement of this

nature would take time to implement. Exactly how much time will need to be identified and agreed during the project. Any downtime in a severe emergency will cause disruption to services.

- 5.5 The West Sussex local authorities have a commitment at Leader level to work in partnership to improve services and to gain efficiencies where possible. This initiative has grown in strength over the past twelve months and has obtained government funding for specific projects to deliver a vision of joint working, sharing of assets and procurement. To date this partnership has a number of associated projects in delivery stage, has signed up to a joint Customer Access Strategy and is in the process of approving a county-wide ICT Strategy. Each partner has identified the need to address resilience at times of disaster recovery and recognises that with limited funding, efficiencies and effective solutions can be achieved in offering mutual aid between authorities. The West Sussex IT Managers have identified this as a suitable project to be delivered in partnership, rather than individual authorities procuring specific solutions in isolation with the private sector.
- 5.6 This proposal will lead to a more joined up approach to ICT disaster recovery across the partnership, starting with telecoms and offering the opportunity to extend this mutual aid to other areas.
- 5.7 The draft countywide ICT Strategy contains a specific objective to provide resilience of systems to each partner and as such, this proposal will form the project to deliver that objective as a priority.

## **6 Alternatives that have been considered**

- 6.1 The appendix outlines the five options considered to provide telecoms resilience in accordance with the BCMS.

## **7 Resource and legal implications**

- 7.1 Resources required for this project will be staff time from the ICT service, the Emergency Planning team and the Council's Property Team. The project will support the Council's obligation to comply with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

## **8 Consultation**

- 8.1 The Emergency Planning Team were consulted on this proposal and recognise it as viable, although there would need to be a recognition that this solution will take time to implement as partners will need to identify locations and agree protocols. The existing BCMS will need to be revised to reflect this change.
- 8.2 All other borough and district councils in West Sussex were consulted on this proposal and are supportive of the principles contained herein.

## **9 Community impact and corporate risks**

- 9.1 The solution offered will maintain the Council's key communication tool in the event of a disaster enabling customers to contact the authority.
- 9.2 The risks associated with this project not delivering the desired outcome will be mitigated with the commitment from the Better Together Board and the West

Sussex IT Managers working in partnership to deliver a solution that will benefit every partner.

## **10 Background Papers**

- 10.1 Report to Executive Board - 13 April 2010 – Business Continuity Management Strategy.

## **11 Appendices**

Appendix – Options Appraisal

## Appendix

### Business Continuity Management Strategy – Option appraisal

#### Option A: Proceed with the identified supplier

The risk in continuing with the originally identified supplier is a contract that could potentially have a financial risk to the authority. Although a large proportion of this has been mitigated through contractual negotiations, some element would remain and neither party are at a point in negotiations where the terms are considered to be satisfactory. As a part of the market research into a disaster recovery solution for telecoms, this was the most appropriate solution and site references were favourable. However, BT now offers a very similar solution (set out in Option C)

#### Option B: Continue with present arrangements

The existing DR solution for telecoms is limited. In the event that the Council's switch were damaged, BT could be instructed to divert calls to the Council's main number and other dedicated lines to an alternative site. However, the Council do not have a service level agreement or contract in place to provide any form of guaranteed response time and the identified accommodation in the BCMS (Westgate Centre) does not have the infrastructure to cope with the volume of calls. However, an appropriate BT line could be installed (ISDN line as outlined in Option C at an annual revenue cost of £9,005).

#### Option C: Seek best alternative provider

BT offers their own disaster recovery solution with a 30-minute response time but charge per channel to redirect calls. There is a connection charge, plus a quarterly rental for this service. This solution could be applied to the block of 30 channels supporting the main switchboard number (table 1), plus vital direct lines supporting the depot, Careline, the emergency control room, benefits, customer services and car parks (table 2) or to all 90 channels (table 3). The BCMS identifies Westgate Centre as the primary accommodation site and as such the infrastructure at Westgate would require upgrading to cater for the volume of calls. This would require a new ISDN connection capable of handling 30 channels to be installed at Westgate. These costs are included in tables 1 and 2 and 3.

**Table 1** – 30 Channels to cover main number 785166

| BT "Commsure" service                 | Capital       | Annual Revenue |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Redirect main Council number (785166) | £2,136        | £8,550         |
| ISDN line                             | £107          | £9,005         |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>£2,243</b> | <b>£17,555</b> |

**Table 2** – 30 channels to cover main number plus vital service DDIs

| BT "Commsure" service                 | Capital | Annual Revenue |
|---------------------------------------|---------|----------------|
| Redirect main Council number (785166) | £2,136  | £8,550         |
| Redirect additional 15                | £1,069  | £4,275         |

|              |               |                |
|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| channels     |               |                |
| ISDN line    | £107          | £9,005         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>£3,312</b> | <b>£21,830</b> |

**Table 3** – All 90 channels

| <b>BT “Commsure” service</b>          | <b>Capital</b> | <b>Annual Revenue</b> |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Redirect main Council number (785166) | £2,136         | £8,550                |
| Redirect additional 60 channels       | £4,272         | £17,100               |
| ISDN line                             | £107           | £9,005                |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>£6,515</b>  | <b>£34,655</b>        |

Not all calls need be directed to Westgate. Individual direct lines could be identified within the event plan to be redirected to individuals’ mobile phones or alternative sites. The above solution would enable the infrastructure at Westgate to receive the volume of calls, but those calls would need to be dealt with by the Customer Service Centre staff that would be relocated to Westgate.

#### Option D: Seek partnership arrangement with neighbouring authority

Since the approval of the BCMS the commitment to the Better Together work streams has developed. Most authorities within the West Sussex partnership have contact centres and the infrastructure already in place to cope with high volume calls. A partner arrangement could be investigated whereby calls were redirected to a partner site that take the calls and forward on service requests to email, web or mobile phone devices. In the event of an extended period of downtime, Chichester Customer Service staff could be relocated at the partner site.

#### Option E: Repurpose Funding to Build Resilience in other Channels

Telecoms are a key communication channel, but a full disaster recovery solution is expensive for a low likelihood event. The more likely scenario is a BT line/exchange issue or Philips fault for a short period of time. Should telecoms be unavailable, customers would revert to the website and email to communicate with the authority. Both of these communication channels were identified in the BCMS and a project is currently being delivered to build resilience into these systems in the event of an incident.

At their meeting on 6 October 2010 the IT Advisory Panel approved a project initiation document (PID) for integration software for the website and mobile working. The purpose of this software is to automate online transactions, providing efficiencies for customers in processing requests and saving time and resources in the customer service centre and back office. The PID identified those service requests currently undertaken that may be automated in this way with associated savings. The integration software has a revenue commitment of £13,550 per annum and although the PID identified this cost to be offset against efficiency savings as the product is rolled out, the revenue will need to be met from base budget in 2012-13. To ensure there are funds to meet this revenue commitment immediately, rather than a staggered achievement, officers recommend a portion of the revenue identified for telecoms resilience is repurposed.