SURREY
COUNTY COUNCIL

Audit & Governance Committee
28 November 2022

Update on the Surrey County Council Learning Points for the Business Continuity Aspects of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery

Purpose of the report:

This report has been submitted to the Audit & Governance Committee to the progress against the main learning points from a Surrey County Council organisation resilience perspective to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The report has been submitted whilst COVID-19 cases in the County and wider UK are increasing and although the Major Incident has been stood down, work is continuing to ensure residents are supported as required.

The Committee instructed at the January 2022 meeting a further update report be presented to the Committee in November 2022 including:

- a debrief from the Corporate Resilience Group and the RAG chart of actions.

- Information on the impact on services from the resident's point of view. Had the right services been prioritised and were those services managed to be provided in accordance with the plan.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

1. The Audit and Governance Committee note and discuss the detail contained in the report.

2. That the Audit and Governance Committee note the RAG Progress contained in the report as appendix 1.

3. The Audit and Governance Committee provide direction for any further reporting on the progress of SCC response arrangements in line with learning from incidents as they occur.

Introduction:

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4. The COVID- 19 pandemic is an ongoing global pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2. It was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of international concern on 20 January 2020, and later a pandemic on the 11 March 2020.

5. Since the end of June 2022, most COVID-19 infections in the UK have been Omicron variants BA.4 or BA.5. In the week ending 25 September 2022, BA.5 made up 85.8% and BA.4 made up 10.6% of all sequenced infections (the sample of positive cases that undergoes additional analysis to identify the variant). Over recent weeks, there has been a small increase in the number of Omicron BA.2.75 infections (3.5% of sequenced infections), but this is not the cause of recent rising infection trends.

Context

6. As included in the previous report to the committee, in advance of the pandemic and following the advice of Public Health England (PHE, now the UK Health Security Agency), Surrey County Council (SCC) had a contingency plan in place for pandemic influenza. The objectives of that plan were to minimise impacts to residents and staff, and to safeguard the health and wellbeing of Surrey's residents by minimising the disruptive effects of a flu outbreak on the council's critical activities.

7. SCC is a CAT 1 responder as defined by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, regs 2005, and also plays a key role in partnership working within the Local Resilience Forum (LRF), of which the objectives for response are to reduce harm to people and minimise impact on the environment and economy.

8. On the 19 March 2020, a major incident was declared by the LRF, and the following day a Strategic Co-ordinating Group was set up, with sub-groups established for key work streams to manage the response. The internal SCC governance structure for managing the response has remained consistent throughout the pandemic, with the partnership structures evolving throughout the pandemic as required.

9. This report is designed to focus on the internal SCC response to COVID-19, highlighting lessons learned in the process from a business continuity perspective. The lessons learned have been captured by two separate feedback exercises held in six monthly intervals. The first lessons learned process was recorded by colleagues from the Council's Strategic Commissioning Team and the second debrief was coordinated by the SCC Emergency Management Team.

Progress of the SCC COVID Debrief Report Recommendations

10. The RAG Progress against the Debrief Report Recommendations is outlined in the tracker included as appendix 1, of this report.

11. Following the recommendations and learning from COVID-19, SCC has reviewed the response Command, Control and Coordination arrangements across the Council Services. The work has been done to ensure that SCC services are managed in a different way to ensure the response to Surrey communities and align to the expectation of our partners in the Local Resilience Forum. The SCC Response structure has been included in appendix 2.

12. The SCC response arrangements align to the expectations of the Joint Emergency Service Inter-Operability Principles (JESIP) and as such the organisation's learning is both dynamic and continual. The summer period of 2022 saw other emerging risks and threats come to fruition, including Heatwave conditions, heathland fires and water supply outages combining to have a significant and adverse impact on areas in Surrey. Learning from these incidents builds on the recommendation from the COVID-19 response to ensure that improvements are made to support residents, in particular those who are vulnerable or require greater support when an emergency occurs.

13. The oversight of the progress of the recommendations from the COVID-19 response and other recent incidents is the responsibility of the SCC Corporate Resilience Group. The planning structures for the SCC resilience is included in appendix 3.

Information on the impact on services from the resident's point of view

14. Through the debrief process it was thought that the prioritisation of services was broadly correct, although there were gaps identified. These gaps were mainly due to the national lockdown restrictions that were not included in the national planning arrangements at that time.

15. The SCC business continuity arrangements pre-identify the services into the priority groups, and the current prioritisation is included in appendix 4. At the time of the first stages of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Public Health was not included as a Group A service, this was reviewed and changed through the Ops Group moving the Public Health team to Group A.

16. Although it was not captured as a learning point in the debrief process, the need to continually review the prioritisation of services was undertaken throughout the response. The initial prioritisation of services aimed to provide the first assessment and through the Ops Group it was known that it would be necessary to review the service prioritisation for longer running incidents.

17. There were challenges in ensuring that the SCC Service prioritisation remained current and met the expectation of our residents in line with the restrictions in place as the pandemic progressed. Through the Ops Group, a risk-based approach was undertaken to provide for the health,

safety and welfare of our staff alongside the requirements and need of residents using or depending on the services we provide.

18. Through SCC managers' professional links with other County Councils and through the LGA, it was possible to ensure that there was consistency across the region and England in both the 'lockdown' of services in the early stages of the pandemic, through to the gradual reopening of society.

