

Appendix A: Detailed Brexit Preparedness Work Stream updates

City Economy

There remain concerns about the overall level of preparedness in the private sector, particularly in relation to small businesses.

Concern had been raised over the small proportion of VAT-registered firms in the UK who had applied for the necessary Economic Operator Registration and Identification (EROI) ID number. However, the Government has just announced that it will start automatically enrolling UK firms following lobbying by the CBI and business groups.

We work closely with Business West through the Bristol Brexit Response Group, both in terms of information sharing and also identifying areas of joint government lobbying.

HM Government has just published new, simplified advice for businesses in the form of an online toolkit. Signposting businesses to official advice and guidance will be a feature of our communications approach as we approach the 31 October deadline.

Civil Contingencies and business continuity

Multi-agency Strategic and Tactical Coordinating Groups meet regularly under the umbrella of the Avon and Somerset Local Resilience Forum (LRF), chaired by Avon and Somerset Police. The LRF is reviewing its Brexit risk assessment in light of the most recent planning assumptions received from HM Government, and any escalating risks will be considered by the LRF's Strategic Coordination Group and, where directly relevant to the council, by the Brexit Project Board. The LRF and BCC are considering the impact of Brexit associated risks occurring at the same time as seasonal winter pressures.

We are expecting a higher reporting requirement from the Government throughout September, October and November, with requests for information to increase in line with proportionate national preparedness. Funding has been allocated to allow for temporary increased capacity in the council's Civil Protection Unit to enable this and additional planning requirements.

Among the risks previously identified by the council and partners are food supply assurance, fuel shortage and public protest and demonstration. These are being reviewed in line with new national planning assumptions.

The council has a supply of bunkered fuel to help maintain its core fleet if there were a shortage, although this is a short term (<2 week) contingency measure that would be used to support the delivery of critical activities.

With regards to food supply, national advice has been that a shortage in supply should not be anticipated, though there may be a short-term limiting of consumer choice and a rise in prices. We have specifically reviewed the preparedness of food suppliers to schools and care homes and received substantial assurance of preparedness from our Trading with Schools service, which holds this contract.

The risk of both food and fuel shortages include the possibility of short term shortages caused by 'panic' or 'precautionary' buying.

We continue to work closely with LRF partners, particularly the Police, regarding the management of public protests.

Every council service has a Business Continuity Plan describing how it can best continue in a range of challenging scenarios. A programme to review and update these has been completed.

Community Cohesion

In July we launched the #WeAreBristol campaign, aimed at challenging people's perceived views and celebrating what we have in common in order to support greater community cohesion.

We have also arranged community cohesion work in four disadvantaged neighbourhoods, hosting facilitated conversations to understand more about people's experiences and what we can do to counter any oppression they may face.

A city-wide Tension Monitoring Group meets regularly and is not at present reporting any rise in community tension which can be directly related to Brexit. However, members have warned about seeing signs of a less tolerant atmosphere with Stand Against Racism and Equality (SARI) reporting they are receiving more complaints where sentiments like 'go back home' are expressed but this is also reflecting a national discourse.

Figures from the most recent Safer Bristol show a rise in hate crime in 2018/19, which they say is "partly attributed to increased awareness and reporting but Brexit, terrorist attacks, austerity and the increase in far-right political movement are all seen to have contributed." Separate figures from Avon and Somerset Police show a spike in incidents after the referendum, with hate crime levels remaining higher than pre-2016.

EU Settlement Scheme

Work is underway to develop a greater understanding of Bristol's EU citizen demographics – both those that have already applied for the scheme and those that haven't. This will help us better target communications to promote the scheme, with concerted campaign work planned for later in the year. While over 1m people have successfully applied nationally, concerns have been raised within the city-wide Bristol Brexit Response Group about the level of awareness amongst vulnerable, elderly and hard to reach groups.

We are liaising closely with organisations from the voluntary and community sector, such as St Pauls Advice Centre and the Bristol Law Centre. We have trained staff at our Citizen Service Point to assist residents with the application process, including document scanning to make the application process quicker and more straightforward. Whilst we could legally charge a fee for this service, we have chosen to provide it free of charge since its launch in June. In its first two months of operation over 155 people have been assisted.

