

16 July 2020

Agenda Item: 7

**JOINT REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR FINANCE, INFRASTRUCTURE AND
IMPROVEMENT AND THE SERVICE DIRECTOR PLACE AND COMMUNITIES**

APPROACH TO RESILIENCE AND LESSONS LEARNED

Purpose of the Report

1. To report to Committee positive actions being taken by the Council to review and learn from its response to the pandemic so far, along with its plans for further self-assessment through recovery and renewal.

Information

2. The COVID-19 pandemic has required the Council to amend its immediate priorities and re-direct resources to those service areas deemed most critical, seeking to mitigate the short and long-term effects of the current emergency on all key stakeholders. The Council's emergency response continues to focus around the five key work programmes approved by Policy Committee on [18 March 2020](#).
3. With all emergencies comes the opportunity to self-assess; to understand what worked well, alongside where lessons might be learned for the future. This is especially important for the current emergency, given the possibility of a second wave of the pandemic later in the year.
4. The Council began its activity on this front as soon as capacity allowed, and it continues to plan for further phases of review and learning. This is being carried out in two dimensions:
 - the Council's organisational response to maintain service delivery
 - the Council's management of the emergency through its emergency response framework and through its significant role with its Local Resilience Forum (LRF) partners.

The Council's response to maintain service delivery

5. The Council's Internal Audit Team took swift action to re-assess and redirect its planned activity when the pandemic emergency hit in March 2020. Recognising that much of its planned activity needed to be placed on hold, the Team engaged collaboratively with a wide range of operational managers in an advisory role, to assist with the adaptation of established systems and procedures to meet the immediate demands of the response.
6. Alongside this, the Team commenced planning the content and timing of how it should audit the COVID-19 activities of the Council. As soon as considered appropriate, Internal Audit

proposed a review of the Council’s response, and discussed a draft scope with the following Service Directors:

- Service Director for Finance, Infrastructure & Improvement – and the Council’s Section 151 Finance Officer
- Service Director for Place and Communities – and also the Chair of the Risk, Safety & Emergency Management Board.

Both Service Directors welcomed and encouraged the proposed audit

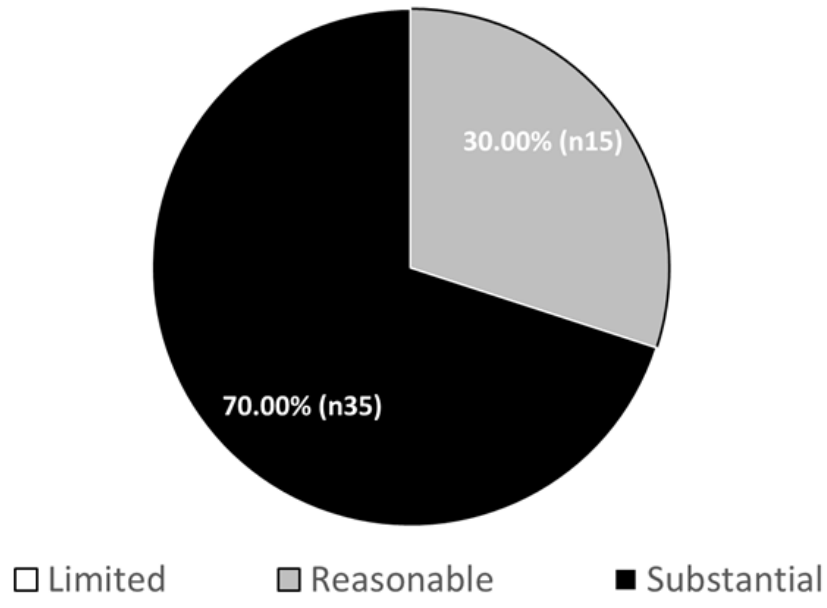
7. The scope of the audit was based around the [Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors’ specific COVID-19 guidance](#). This was adapted to meet the needs and circumstances of the Council’s response, and resulted in a focus on the following nine risks:

No.	Risk	Description
1	Business Continuity/New Ways of Working	That there may be inadequate co-ordination, management, benchmarking and documentation of policy planning for the response to COVID-19, and that leadership processes may not be established effectively.
2	Critical Services	That critical services may not be maintained during the pandemic.
3	Communication	That key messages relating to the Council’s response to COVID-19 may not be communicated effectively and in a timely manner to all staff and stakeholders throughout the duration of the pandemic.
4	Technology	That the Council’s technology infrastructure may be unable to sustain business continuity by facilitating remote working and crisis management communication and supporting business-critical ICT systems and processes.
5	Residents and Stakeholders	That suitable methods and adjustments may not be identified and applied to Council services to enable them to meet resident and stakeholder priorities and needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
6	Suppliers and Providers	That necessary actions may not be identified and pursued to maintain supply lines and provider-led services during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.
7	Workforce	That processes may not be created or adjusted as required to manage staff issues, such as attendance, sickness and support, health and safety, and re-deployment during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.
8	Finance	That sufficient funds and suitable financial controls may not be in place to mitigate the short and long-term risks posed by COVID-19 to Council operations, services and the local economy.
9	Recovery	That suitable provisions may not be in place for recovery from full lockdown measures.

