

**EXERCISE BOSTON COMMON**

**Exercise date: 17th – 21st May 2021**

**Debrief Report**

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# Introduction

After the success of previous exercises run during Business Continuity Awareness Week (Exercise Bravo Charlie 2016, Exercise Broken Crown 2017, Exercise Battle Creek 2018, and Exercise Blue Chip 2019), South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue (SYFR) decided to host another exercise during BCAW 2021 called Exercise Boston Common.

This national exercise took place during BCAW between the 17th and 21st May 2021 and was open to participation from any organisation that has access to ResilienceDirect.

The exercise ran throughout the week on ResilienceDirect with injects being released each day to progress the scenario. Each organisation could participate to whatever level their workload would allow.

The exercise planning team and exercise control was run by two members of the SYFR Resilience, Planning & Contingencies department.

The information used to write this debrief report has been taken from observations the exercise planning team made during the exercise and the feedback requested after the exercise (16 feedback forms were received).

# Aim and Objectives

The aim of the exercise was to encourage partners to collaborate with each other to resolve Business Continuity disruptions.

The objectives of the exercise were:

* To test Business Continuity Plans within individual organisations.
* To enable participants to contribute to Business Continuity Awareness Week (17th-21st May 2021)
* To encourage members to use the response pages within ResilienceDirect

# Participation

As previously mentioned, the exercise was open to anyone that has access to a ResilienceDirect account. There were 107 users that had access to the Exercise Boston Common pages on ResilienceDirect from a large range of organisations including:

* South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue
* Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service
* Oxfordshire County Council
* North East Ambulance Service
* North Yorkshire Police
* British Red Cross
* Hereford and Worcester Fire & Rescue Service
* Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service
* Warwickshire Fire & Rescue Service
* Leicestershire Fire & Rescue Service
* Yorkshire Ambulance Service
* Essex County Council
* Mid and West Wales Fire & Rescue Service
* Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service
* Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service
* Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service
* Northumberland Fire & Rescue Service
* Lincolnshire Fire & Rescue Service
* North Northamptonshire Council
* Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service
* West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service
* Cleveland Fire & Rescue Service
* Humberside Fire & Rescue Service
* Tyne and Wear Fire & Rescue Service
* Police Scotland
* Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire & Rescue Service
* National Crime Agency
* West Sussex County Council
* Lambeth Council
* HM Prisons and Probations Service
* Lincolnshire Council
* HM Revenue & Customs
* Hampshire Police
* Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board
* Barnsley Council
* Met Police
* North Ayrshire Council
* Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service
* Kent Fire & Rescue Service
* Department of Work and Pensions
* Surrey and Sussex Police
* Thurrok Council
* Avon Fire & Rescue Service
* Bedfordshire Borough Council
* Kirklees Council
* South Yorkshire Police

In total there were 45 organisations that had access to the exercise pages and approximately 32 actively took part in the majority of injects.

The feedback from the exercise suggested that there was a mix of involvement from each organisation, with some only have one or two people from their organisation taking part and others having between four and eight people taking part.

# Exercise Preparation

Prior to the exercise, the planning team decided upon the general scenario and then created 10 injects to progress the scenario throughout the week.

The exercise pages created on ResilienceDirect were in the ‘response’ page template. The exercise pages included an exercise homepage, an injects page, and a guidance page. Participants responded to injects by using the ‘agency report’ feature. An email notification (through ResilienceDirect) was sent when an inject was released and it was requested that an agency report be submitted in response to each inject.

The exercise was advertised by various forums including through last year’s participants, through the ResilienceDirect Latest News on the Collaborate Homepage, and through the Business Continuity Institute (BCI). Registration to the exercise started a month prior to the exercise beginning.

The week before the exercise began an email notification was sent out to all participants that released the exercise homepage which held the aim/objectives, the format of the exercise, and release times of the injects.

