

Business continuity planning Coronavirus/COVID-19



The continued increase of UK residents developing COVID-19 is a high concern, and will present a challenge if the spread of the virus expands as it has in other locations. The evidence so far justifies contingency planning.

Medical professionals have plenty of unanswered questions, but some statements are widely held within the profession:

- COVID-19 symptoms resemble common colds and flu, including coughing and fever. By the time a quarantine has been put into effect, some infected people have already left the quarantine area. So expect the disease to spread.
- A vaccine will take at least a year to develop, test and distribute—and that's the best possible case.
- A treatment to mitigate harm may come soon, but there are no guarantees that one will be found.
- The disease seems to be most deadly to the elderly and those with other medical problems.

The WHO have reported that in the Hubei Province, 65,596 confirmed cases have been recorded in a population of 59 million people, producing an incidence of just over one in 1000 people. So far, 81% of the cases have been mild.

The most likely direct business problem is several workers fall ill around the same time. Because the disease spreads best when people are close, such as within 6 feet of one another, cases are likely to cluster among different workgroups.

What to consider in business continuity planning

Organisations are strongly encouraged to have a business continuity plan in place at all times, and to regularly review this (at least annually) to ensure it accurately addresses your organisations service, staff and volunteers.

Contingency planning should be broad enough to help you manage a range of unexpected or urgent situations, ranging from:

- Health related incidents – such as Coronavirus or other medical condition that could affect significant numbers of either your service users or the general public
- Civil emergencies – fires, floods, gas leaks, WW2 unexploded incendiary devices
- Other unexpected incidents that have an impact on the day to day operation of your business, that may last beyond 24 hours, e.g. cyber-attacks or acts of terrorism

Your business continuity plan should consider how any incident will impact your business – your services, clients, staff and volunteers, premises, communications, infrastructure – and what mitigating actions your organisation can take to address these.

Plan for the worst – hope for the best.

The impact on your staff and volunteers

Consider your staff and volunteers and how many of these:

1. Are parents to school age children
 - If a child is requested to be isolated (or if schools close as a precautionary measure) how many staff would be able to make child care arrangements and how many may need to take time off work? Note – if a child is thought to possibly have COVID-19, it is possible that at least one parent/carer will also need to self isolate
2. Have direct caring responsibilities for vulnerable adult dependents.
3. Have underlying health conditions which may make them more at risk of COVID-19, particularly if they have respiratory health conditions or a compromised immune system.
4. Can staff and volunteers be redeployed to ensure your most critical services can be preserved or maintained?
5. Can staff and/or volunteers work from home – what equipment or resources are needed for this? Do you have remote access to your systems to enable this?

The impact on your services

1. Which of your services could be suspended for the duration of the event
2. Which services could be delivered in different ways (telephone calls instead of home visiting, video calling, emails etc.)
3. List the priority order of your services and consider how you could preserve or continue to deliver services to your highest priority clients with a reduced work force – consider workforce reductions of 10%, 20% and 35% over 1 week, 2 weeks, 1 month and 2 month durations.

The impact on your clients

If you are providing services to clients that are life-essential – i.e. without them their health and safety would be significantly and directly compromised, (e.g. you provide home shopping for a housebound person), you may either need to reduce or reshape how this can continue to be provided. Consider the point at which you engage with statutory services – remember that in the event of a serious incident, if other businesses (including statutory services) are also affected, it will likely take longer for any assessment to be done or services to start. If you have serious concerns about a child or vulnerable adult's health and safety, apply your organisations Safeguarding policies and procedures.

In the case of COVID-19 (and other viral health conditions), could continuing to deliver a service put vulnerable clients at greater risk?

Supporting a wider contribution to address the problem

In the event of a serious incident or event that is likely to last a significant amount of time, the impact will be felt by everyone – by the local authority, health services, emergency services, shops, services etc. The borough has its own robust business continuity plans, but in such instances, it is likely that support and assistance would be sought to help support and protect the most vulnerable residents. Organisations will therefore be asked whether

their staff and volunteers would consider helping other services – this might include welfare visits, providing shopping or food for housebound or vulnerable residents.

Immediate actions

1. Make sure you have all staff and volunteer contact details up to date
2. Make sure you have your client contact details readily available
3. Have your working from home arrangements in place
4. Have a communication plan in place – which staff will be responsible for sending out information to staff, volunteers and clients in the event of an emergency.
5. Draw up your plan – which sets out which services and clients should be prioritised
6. Share your plan with staff, volunteers and trustees
7. Review and update it as events unfold – and share updates with staff, volunteers and trustees.