



<b>Title</b>	<b>Chief Fire Officer Report – Adult and Social Care and Communities Scrutiny Committee</b>
Chief Fire Officer Suite of Services	Trading Standards, Civil Protection and Coroners Services
Date	24.1.2023
Purpose of Report	To provide a strategic update on issues and key areas of service provision, opportunities and challenges

## Trading Standards

### Operational overview

1. Year to date the service has received 5939 complaints and enquiries, as with the August report this is lower than the same period in 21/22, the different reflects the increased demand on the service during the pandemic period.
2. Comparison with 2019/20 shows a difference of only 100 complaints and enquiries suggesting demand is consistent with pre-Covid levels.
3. Officers have carried out 858 inspections of premises (including re-visits) compared to 636 over the corresponding period in 21/22.
4. The increased number of inspections reflects greater focus on market surveillance and intelligence led project work,
  - Cost of living focussed work re accurate delivery of fuel and accuracy of public weighbridges. Officers found no cause of concern
  - Cost of living related work re safety of second hand items, especially electrical goods
  - Cost of living/protection work to individuals who have been scammed including public engagement sessions at banks and post offices. Including the ongoing return of approximate £7,500 given out to scammers but recovered before it reached them.
  - Cost of living led food sampling, re substitution of ingredients
  - Proactive safety sampling of toys for the presence of phthalates (toxic chemicals)
  - Test purchase activities for the availability of age related disposable e cigarettes to people under the age of 18.

- Proactive inspections regarding the storage and retail sale of fireworks. There were no significant causes for concern

In addition to business as usual work at farms, animal gatherings, food premises, retailers of illegal tobacco, etc.

#### 5. Noteworthy outcomes for the attention of the committee

- Seizure of illegal tobacco from a shop in Gloucester led to engagement with the premise landlord. As a result, that shop is no longer used for the sale of illegal tobacco.
- A farmer who has frequently come to the attention of this service from Churcham, was prosecuted for 29 animal health offences. These included failing to meet record keeping requirements for traceability and disease control in livestock, failure across all aspects of how the animals were kept, debris in fields, dirty and wet bedding, broken fences, access to feeders difficult due to deep mud, dirty drinking water and most significantly failing to treat two animals for conditions which led to unnecessary pain and suffering. The farmer was prosecuted and disqualified from keeping farm animals for 8 years.
- The Council's response to an outbreak of Rabies was successfully tested (exercise delivered by CPT). Officers found the multi-agency activity useful for networking and for a better understanding of the role of partners such as Public Health in situations normally thought of largely in terms of animal health matters.
- Officers have seized 5209 packs of illegal cigarettes (of which 3893) were counterfeit and 507 pouches of tobacco (of which 427 were counterfeit), with an illegal sale value of £31,115 and an evaded duty value of £43,920.
- Officers have seized 1219 non-compliant disposable e cigarettes with a value in excess of £7,200.
- A further 476 items including toys and electrical chargers were seized or caused to be removed from sale due to product safety issues.

#### Finance and performance

6. The service budget remains on target
7. Remaining inspections and project work are on course for completion by year end.

#### Risk

8. Despite receiving no additional funding for this work, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) requires inspections are carried out annually/two yearly according to their risk profile. This expectation was relaxed during the pandemic period, but Food Authorities (including GCC) should be back to full delivery from 2023/24

9. During the pandemic period, Trading Standards took the opportunity to update the database of food businesses to reflect the actual number within Gloucestershire. In a two tier local authority, food businesses are required to register at district level but until recently there was no automatic notification to the county council. This work saw an increase of 40% in food business records to 7278.
10. The current establishment of qualified food officers competent to deliver official food controls is insufficient to meet this increased demand.
11. This service has developed a plan, in consultation with the Director and Lead Cabinet Member, to cover the existing shortfall and
12. Develop existing staff where possible but there is still a need to and recruit and train additional food officers (minimum of 3 years per officer). The success of this plan is subject to continued support of MTFs bids.

## Civil Protection Team

### Operational Response

13. Incidents supported Sept 2022 – Jan 2023 (*CPT Duty Officer on call 24/7*)
  - Activation of Operation London Bridge – Passing of HRH Queen Elizabeth II
  - House Fire – Residents evacuated
  - Industrial Fire – Potential asbestos
  - Landslide – Structural Engineer required
  - Barn Fire – Potential asbestos
  - Water Supply Outage (x3 incidents)
  - Pre-Event assessment teleconference (PEAT) – Scope Industrial Action over Christmas period
  - Support to housing association residents due to residents unable to contact the relevant housing association – property issues due to heating, burst pipes and damaged alarm systems. (x3 incidents)
  - Flood Advisory Service participation due to rising river levels

**Response Plans** - The following response plans are being updated

14. **GCC Critical Incident Plan** (*draft being updated following Exercise Aurum held in November 2022*) - This plan will provide guidance to GCC Gold group (Strategic leads in incident response) on coordinating the County Councils response to an incident that affects service delivery (ie: loss of building, power outage, cyber-attack etc). This plan incorporates a list of critical services (collated from

the submitted business impact analysis), order of priority, timeframe and requirements to re-instate.