# Scenario and Injects

The scenario for Exercise Boston Common was based on a cyber-attack but included other concurrent issues including a small Covid-19 outbreak and a World War 2 bomb disposal. 10 injects were released throughout the week that progressively worsened the scenario/incident.

The scenario theme feedback had a generally positive response with feedback stating that it *‘aligned to current threats’* and was *‘timely, clear, relevant and realistic’.* One participant stated that *‘injects were pretty generic to cover a range of organisations participants but provided us with general details for useful discussions’,* while another stated that *‘injects covered a few different BC impacts so was a good exercise that can be adapted easily to test departments specific risks’*. One comment did however state that *‘having three different problems at the same time is unlikely’.*

In terms of the frequency of injects most of the feedback was positive with comments stating ‘*the injects were spread out so impact on the day job was lessened’*, *‘two injects a day is enough when there is other work to be doing’,* and *‘just the right amount of injects each day to keep the exercise flowing’*. It was also noted that having *‘predetermined exercise timings’* was useful. However, there were some participants who struggled to keep pace with the injects due to *‘internal commitments’*.

One participant stated having the exercise run over a week made it *‘logistically impossible to run a full Major Event Management Team for the full week’*.

# Business Continuity Plans

The overall response to whether the exercise tested organisations business continuity plans was yes. Comments included:

* *‘useful opportunity to think about how we would respond and recover from different types of incidents’*
* *‘throughout the exercise the Business Continuity Plan and Disaster Recovery Plan were referred to throughout’*
* *‘good test of BC knowledge and prompted us to get in contact with other teams who would lead on the response for a cyber-attack’*
* *‘this tested one aspect which was our availability of fire appliances’*
* *‘it tested elements of a number of our business continuity plans, communications mechanisms, and guidance for staff’*

Some organisation noted that for them it tested more the tactical and strategic level rather than individual plans.

# ResilienceDirect

All feedback stated that it was useful for the exercise to be run on ResilienceDirect with many comments stating that it was a good refresher/familiarisation on using the system. There were some comments that ResilienceDirect *‘doesn’t reach a wider audience’* and that not all the relevant people for this scenario had a ResilienceDirect account. In light of this, it would be useful for organisations to review who in their organisations has access to ResilienceDirect in relation to business continuity incident management.

Comments surrounding the use of the Agency Report feature stated that it was *‘straight forward’, ‘simple’,* and *‘easy to use’*. There were several comments that the TCG/SCG section wasn’t needed for this exercise.

# Suggestions for Improvements

During the feedback, the exercise planning team requested any recommendations for improvements to future exercises. While most of the comments stated that the exercise was well organised and worth taking part in, there were some recommendations.

One participant suggested changing the 1pm inject to later on in the day to avoid the lunch period and to make it easier for participants to respond to injects. The exercise planning team will review this.

There were several comments throughout the feedback that it would be useful to run this exercise over one day, getting more departments involved or an incident management team. While this is not the format of the exercises that SYFR run during BCAW, the exercise planning team would be happy to share the injects from Exercise Boston Common to any organisation to use/adapt internally. If you would like access to the injects from Exercise Boston Common or any previous BCAW exercise please contact lbramley@syfire.gov.uk.

There were a few comments that some organisations would have liked earlier notification that the exercise was taking place so they can get more departments involved and allocate time for the exercise in their workload. The exercise planning team did start advertising and registration to the exercise one month prior to the exercise. While most organisations did register to the exercise early, inevitably some organisations didn’t hear about the exercise until close to the exercise starting. The exercise planning team will review how/when they advertise future exercises. The Business Continuity Institute (BCI) usually gives six months’ notice of the dates of BCAW, all future exercises will take place during BCAW.

# Conclusion

Due to the positive feedback once again given on this exercise, it is envisaged that a similar exercise will be planned for next year’s BCAW.

All feedback and recommendations within this debrief report will be considered in future scenario and exercise planning.