

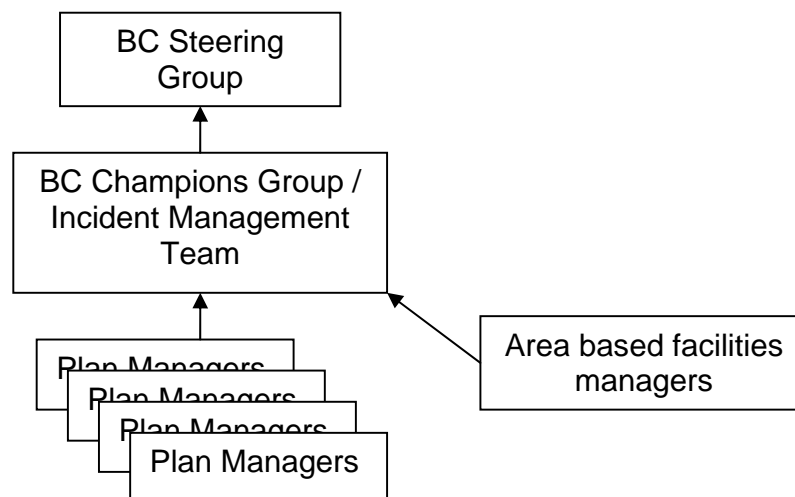
Essex County Council's Beacon Status and its Business Continuity Duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004

Arthur Rabjohn (MBCI) of Steelhenge Consulting interviewed Richard Verrinder (Business Continuity Manager) and Paul Walker (Emergency Planning Officer responsible for BC promotion) from Essex County Council's Emergency Planning Unit about the business continuity components of its Beacon Status award for Civil Contingencies for Emergency Planning.

For those unaware of the detail of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (CCA04) there are a number of duties placed upon Category One Responders which in a local authority's case include business continuity and the promotion of business continuity to both business and the voluntary sector. In achieving Beacon Status Essex CC had to demonstrate the highest standards of application and compliance to these duties. There are therefore a number of lessons that can be identified to assist other emergency managers in addressing the business continuity aspects of their programmes. This interview is intended to highlight those lessons so that they can be shared and turned into lessons learned. In our last issue we looked at establishing the Business Continuity process within Essex County Council, this part will look at its application.

AR: Good morning Richard and Paul, first congratulations on achieving this notable success of Beacon Status for Essex County Council. Within your plan who are the key players and what interdependencies were identified in the process of developing it?

RV: As we've discussed previously the key to our BC organisation is the governance structure:



Of these three groups it is the BC Champions who are key both in the planning phase and also the response phase. They have a responsibility for business continuity within their service and in particular to ensure that plan managers are able to deliver relevant and useful plans and that contact details are always kept up to date. During an incident we use a variety of means of contacting Champions – SMS message, email and direct phone contact. As with most organisations the interdependences are not obvious until some detailed analysis work is completed. Many of our technical dependencies have now been highlighted and we are working through a programme to reduce the risk for these but the associated costs of these changes are proving significant.

Each of the BC champions and Plan managers have deputies and we keep a database of their contact details to ensure we can always get in touch with someone within each service group.

AR: Who sits on your BC Steering Group?

The group consists of senior managers taken from all of the front line and support services. The group is chaired by the Corporate Resources director who is accountable for all business continuity work.

AR: Richard how regularly do you meet with your champions?

The champions group meet on a monthly basis to discuss areas of common interest and to share information of organisational changes with each other.

AR: Have your plans been exercised and were there any lessons identified?

As you know Arthur, unless you exercise the plans you will never find where the holes in them are. However, since we provide so many different services we have so far concentrated on the key ones which have direct public facing elements. We have an ongoing programme for exercising which will keep us busy!

We have run a series of call cascade tests to make sure we can contact all of the key players during an incident and to ensure that all of the people who are named in plans know what they are expected to do. We have also run several relocation exercises so that we can find out what the issues are related to providing service continuity for our Contact Centre and Social Care services. Individual service areas have also run their own table top exercises which have covered loss of staff and a variety of technical failures.

The lessons that have been identified through these exercises have been fairly obvious and will not be a surprise to anyone. The plans themselves as well as the exercise notes must be clearly communicated to all of those who are

involved. In a large organization there are many different groups who need to understand what they are expected to do. This includes the obvious support ones such as Facilities Management, Human Resources and IT, but there are also many other groups of staff who are expected to be part of a phone cascade process that need briefing on the wider aspects as well as their own particular responsibilities. In particular, if you use any sort of manual call cascade process then make sure you keep it simple. The fewer the links in a chain then the less likely it is to break.

One surprising lesson that was identified during an Emergency Planning team relocation is that the EP team takes responding in an emergency for granted but is used to working from its normal Emergency Response Centre to do so. By moving the team to respond to an incident from a different base then issues around the currency of available information and the level of detail that is needed in the relocation plan were identified. So, although there was flexibility from the staff to respond, if they do not have access to the right information then the response is hampered while it is retrieved.

The last point to note is probably the most obvious - follow the plan or make sure that everyone involved knows why you are deviating from it. Keep a comprehensive record of the decisions that you take and make sure people provide their logs so that your post exercise report can be compiled comprehensively – otherwise lessons identified will be lost and the effort of running the exercise wasted.

AR: Richard and Paul, thank you for sharing with me how you are successfully meeting the duties of the CCA04 with regards to Business Continuity and set a benchmark for others to strive for. Congratulations on achieving Beacon Status for Essex County Council.

In Part III of this interview Arthur discusses with Paul and Richard about Promoting BC.

<http://www.steelhenge.com>