Appendix

Children's Services

Annual Report of the Resilience Group for Schools and Other Settings

(September 2011 – August 2013)

Introduction to the First, Annual Report of Central Bedfordshire's Resilience Group for Schools and Other Settings

(covering 2011 – 2013)

All Councils, acting as local authorities have a duty to promote 'Resilience' in their schools, so that the latter are able to manage Emergency and Business Continuity challenges in an effective and transparent manner and learn from reviews of previous events.

In Central Bedfordshire, this area of work is delegated, with appropriate governance, to the Resilience Group for Schools and Other Settings (known as the 'Schools Resilience Group'). The first annual report (covering the Group's first two years of operation) is attached. The Group is comprised of Central Bedfordshire Council officers and external volunteers. The secretariat for the Group is provided by the Compliance and Risk Team.

As the attached report demonstrates, the Group works to ensure that Central Bedfordshire Schools, of whatever legal status, are encouraged to develop high-quality, Emergency and Business Continuity Plans, through the provision of appropriate and timely advice and resources.

The report details the Group's work over its initial two years of operation. It identifies priorities for future development, as well as areas where it could tread anew.

Thanks are due to all those who have contributed to the Group's work and this report, which we hope all concerned with these issues will find of interest and value.

Nick Carter
Chair – Resilience Group for
Schools and Other Settings

Resilience Group for Schools and Other Settings
First Annual Report (Sept 2011 – August 2013)

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The School Resilience Group (originally called the 'Critical Incidents in Schools Group') was adopted by Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) in April 2009 at which time it was led by the Emergency Planning Team and supported by the Head of School Support and the Area Education Officer. The Group had been originally established under Bedfordshire County Council three years before the re-structuring of Local Authorities in 2009 which saw the creation of CBC.

1.2 Following consultation with the Director of Children's Services in April 2011, it was decided that the Group should henceforth be chaired by a School Governor. Once the new Chairperson was in place, to ensure it was fit-for-purpose going forward, the Group conducted a wide-ranging review, covering: membership, terms of reference and current work programme.

1.3 In August 2011, the Group was renamed the 'Resilience Group for Schools and Other Settings' to reflect its broader overview of CBC educational establishments. New Terms of Reference were drawn up and subsequently approved by the Children's Services Management Team (CSMT) from which the Resilience Group derives its governance. Terms of Reference can be found at Appendix 1.

1.4 The Group provides a forum for the relevant, key CBC officers – supported by Headteachers and School Governors – to consider and, as appropriate, recommend and develop the provision of CBC support and guidance for educational establishments in relation to Business Continuity and Resilience.

1.5 Its membership comprises:

Nick Carter	Chair (School Governor)
Pete Hardy	Compliance and Risk Adviser for Children's Services
Celia Dawson	Senior Administrator Compliance and Risk
Mark Conway	CBC Emergency Planning
Liz Dunn	CBC Health and Safety
Nick Pearce	CBC Communications
Sue Riley	CBC School Transport
Rob Parsons / Sandra Einon	CBC Children's Services
Mike Smith	School Governor (Caddington)
Brian Storey	Headteacher (Church End Lower)
Steve Kelly	Headteacher (Arnold Academy)

1.6 In operational terms, the Group acts as a consultative forum for the Compliance and Risk Adviser who is responsible for ensuring that the recommendations of the Group are implemented in line with other CBC policies and procedures. The Group normally meets once a term; and will henceforth report annually to the CSMT.

1.7 This report covers the Group's first two years of operation. (Henceforth it will report annually to the CSMT). The Group's main achievements for the period covered by

this report are listed in the Executive Summary, with supporting information contained within the body of the report.

2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 As a Local Authority, Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty under the 2004 Civil Contingencies Act to promote Business Continuity. Schools have no such obligations - although it is best practice for schools to have in place appropriate plans and arrangements so that they can deal effectively with emergencies and their aftermath should they arise. Against this background, in January 2012, a survey of all CBC schools was undertaken to determine their current levels of resilience and preparedness. Results showed that whilst 87% (78 of 90 respondents) of schools confirmed that they held an Emergency Plan, only 33% (30 of 90 respondents) held Business Continuity Plans. The survey also raised awareness of any shortcomings regarding Emergency and Business Continuity Planning *within* individual schools. Following this survey, the most 'at risk' schools were identified and offered support. A brief account is in Section 3.0, with a full report at Appendix 3.

