

Business Continuity Planning Webinar for Hillingdon Schools

Held on 17 September 2026

Summary from Webinar Transcript

The webinar was delivered by Abiola Sadiq (LA's Business Continuity Officer) and Abdikafi Ali (LA's Emergency Planning Officer), with an introduction and close from Michael Hawkins, Head of Education. The session focused on helping schools move from a risk-based mindset to a resilience-based approach, ensuring they can continue critical operations during and after disruptive incidents.

Key Messages Delivered:

1. Business Continuity is about resilience

Schools should not only plan for emergencies but also for how they will continue operating and recover afterwards. The emphasis should be on safeguarding pupils, protecting staff welfare, maintaining education provision, and ensuring operational continuity during disruption.

2. Schools face a wide range of risks

Risks can include:

- Fire and flood incidents
- Loss of buildings or facilities
- Cyber attacks
- Loss of critical staff
- Supplier failure
- Wider emergencies affecting communities

Cyber security was highlighted as a growing concern due to schools' reliance on technology and data systems.

3. Priority areas during disruption

When an incident occurs, schools should prioritise:

1. Safeguarding
2. Pupil and staff accounting
3. Welfare support
4. Teaching and learning continuity
5. Essential administration, catering and payroll

Life safety and safeguarding must always come first.

4. Four critical dependencies

Business continuity planning should focus on:

- People
- Premises
- Technology

- Critical suppliers

Schools should identify risks and fallback arrangements for each area.

5. Business Continuity Plans (BCPs) must be maintained and tested

A good BCP should:

- Have a named owner and deputy
- Define activation triggers
- Include communication plans
- Identify critical functions and recovery priorities
- Be reviewed annually
- Be exercised and tested regularly
- Capture lessons learned from incidents and exercises

6. Communication is critical

Schools should have:

- Primary communication channels
- Backup communication methods
- Offline contact lists
- Prepared holding statements
- Alternative methods for communicating with parents and stakeholders if IT systems fail

7. Emergency Grab Bags

Schools should maintain a continuity kit/grab bag containing:

- Business Continuity Plan
- Key contact information
- Safeguarding information
- Decision logs and checklists
- Backup devices, chargers and torches
- Essential keys and records

The contents should be reviewed at least every six months.

8. Exercises should go beyond fire drills

Schools were encouraged to undertake:

- Plan walkthroughs
- Communications cascade tests
- Tabletop exercises

- Cyber incident exercises

Testing plans helps identify weaknesses and improve preparedness.

Actions for Schools:

Governance & Ownership

- Appoint a named Business Continuity Plan owner.
- Identify and brief a deputy owner.

Review Critical Activities

- Identify and document critical services.
- Define recovery time objectives (RTOs).
- Map dependencies and interdependencies.

Update Business Continuity Plan

- Review BCP if not updated within the last 12 months.
- Ensure key contacts and escalation routes are current.
- Include offline access arrangements for essential information.
- Verify safeguarding and communication arrangements.

Confirm Contingency Arrangements

- Identify alternative premises.
- Confirm alternate suppliers and review supplier BCP arrangements.
- Establish fallback arrangements for IT failures and cyber incidents.
- Ensure deputies can access critical systems and information.

Establish/Review Emergency Grab Bag

- Prepare or refresh continuity kit contents.
- Include updated contact lists, safeguarding information, chargers and key documents.
- Review grab bag contents every six months.

Testing & Exercising

- Conduct at least one tabletop exercise.
- Test communications cascade processes.
- Review lessons learned and update plans accordingly.

Hillingdon Council Requests and Support:

- Schools are asked to share their current Business Continuity Plans with the Education Team by **the end of October** for review and feedback. Maintained schools are specifically requested to do so. Please send to education@hillingdon.gov.uk
- A Hillingdon BCP template will be developed and shared with schools.
- A recording, transcript and checklist will be made available to schools.
- A follow up session will be held at the next Head Teachers' Termly in November.

School Action Checklist:

- ☐ Nominate BCP owner and deputy
- ☐ Review/update BCP
- ☐ Update contact lists and safeguarding information
- ☐ Identify alternative premises and suppliers
- ☐ Create/update emergency grab bag
- ☐ Conduct tabletop or communications exercise
- ☐ Record lessons learned
- ☐ Submit BCP for council review by end of October
- ☐ Schedule annual review and testing cycle