We have also taken the opportunity to promote the settlement scheme at a series of events with consulates. The French, German, Swiss and Portuguese Consulates have given positive feedback on the verification service delivered by the council, with the Portuguese Consulate recently holding three days of appointments for citizens in the CSP.

The council has undertaken substantial data quality assurance work in relation to our Looked After Children, preparing us to apply for the EU Settlement Scheme on their behalf wherever this is necessary.

To date, 8,670 EU citizens in Bristol have successfully applied to the scheme. This equates to around 41% of the eligible population and is the third highest amongst Core Cities. Nationally over 900,000 applications have been received; around 30% of the eligible population.

Housing

The council's main contractors have been contacted and we have received assurance statements. In order to try and keep continuity of supply, some materials have been purchased in advance.

However, the general uncertainty is impacting contractor confidence and we are experiencing delays and reduced capacity, which is impacting delivery of some work programmes.

In the event of contractors going into administration, our contingency planning assumption is that repairs would revert to being delivered in-house, in the short term. We would look to use urgent procurement powers to utilise other contractors and frameworks to try to minimise disruption to repairs and maintenance programmes.

The Housing Revenue Account's business plan modelling has been updated to assess the negative impact of a No Deal Brexit. In response to concerns about a potential rise in homelessness and increased demand on temporary accommodation, we have modelled the financial impact of various levels of increased demand.

Regulatory Services

A lack of Port Health and Trading Standards capacity was identified as an area of risk. The award of a £91k grant from the Food Standards Agency will enable recruitment of a temporary Environmental Health Officer due to start in September 2019 to backfill the secondment of a permanent staff member to train and undertake additional Port Health work, creating increased capacity until end March 2020.

Training has been undertaken on new IT systems provided by government in case of loss of access to existing EU-wide databases relating to import and export.

Capacity could be constrained should officers be called upon to provide mutual aid to Channel Ports. This was cited as a risk in the January assessment. However, we have received no requests and nor do we anticipate any at this stage.

Social Care

Providers of residential and nursing care continue to report significant recruitment challenges, with a noticeable trend of EU workers returning home, without a counterbalancing flow of replacement workers. As set out in the scenario assessment, the sector both nationally and locally is heavily dependent on migrant labour; 19% of workers in the Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire CCG area are non-UK born.

In our engagement with central government we have raised concerns about the impact of Brexit on the sector and urged them to make the security and sustainability of the Social Care workforce a post-Brexit priority. We have highlighted that forthcoming changes to the immigration system, including the introduction of a £30,000 minimum salary threshold, could further impact on providers' ability to recruit and retain staff.

There is currently no indication that the Migration Advisory Committee / central government are inclined to add care workers to the shortage occupation list of occupations exempt from the threshold. There is also little confidence that the 12 month 'Temporary Workers Route' will be an effective remedy, given that it provides workers with no opportunity to remain beyond the 12 months and no right to claim benefits, access health care or housing.

In this already challenging sector the risk of supplier failure (for example due to cash flow issues, supplier delays or reduced workforces) is a real consideration for the short to medium term following a No Deal Brexit.

Supply Chain

A lack of centralised contract information was identified as an issue and as a result we have recruited an analyst on a temporary basis. Their task will be to centralise data and update both the Procurement Management team and Brexit Project Board.

A survey was issued to suppliers earlier this year and we will shortly issue another formal communication to key suppliers. The aim is to ensure we have an up to date understanding of the level of risk in the supply chain and the level of preparedness of key suppliers (including their supply chain risk and import risks). This information will enable us to better predict and respond to any delays or disruption.

Internally, the procurement team is leading on coordinating contact with contract managers and administrators within the council, including what actions they may need to consider when dealing with suppliers.

Engagement with suppliers and reviewing contracts has been underway throughout the year and is the responsibility to relevant service managers.

Workforce

In March 2019 we wrote to all EU staff members to provide information about how their citizen and residency rights will be affected by Brexit. We also referred them to official advice and guidance about the EU Settlement Scheme. To support this, we also arranged a series of drop-in sessions to provide more detailed advice and support.