UNIT4

In Business for You

RESPONDING TO CRISIS: A PUBLIC SECTOR
GUIDE TO CONTINUITY PLANNING

1. Setting the scene

Why having a plan matters: a guide to continuity planning in the public sector

COVID-19's challenge to services?

As this crisis unfolded, the public sector found that its response to the virus was hindered by increased risks, staff shortages and inadequate equipment and technology. Putting the vital services they provide at risk when they are needed most.

But how could they be prepared for a challenge like this?

That's why continuity planning matters for the public sector; it helps you expect the unexpected. Giving you the plan and the tools to keep your services running through anything and bring you, your people, and the people you serve closer together.
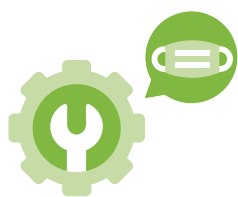
Keeping your services running

Continuity planning means being prepared and knowing what you're capable of when challenged. Helping you understand how to respond and adapt your services to keep helping people throughout.

For the public sector, this can be a robust cloud ERP system to make homeworking easier or using the principles of People Experience to make sure people have what they need to get work done.

What are you facing?

People will be scared about more than the crisis.

To help people through a crisis, understanding its impact on them is crucial. For example, the people who rely on your services will be worried about their families, jobs and what happens next. Your people will have the same concerns too.

However, a key concern for both is what will happen to services like yours once the crisis has passed. But why are they worried?

Right now, the public sector is facing:

- loss of revenue streams (parking charges, council tax etc.)
- challenges posed by outdated legacy systems
- lack of remote working capabilities
- greater demand
- increased restrictions
- staff safety issues
- staff shortages

All of which is putting a huge strain on services and threatens their future. Continuity planning keeps the public sector moving during challenges like these.

People need you more than ever.

In a crisis, people rely heavily on government. To keep some services running, you'll need to deliver them digitally. Which means answering these questions:

- What exactly can be done digitally?
- How does this impact everyone – from service users to the people who deliver them?

- What about services that can't 'go digital' (waste collectors, doctors, nurses, others on the frontline)?
- Which services are most critical? (It's not always the obvious ones).

You're busier than ever.

Pausing some functions, like HR and recruitment, to focus on essential services, might be necessary. But that puts these services under more pressure. So you need to ask:

- What can you do to ease this?
- Can new technology take some of the strain?
- Does everything need to be done by people?

Your continuity plan lets you identify what you can do to overcome these challenges and helps keep your people and services working.

2. Assessing your need

A public sector continuity plan is reliant on the information you provide. It needs to know what services matter most, what people need to provide them, and all other factors surrounding this.

Solutions connect people.

Right now, balancing the welfare of your people with the need to protect your key workers on the frontline, like those in care homes and social care, is paramount.

However, human contact and the ability to access help when needed matter in any crisis. Your continuity plan must take into account the following factors:

- What measures and tools do you have to help people through this?
- How can you grow engagement across the team?
- How are you helping people work together to get things done?
- Does your plan cover everything everyone needs to do their job effectively?

In the public sector, these needs can be far reaching, from laptops to enable home working to crucial PPE.

The 3 things your plan, with the help of tech, must deliver in a crisis.

1. Connectivity: for you, your people and your citizens.

The people you serve need to be able to get in touch with you via their preferred channels. But at the moment, connectivity and networks are letting many in government down. You need to be sure your systems can withstand anything.

Old, young, tech-savvy, or technophobic — talking to everyone and being universally user friendly isn't easy. But in the public sector, it's essential to those relying on you — especially as your services become more and more 'digital'.

2. Capacity: handle sudden rises in demand or changes in working

For ordinary citizens, you aren't just a service — you're a lifeline. Any disruption can have huge, unforeseen impacts on people's lives.

To avoid disruption, you'll need to be as flexible as possible. And ultimately, this means building or buying systems you can rely on all day, every day. Equipping you to:

- Scale capacity, even during a crisis.
- Foresee changes in demand, big or small.
- Adapt to circumstances quickly and safely.

3. Accessibility: everyone can work with the changes without instruction, disruption or problems

Changing times shouldn't change the way people interact with your services. A good continuity plan provides ways to keep services accessible, regardless of circumstance. Good communication through as many channels as possible will help smooth the way, whether that's emails, social media, online forums, text, in person or more.

3. Future considerations

Looking ahead

Your first priority is to help your department and your people through this crisis. Tough times take a toll both financially and personally, and everyone will need time to recover.

But a lot of us are already asking ourselves what the future holds for the public sector.

Business as usual?

The reality is that the current crisis will likely change how the public sector works forever. Making remote working more commonplace, bringing the benefits of digital services to the fore, or change how your services interact with those who use them. But the full impact is yet to be realized.

Whatever the case here or in the future, your plan should cover all eventualities and technology needed to support it.

Give your people the tools to be brilliant.

If the current situation has shown us anything, it's that the public sector is full of amazing people. But that's not enough if they don't have the right tools to do their job.

To do this will probably require infrastructure modernization across the public sector. Continuity of operation planning will top agendas, with everyone wanting technologies that enable wrap-around working.

Infrastructures that do this will use flexible systems, cloud technologies, and automation.

Flexible systems

Your infrastructure should work just as well in a crisis as it does in the day-to-day.

To make this happen the next 3–6 months will probably see a complete shift in IT portfolios to create more flexible solutions. This will fundamentally change how governments procure IT, shifting focus to flexible infrastructures that blend seamlessly with modern tools like Team, Sharepoint, and Azure.

Cloud & Automations

Cloud systems let your people work anywhere, while automations free them to focus on what's important.

They also make your services more flexible and efficient. Removing time-consuming tasks and helping build teams across borders.

A fully integrated cloud infrastructure provides:

- A reduced IT burden
- Greater mobility
- Increased scalability
- Transparency & accountability
- Collaborative tools
- Improved user experience
- Real-time reporting
- 360 visibility

Four Business Drivers for Change

Smarter technology can boost operational efficiency, and empower employees, leading to improved services. Identify the 4 key areas where technology change will drive your business forward with our downloadable infographic.

Download now.

About Unit4

Unit4's next-generation enterprise software supports our customers in delivering an exceptional People Experience to their customers — from students and professionals to the public servants and non-profits doing good in the world. Unit4 transforms work to be more meaningful and inspiring through software that's self-driving, adaptive and intuitive, intelligently automating administrative tasks and providing easy access to the answers people need. Unit4 works with people the way people work.

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