15. **Management of the Deceased Plan** - (inc: Emergency Mortuary, Excess Deaths, Mass Fatalities – Full revision underway) - This suite of plans provides guidance on the multi-agency management of an incident that results in mass fatalities / excess deaths (ie: Pandemic, large scale accident, malicious event...). Working with colleagues from Coroners, Glos Police and District councils.

The Excess Deaths & Emergency Mortuary elements have been combined into one plan, which is due to be circulated across multi-agency stakeholders for consultation by mid-January.

The Mass Fatalities element of the plan will be reviewed working as part of a working group to be established by the Coroner in early 2023

16. **Highways Emergency Welfare Plan** (*Review underway*) - This document provides a guide for Gloucestershire LRF to manage the provision of emergency welfare where the highway cannot be cleared expeditiously and the resulting congestion poses a threat to life or unacceptable discomfort.

**Training & Exercise** – The following exercises have been delivered / are scheduled

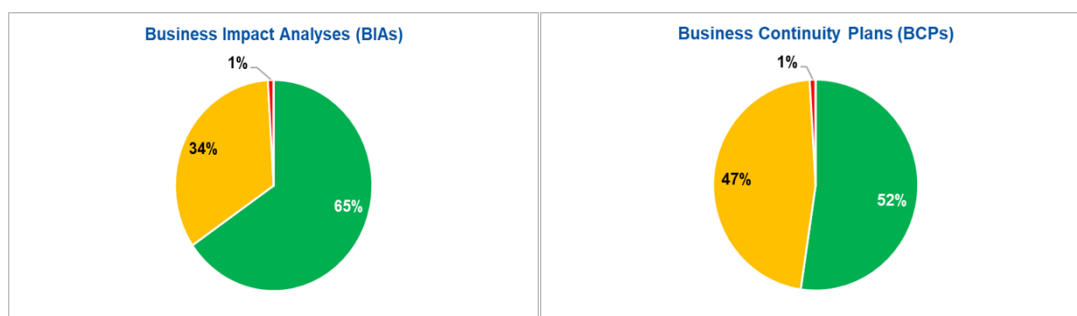
17. **Exercise Pluto - Multi-agency Animal Health exercise** (delivered Nov 2022)  
Testing the multi-agency response to a widespread animal disease and validating the LRF Animal Disease Plan that has recently been updated. A wide range of agencies from across the Local Resilience Forum attended this face to face event, including subject matter experts from DEFRA, DLUCH and Chief veterinary staff, all providing valuable learning for the counties preparedness for animal health incidents.
18. **Exercise Aurum - GCC Gold response exercise** (delivered Nov 2022)  
Testing GCC Gold Groups response to a Critical Incident affecting the County Councils ability to deliver services. The exercise also tested the newly written GCC Critical Incident Plan. The plan is currently being updated to incorporate feedback from the exercise. This face to face exercise was well attended by the Corporate Leadership Team, enabling a wealth of experience from across the directorates to come together and discuss strategic strategy & direction to respond to an incident impacting the delivery of council services.
19. **GCC Silver response exercise** (Re-Scheduled from Dec 2022 to February 2023)  
Testing GCC 'Silver' groups coordination of the tactical response to an incident affecting / requiring support from GCC.

**Business Continuity Management (BCM)**

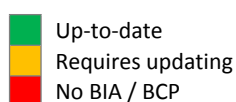
20. The programme of business continuity management (BCM) work approved by CLT in Q2 2020-21, which was extended through to December 2022, has completed its project phase.

21. Overall, whilst there has been a substantial improvement over the 2020 position there is still further work to do; the focus moving forward will be on exercising business continuity plans and ensuring that business continuity remains a regular business-as-usual activity for plan owners across the council.

Overall position for GCC (incl. GFRS) (data correct as at 9<sup>th</sup> January 2023):-



(Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding)



➤ -4% fall in business impact analyses (BIAs) up-to-date since the last report (October 2022: 69%)

➤ -1% fall in business continuity plans (BCPs) up-to-date since the last report (October 2022: 53%)

22. Since the last update there have been minor falls in the levels of compliance with business continuity policy. As previously reported, some teams and services have still yet to engage in terms of booking-in BIA sessions with the Civil Protection Team. Also, a number of teams / services have started the process but have not completed it: at the time of writing, eight BCPs are overdue by six months or more, including one which was due in the 2021 calendar year.

23. Given that the business continuity work has reached the end of its project phase, with plan owners having had ample of time (2½ years) to complete BIAs and BCPs in the manner expected, it is intended for the council's strategic business continuity risk to be rated this quarter as having **worsened in terms of both likelihood and impact**.