2.2 In February 2012, the guidance 'Managing Emergencies in Schools' was launched in Central Bedfordshire. This new document replaced 'Managing Critical Incidents in School' (2008) and reflects more accurately the support and advice CBC are able to provide to schools in emergencies of varying impact. A full report is in Section 4.0. 'Managing Critical Incidents in School' had originally been created by Bedfordshire County Council and adopted by CBC when the latter was created in April 2009.

2.3 During 2012, the process by which schools report emergencies to CBC has been revised. A dedicated 'School Emergency' 'phone number has been created and circulated to schools. This replaces the previous advice 'Emergency Contact Information for Schools and Other Settings' which, on review, was deemed confusing. This previous document also carried contact information for CBC staff who are not required to respond to emergencies. A full report is in Section 5.0.

2.4 An internal 'School Emergency' e-mail group has been created. This is to ensure that information received can be quickly disseminated within CBC to departments which need to be aware. The aim is to avoid duplication of effort and provide schools with consistent and co-ordinated communications. More detail can be found in Section 5.0.

2.5 The 'School Emergency Co-ordinator Procedures' have been re-written to reflect recent changes highlighted above. This document can be found at Appendix 2.

2.6 Having undergone minor improvements in July 2012, the web-based School Open Status (SOS) system has proved to be an invaluable tool in communicating with parents and the wider public in the event of severe weather and school closure. The system has been promoted widely in conjunction with Communications, and received 4,000 new subscribers between November 2012 and February 2013. The service has also been offered to private, voluntary and independent pre-school providers resulting in 15 new pre-school accounts. The priority going forward is to examine the case for further integration with the school transport providers. A full report is in Section 6.0.

2.7 In February 2012, a coach carrying Alvechurch School (Worcs.) pupils back from a skiing holiday crashed in France, killing a teacher, the group leader. The findings from the consequent investigation by Worcs. CC has prompted a review by CBC (and other local authorities) of its emergency procedures in relation to school visits and journeys. As a result, new guidance has been made available on the EVOLVE site and future training of Educational Visit Co-ordinators and Group leaders will incorporate an increased focus on this area. A full report is in Section 7.

2.8 During Spring Term 2013, CBC delivered two workshops to schools and governors to raise awareness with regard to Business Continuity Planning. 29 schools were represented across both workshops, with an overall, total, attendance of 42. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive. A fuller account is in Section 8 (Feedback at Appendix 6).

3.0 SCHOOL SURVEY: EMERGENCY / BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNING

3.1 Whilst the 2004 Civil Contingencies Act identifies a number of requirements of Local Authorities in relation to Business Continuity Planning, there is no such legal requirement placed on schools themselves. Nonetheless, as a Local Authority CBC has a responsibility to promote resilience, and to that end a survey of schools was undertaken in January 2012 to ascertain levels of preparedness for emergencies, the three main objectives being:

3.1.1 To provide Central Bedfordshire Council with baseline data regarding the state of readiness of its schools to cope with unforeseen emergencies.

3.1.2 To provide a self-assessment tool for schools. (Participation in the survey would highlight to schools any gaps they may have in their own Emergency and Business Continuity Planning).

3.1.3 To support awareness-raising of a new section on the CBC Learning Portal dedicated to Emergency and Business Continuity Planning. This section functions as a source of templates and resources designed to simplify the process of writing a comprehensive and effective Emergency Plan in schools.

3.2 In total, 90 establishments, across the full spectrum of provision, responded to the survey. Whilst no particular patterns could be observed across the whole sample in respect of gaps in school resilience, there were many, significant gaps in planning within individual schools (e.g. lack of evacuation procedures, no school closure procedures, etc.).

3.3 It was also evident that many schools had not assessed the full impact of the loss of key utilities, services or staffing; and as a result did not have adequate arrangements in place for dealing with the aftermath of a crisis. (Only one-third of schools responding had a Business Continuity Plan).

3.4 Data collected from this survey was used to identify schools with gaps in preparedness. They subsequently received additional guidance and were

signposted to workshops provided by Central Bedfordshire Council to support their writing of Business Continuity Plans.

3.5   Information collected will also be used as baseline data when the survey is repeated in January 2014.

3.6   More detail regarding findings of the survey are available at Appendix 3.

4.0 EMERGENCY / BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNING – RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS

4.1   In February 2012, the document 'Managing Emergencies in Schools' was launched in Central Bedfordshire. It was based on existing Nottinghamshire CC guidance and supported by the Central Government project 'Coping with School Emergencies'. This new guidance replaced 'Managing Critical Incidents in School' (originally created by Bedfordshire County Council in 2008) and reflected more accurately the support and advice CBC are able to provide to schools in emergencies of varying impact.