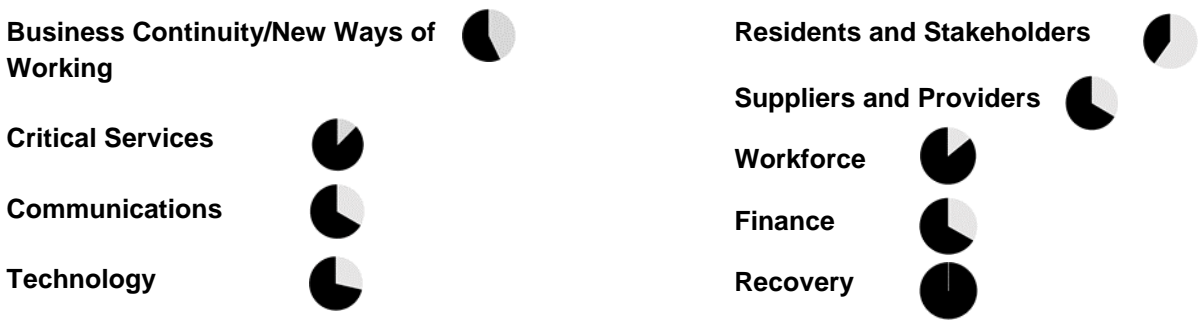
8. In terms of the period under review, the audit assessed response activities between the date of the first report to Policy Committee on 18 March 2020 and the date of the update report to Policy Committee on 13 May 2020.

- 9. Standard audit practices were applied throughout the review. However, recognising the pandemic’s restrictive effect on staff capacity, with the agreement of the Service Directors detailed above, information was sourced primarily, although not exclusively, from existing Council systems, avoiding the need to involve senior colleagues extensively. Individual managers were engaged more directly towards the close of the audit fieldwork in a more targeted way, to discuss any gaps in assurance.
- 10. The audit has progressed to its discussion stage. The full findings have been shared with the two Service Directors, and the draft report is due to be presented to the Corporate Leadership Team. Although the report is still being cleared through the established verification procedure for all audit reports, the outcomes are sufficiently clear to enable some key assurances to be shared with the Committee. Once cleared for issue, the final report will be distributed to all members of the Governance & Ethics Committee (in accordance with the Internal Audit Charter) and also with members of this Committee.
- 11. The report will present Internal Audit’s opinion that there is **substantial assurance** of the risks during the pandemic response period having been managed effectively. This is depicted in the overall assurance chart, below.

Overall Assurance Chart



12. This overall assurance will break down as follows across the nine risk areas reviewed:



13. As expected, the Internal Audit review has identified a combination of recommendations for action and lessons to take forward for the future. Internal Audit recommendations are categorised as either Priority 1 or Priority 2 and, at this discussion stage, two issues were raised as Priority 1:
- a) Keeping the Corporate Risk Register up to date – this action had commenced at the time of the audit and is now nearing completion.
 - b) Sensitivity analysis for the financial impact of COVID-19 - this concerns the lack of scenario planning provided with the budget data presented in the Policy Committee Report (13 May 2020). Finance have confirmed that this will be conducted once more regular budget monitoring information has been received.
- Both of these recommendations are accepted, as confirmed by the fact that action is already in hand to address them.
14. The final audit report will set out all of the Priority 2 recommendations and agreed actions to be taken by management. Implementation of these actions will be subject to the established follow-up procedure in force through the Governance & Ethics Committee.
15. At this stage, lessons learned are likely to be centred around: business continuity planning; the importance of ICT resilience; and compliance with the general pandemic and specific COVID-19 response plans.
16. Further audit reviews will be scoped and carried out as the Council moves into recovery and renewal.