24. Such rating reflecting the current levels of compliance together with a worsening energy security and industrial action landscape in the UK. The strategic risk owner – Mark Preece, Chief Fire Officer – is engaging with CLT

on this issue and appropriate data on compliance has also been shared with Steve Mawson, Deputy Chief Executive.

### **Facilitated De-briefs**

25. Following GCC's response to both C-19 and Operation London Bridge, Civil Protection Team facilitated a number of structured debriefs which provided the opportunity to reflect on what went well, what didn't go so well and areas for improvement. The outcomes have been captured in post debrief reports shared with the teams which outline areas discussed, lessons learnt and recommendations for future processes.
26. **GCC Covid 19 Hub debrief** (delivered September 22) - This debrief provided all members of the GCC Covid Hub team the opportunity to reflect on their delivery of support services across the County during the response to C-19.
27. **GCC Gold Group debrief** (delivered October 22) - This debrief provided all members of the GCC Gold Group the opportunity to reflect on how they managed the strategic coordination of the County Council's response to C-19
28. **Operation London Bridge debrief** (delivered October 22) – passing of HRH Queen Elizabeth II - This debrief provided an opportunity for officers to reflect on the activation of 'Operation London Bridge' protocol and the collaboration with the wider LRF response. Note: Some officers from the County Council also attended the local resilience forum multi-agency debrief.

### **Challenges / looking forward**

29. The Civil Protection Team is a small team (6 officers) with a high percentage of the staff's time being allocated to Service Level Agreement (SLA's) commitments with the District Councils. As such it has been challenging to progress resilience work streams for the County Council as much as we would like too.
30. The need for additional resources in the team was discussed and recognised in 2022 and additional funding was allocated to recruit two additional staff members to the team on fixed term contracts.
31. Two recruitment campaigns were run in 2022, but unfortunately were unsuccessful in filling the two fixed term positions.
32. Recruitment seems to be a challenge at present across all areas, as many partner agencies are also having difficulty in recruiting suitable candidates into civil protection roles.
33. As of December 2022, the team has now decreased to 5 members, with one officer leaving. Combined with the difficulties in recruiting this has put us in a position where we do not have sufficient resource to deliver on x2 of our SLA

commitments. Another recruitment campaign is underway to try and recruit back into the vacant position.

34. With the current challenging landscape it is timely to review the current team model and commitments. It is recognised that for emergency preparedness, response and recovery a co-ordinated approach between upper tier and lower tier authorities remains the best approach.
35. Discussions are underway to look at the best options to achieve this with the resources available. A paper outlining these options will be written and taken to the Corporate Leadership Team for further discussion.
36. The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 outlines the statutory duties that local authorities must adhere to. Strengthening resilience is very much part of the UK Governments future vision with the 'UK Resilience Framework' being released in December 2022, outlining the Governments intentions between now and 2030, to invest in and strengthen resilience across the UK

## **Finance**

37. The 2022/23 budget for the Civil Protection Team is set at £314k (£218k base plus £96k income from SLA's. x4 staff members funded from base budget & x2 staff members funded via SLA income. (Note: Following the pay award the base budget has increased by £13k for the remainder of 22/23)

## **Coroners Team**

### Operational overview

38. The winter months are traditionally the busiest time for the coroner service and this year has been no different with December witnessing the highest number of referrals and post mortem requests since the Coroner Court opened in 2012. Coroner Officers are working hard to process this work and keep families updated on progress.
39. All partners involved in the death management system experience body storage capacity issues at this time of year. The coroner service has been proactive in procuring 32 additional storage bays which are currently housed with the existing fridges and freezers in the body store at the court. These bays will remain in the body store until Spring 2023.
40. The service is currently experiencing a backlog in deceased persons requiring a post mortem examination. This is not unusual for this time of year but, following the referrals in December and over the New Year, this is the highest

it has ever been. The mortuary team continue to work with duty pathologists to ease pressures and two Saturday sessions have been completed during January. Coroner Officers continue to inform the families of the deceased how the service is managing this issue.

## Financial

41. As predicted at the start of the year, the service is overspent by £35k. This additional expense relates to additional fees payable to pathologists which was introduced in September. This is a continuous cost and will total c.75k over an entire financial year.
42. The service is pursuing an MTFS bid to ease this pressure and add additional funding to the baseline budget to cover these costs. This bid has been successful in the MTFS process so far.

## Risk

43. Lack of duty pathologists available to undertake coronial work remains the largest risk to the service. This is a national problem and the Chief Coroner for England & Wales is actively looking into it. The Senior APT continues to work with duty pathologists to ensure her team are flexible to the needs and availability of pathologists and Saturday sessions are currently being undertaken.
44. As part of the MTFS process the department has submitted a bid to increase the level of coroner cover and resilience in the county due to this increased risk. Subject to final Cabinet approval it is the intention to add an Area Coroner's position within the structure.