4.2   The guidance is all available on-line, via the Schools' Portal and comprises three sections.

4.2.1   A - provides individual schools with current advice and guidance for developing procedures and the writing of their own Business Continuity Plans (a PDF file).

4.2.2   B - to be used to create an establishment plan (an editable template).

4.2.3   C - contains supporting information and staff training materials.

4.3   A number of lower have used these resources to develop their own Business Continuity Plan and Procedures. The Headteacher one Lower School described the resource as '..*brilliant*..' and '..*an invaluable resource in a small school where most staff have multiple whole - school responsibilities…*'. The Headteacher also felt that a process based on a set of standard templates to develop school policies was critical in terms of securing the confidence of the Governors in that process.

4.4   We are scheduled to repeat the BCP / EP survey in January 2014. At this point more information will be available with regard to the level of usefulness of 'Emergency / Business Continuity Planning – Resources For Schools'.

5.0 SCHOOL EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

5.1   In April 2012, Sandy Upper School experienced a suspected Legionella outbreak. The school struggled to make contact with the most appropriate officer at CBC who could advise as to immediate actions to take.

5.2   As a result of this incident, the Resilience Group conducted a review of the School Emergency Procedures. The following is a summary of the findings:

5.2.1   The 'Emergency Contact Information for Schools and Other Settings'(Nov 2011) document, carried too much information and too many alternative phone numbers, many of which were for officers and departments who are not 'first call' in the event of a school-based emergency.

5.2.2   A review of the 'notable incidents log' suggest that the vast majority of school-based emergencies, with the exception of forced closure owing to severe weather, are caused by 'buildings-related' issues.

5.2.3   The use of the Duty Emergency Planning Officer (DEPO) 'phone number by schools in most instances would result in delays to response as the DEPO would then need to identify an appropriate and available person to deal with the incident.

5.3   As a result, the following changes were made to the Emergency Procedures:

5.3.1   The 'Emergency Contact Information for Schools and Other Settings' document was recalled.

5.3.2   A dedicated 'School Emergency' 'phone number was created.   During office hours, calls to this number are forwarded to the Compliance and Risk team; and to the Welbeing service, during out-of-hours

5.3.3   New guidance was issued to schools in September 2012 (Appendix 4). This consisted of a simple wall chart with two 'phone numbers: the CBC Assets Helpline; and the new School Emergency number.

5.3.4   A School Emergency e-mail account was created for the purposes of internal CBC communication. On receipt of a reported school emergency, the call recipient sends a summary report of the incident to schoolemergencies@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk. This message then automatically forwards to all interested parties; and is then manually forwarded to the elected member(s) in the area affected by the incident.

5.3.5   The 'School Emergency Co-ordinator Procedures' (Appendix 2) were updated to reflect all of these procedural changes.

6.0 SCHOOL OPEN STATUS (SOS) SYSTEM

6.1   In November 2011, the Assistant Director for Children's Services Learning and Commissioning requested a report into the viability of the SOS system. This was duly prepared (Appendix 5), and the system closely monitored in terms of its performance.

6.2 A number of minor fixes were identified and incorporated into the system between June and October 2012. These have considerably improved the appearance of the public-facing page, and removed misleading information. The system's reliability has also improved with reduced incidence of frozen screens.

6.3 In November and December 2012, via Central Essentials (and by surface mail direct to Headteachers), schools were urged to re-acquaint themselves with the system and to advise parents to visit the CBC website and register for alerts (Central Essentials included wording which could be cut-and-pasted by schools for a letter to parents). Pre-school providers were also contacted and invited to utilise the system.

6.4 During the period November 2012 - February 2013, the number of people registered for up-dates increased by approximately 4000, up to 9,400. During this period, the Children's Centres' details were up-dated to reflect the recent re-structure, and existing pre-school registrations were also checked for accuracy. All private, voluntary and independent providers of early-years education were invited to use the system; and as a result 15 new user accounts have been created.

6.5 During the winter of 2012 -13, **Monday 21st January** was the only significant day of school closures as a result of bad weather. In all, 59 Lower Schools, 15 Middle Schools, 9 Upper Schools, 5 Special Schools and one CBC Nursery were closed for all or part of the day. This was the first major test of the SOS system since it was improved in July 2012; and it responded very well. It was evident however, that, despite a concerted awareness campaign in November, user errors were still evident - either through lost log-in details, or lack of familiarity with the process. Apparently for these reasons, five schools were declared closed on the Radio Stations, but not on the SOS System. Of particular success was the integrated approach presented via Facebook and Twitter towards communicating school closures to the general public. This was reflected in some very positive feedback, including a commendation from the Mid Bedfordshire MP.