Learning the lessons from the response

17. In addition to and building on the findings of the internal audit, the Council will undertake a lessons learned exercise on its management of the emergency through its emergency response framework and through its significant role with its Local Resilience Forum (LRF) partners.
18. The opportunity to identify and implement immediate lessons arising during emergencies is provided through the response coordination meetings detailed in paragraphs 26 and 27 of this report. Thereafter, it is standard practice that lessons arising from the response will be captured through a process of debriefing. This begins with individuals and teams, in all organisations, and culminates in a multi-agency debrief, through the Local Resilience Forum (LRF). This provides a report and Action Plan for changes required to improve the response to future emergencies. As appropriate, these may also feed into regional or national debriefing events.
19. The County Council's Major Emergency Plan (Version 5.2, August 2019) provides guidance on the process to follow for debriefing. Normally this involves a series of team or service area events from which key points are fed into discussions within the Risk, Safety and Emergency Management Group (RSEMG) for each department. This feeds into a County Council debriefing meeting organised by the emergency planning team. Outcomes from this are reported to the corporate 'Risk, Safety and Emergency Management Board' (RSEMB) who ensure that the actions that emerge are implemented.
20. Current COVID-19 restrictions do not permit the normal in-person meetings and discussions, and so on this occasion these will be replicated by use of surveys and teleconference meetings. These will provide equivalent opportunities for those involved in the response to

discuss openly the positive and negative aspects of the response, and record lessons which need to be fed into the process of planning for future incidents.

21. It is intended that this process will begin during July with the distribution of survey questions, possibly using a software solution. Feedback from this will be tabled for discussion at departmental RSEMG meetings and a corporate telephone conference debriefing meeting will be arranged for late August. Outcomes will be reported to the RSEMB in the form of a narrative report with accompanying draft Action Plan. These will then be reported to a future meeting of the COVID-19 Resilience, Recovery and Renewal Committee.
22. At the same time, County Council officers involved in the multi-agency COVID-19 response structure will have the opportunity to contribute to a police-led, Nottinghamshire-wide debriefing process established through the LRF

Resilience

23. The County Council's adherence to the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act (2004) provides the basis for resilience to major emergencies and business continuity incidents. Under the Act, the County Council has statutory duties in respect of:
 - Risk Assessment (emergencies in the community)
 - Emergency planning
 - Warning and informing the public
 - Co-operating with partner agencies
 - Sharing information with partner agencies
 - Business continuity
 - Business continuity promotion
24. The County Council's Major Emergency Plan provides a strategic framework for the planning, preparation and response to major emergencies occurring in Nottinghamshire. It is developed and maintained by the emergency planning team, and approved by the Risk, Safety and Emergency Management Board. Its aim is to ensure that the County Council is able to make a well co-ordinated response to major emergencies affecting Nottinghamshire.
25. Similarly, the County Council's Corporate Business Continuity Plan (Version 4.1, December 2017), provides a strategic framework for the planning, preparation and response to internal business continuity incidents. These might involve the loss of staff, buildings, or information technology for example.
26. Work to plan and prepare for emergencies and business continuity incidents is coordinated by the emergency planning team under the direction of the Risk, Safety and Emergency Management Board (RSEMB), with oversight by the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT).
27. The prime role of the RSEMB is to ensure the County Council's overall resilience to disruptive challenges; providing leadership and overarching co-ordination of the County Council's corporate risk management, emergency planning and business continuity. Each department carries out its own emergency planning, business continuity and risk management through a departmental Risk, Safety and Emergency Management Group (RSEMG), which feeds information up to the RSEMB.

28. The emergency planning team co-ordinates operational emergency planning and business continuity and provides a 24-hour duty officer who is the first point of contact for the emergency services. The team facilitates the maintenance of specific corporate emergency plans such as those for Pandemic Influenza, Floods Response and Fuel Emergencies, for example. Early in the COVID-19 emergency, the team adapted the existing Pandemic Influenza plan to produce a specific COVID-19 pandemic plan.
29. The emergency planning team are responsible for leading the response to minor emergencies, calling out relevant departments, personnel and resources as appropriate. If the situation escalates and becomes a major emergency, the Risk, Safety and Emergency Management Board (RSEMB) is activated to co-ordinate the County Council's overall response.

Other Options Considered

30. None, as this is a first report setting out information for the new Committee the Council's approach to building resilience and learning lessons from the pandemic response period.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

31. To provide Committee with the opportunity to engage with, and influence, the manner in which the Council should build resilience and learn lessons from the emergency response to the pandemic.

Statutory and Policy Implications

32. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

The emergency response raised by the Council, both as an organisation in its own right and through its extensive partnership working under the LRF, has impacts and implications in most, if not all, of these respects. The nature of these impacts are too many and varied to be detailed here, but all should be specified through the more detailed and targeted reports the Committee is likely to receive as its agenda develops over the coming months.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1) The Committee agrees to receive a further report on the outcome of the emergency response debriefing, and determines whether it wishes to see any further actions taken as a result of this report.

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Constitutional Comments (HD 06/07/2020)

33. The report recommendation falls within the Committee terms of reference.

Financial Comments (RWK 06/07/2020)

34. There are no specific financial implications arising directly from the report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All