6.6 Issues encountered:

6.6.1 All Saints Academy is the only school to not utilise the SOS system. Some confusion was evident via Facebook as a result.

6.6.2 The system currently refreshes at 9.00pm[1]. **On Sunday 20th January**, many schools had already been declared closed by 8.00pm, which meant they were automatically re-opened again at 9.00pm when the system refreshed. This led to confusion in some quarters before the issue was identified and manually rectified.

6.6.3 Central Bedfordshire Council is inevitably compared by the general public to its neighbouring authority Bedford Borough Council, which provides all school transport in-house. It was therefore able to issue a blanket message confirming suspension of all school transport on the Sunday evening. The public may need reminding that Central Bedfordshire Council's school transport is out-sourced. In addition, the way in which up-dates regarding school closures are communicated to the general public needs to be reviewed as a result of the points raised above.

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[1] Schools with 'closed' status automatically default to 'open' at 9.00pm.

6.7   For the future, the priority is to identify how best CBC Transport Providers can be incorporated into the SOS system. As part of the original system build, functionality was included to enable individual transport providers to log into the system and provide up-dates in relation to the status of their transport routes. Faults in the programme have meant that this component has not been reliable and requires investment to rectify. The Resilience Group strongly recommends that CBC commits the necessary resources both to deliver this fix, and the further development of the system to enable parents to register for up-dates on individual transport routes. Currently, on a 'snow' day, the School Transport Team have approximately two hours to co-ordinate the flow of information from Transport Providers and to parents and other interested parties. The development of the SOS system would significantly reduce the load placed upon the School Transport team during this period of high call volume, resulting both in increased capacity for call handling and an increase in the speed and accuracy of information provided to the public through the various media available.

7.0 EMERGENCY PROCEDURES RELATING TO SCHOOL VISITS

7.1   In February 2012, a coach carrying a ski-party home to Alvechurch School in Worcestershire was involved in an accident on a French motorway. The Group Leader was killed.

7.2   This incident highlighted a number of shortcomings in the emergency arrangements that were in place at the time, and Worcestershire CC conducted a thorough review. Their 'lessons learned' have been shared nationally with the Outdoor Education Advisors Panel, prompting a review of emergency planning in relation to school visits in Central Bedfordshire.

7.3   As a result, more robust arrangements are to be established, as follows:

7.3.1   A new guidance document has been added to the EVOLVE system: 'Emergency Planning for Visits and Journeys'.
7.3.2   All Headteachers and Educational Visit Co-ordinators (EVCs) have been advised by letter of the new guidance.
7.3.3   Lessons learned from the Alvechurch accident, and changes to emergency arrangements for visits, were promoted to schools as part of the Business Continuity Planning up-date sessions in Spring Term 2013.
7.3.4   All future Group Leader and EVC training courses will include a session devoted to emergency planning

8.0 BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNING: SCHOOL UP-DATE SESSIONS

8.1   To promote and support the use of the school resource package, two twilight sessions were delivered to school representatives (Head, Senior Staff or

Governors) during the Spring Term 2013. The session comprised mainly of three elements:

8.1.1   A presentation on lessons learned from the Alvechurch coach crash.

8.1.2   A presentation on Business Continuity Planning for CBC Schools; and how to access and use available resources.

8.1.3   A number of brief 'tabletop' exercises designed to test school plans, stimulate discussion and promote the sharing of good practice.

8.2   The combined attendance was 42, representing 29 schools. Feedback was requested and 10 schools provided comments, 8 of which were very positive (See Appendix 6).

9.0 FUTURE PRIORITIES

9.1   To secure the necessary investment to develop the SOS system to its full functionality as identified in the original project plan and detailed in section 6.

9.2   There needs to be consideration of the extent to which CBC should provide Business Continuity Planning support for independent, private and voluntary pre-school providers. A model plan that fits with the needs of these settings needs to be drawn up and agreed.

9.3   The Business Continuity Planning survey needs to be repeated (planned for early 2014) in order to identify how useful the 'Managing School Emergencies' templates have been.

9.4   To provide greater schools' resilience in the event of extreme weather, develop and publish a best practice, guidance document.

9.5   Provide examples of good "Lock Down" procedures for schools.

9.6   Consider and identify further areas of concern in which the group could usefully offer guidance and support to educational establishments – potential flooding is one such area.

10.0 APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Terms of Reference

Appendix 2: School Emergency Co-ordinator Procedures

Appendix 3: Schools Business Continuity Planning Survey

Appendix 4: School Emergency Contacts

Appendix 5: Report on SOS System

Appendix 6: Feedback from Business Continuity Planning Up-date Sessions