19. Given the long period of time that was required to manage the SCC response, it was noted that a review of decisions taken should have been more often and through a more formal process. On occasions, decisions take in the earlier stages of the response should have been reviewed to understand where impacts on residents' lives could have been catered for in different ways over periods of time.

Conclusions:

Financial and value for money implications

20. The report has been submitted to the Audit and Governance Committee to update on the progress against the RAG rating for the COVID-19 debrief actions, as such it is not seen that there are any direct financial impacts caused by this report.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

21. An EQIA has not been provided for this report as the submission to the committee has been made to provide an update on the progress against the debrief actions from the COVID-19 Pandemic.

22. Although not included in the debrief, further work is progressing to include an outline EQIA in each of the SCC and Local Resilience Forum plans to be used when the arrangements are activated.

Risk Management Implications

23. COVID-19 and other respiratory diseases, such as seasonal flu, remain an ongoing risk that is monitored by the UK Health Security Agency. We are also seeing other emerging diseases such as Monkey Pox.

24. There has been an increase in avian influenza across the UK, leading to concerns for the wild and domestic flocks. Birds are the hosts for most avian influenza viruses and a variety of influenza subtypes can be found in birds, particularly in waterfowl and shore birds. Domestic poultry are especially vulnerable, and the virus can rapidly cause epidemics in flocks. Human infections with avian influenza are rare. However, some viruses, such as H5N1 or H7N9, have been associated with rare cases of human disease.

25. Although not directly linked to climate change, we are seeing an increase in the number and severity of incidents.

26. The cost of living and impacts caused by the current global and national uncertainties is a new risk being planned over this winter period.

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Next steps:

27. The direction for planning for the organisation's resilience has shifted to the risks and threats for the winter period focusing on the likelihood of severe weather events linked to a changing climate and the global financial crisis. This includes, but is not limited, to the following areas of work:

- The cost of living for our staff and residents
- Industrial action affecting delivery of a Group A service to residents
- Risk to utility supply, focusing on electricity provision
- Planning for shortage of petrol and diesel
- Extreme weather including flooding and storms
- Ongoing impacts from COVID-19 and other seasonal respiratory diseases
- New restrictions for avian flu and the ongoing risk of outbreaks
- The risk of continued protracted and concurrent incidents

28. Work will continue to support the implementation of learning from all recent incidents.

29. SCC will be required to support the UK COVID-19 Public Inquiry chair by Baroness (Heather) Hallett that has recently started proceedings. The Inquiry has been formally established under the Inquiries Act (2005) and is able to require organisations and witnesses to attend the inquiry and provide evidence.

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Sources/background papers:

- 00 - public agenda AG JAN 2022 (pack).pdf
- SCC - Covid-19 Internal Lessons Learned Report
- data.gov.uk, Abstract information of COVID Deaths, 17 Oct 22,
- Coronavirus (COVID-19) latest insights - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)
- Doctrine - JESIP Website

Appendix One – SCC Covid Debrief Recommendations and RAG Rating

Serial	Recommendation	Owner	Group/Partners	RAG	Comment
COVDb 02/01	Make best use of the EMRT by raising its profile and strengthening its role within the rest of the organisation – Clarity around governance and decision making	KS/IG	SCC CRG		SCC EMRT have now moved into the Environment and Transport and Infrastructure Directorate. This brings the line management of the team under the CLT Resilience Lead Director (KS). New Governance for planning and response has been agreed (included in this report) to support need for dynamic decision making in incident while maintain governance and oversight This recommendation is linked to, Linked to COVDb 02/06 COVDb 02/11
COVDb 02/02	Sharing of knowledge and processes between services in peace time to enable best practice – Platforms such as share point should be considered	IG/AM/HD	SCC CRG SCC CRRF		CRG and CRRF are now include 'deep dives' into resilience issues for specific services on a periodic or needs basis. Planned exercises aim to test assumptions against risk-based scenarios. Share Point and Teams Channels are not established for the appropriate sharing of information
COVDb 02/03	Top Management support on the importance of business continuity and embedding it within the organisation	KS/IG	SCC CLT SCC CRG		SCC EMRT have now moved into the Environment and Transport and Infrastructure Directorate. This brings the line management of the team under the CLT Resilience Lead Director (KS). There is an agree refocus on organisational resilience to provide stable service operation rather than on the crisis management to embed best practice across services.
COVDb 02/04	Consideration should be given to organisation wide contingency plans and plans that deal with prolonged incidents	EMRT DM	SCC CRG SCC CRRF		The recommendation has been reopened as we look to risk associated with the winter 2022/23. There is a focusing on the service resilience during this period as there is an expectation that current risk and threats may impact on the ability of SCC Service to continue operating as BAU.
COVDb 02/05	Dedicated resource within teams to support business continuity within the different directorates	IG/AF/BS	SCC CRRF SCC HR		Staff have been redeployed to support other incidents and events (i.e. Op London Bridge). Working is currently underway to activate the redeployment pool considering the Winter risk and threats. This is linked to COVDb 02/18 and COVDb 02/19
COVDb 02/06	Establish governance such as Ops Group as early as reasonably practicable	SCC CRG SCC CRRF	SCC OPs Grp		New Governance for planning and response has been agreed (included in this report) to support need for dynamic decision making in incident while maintain governance and oversight This recommendation is linked to, Linked to COVDb 02/01 and COVIDb 02/11
COVDb 02/07	Subject matter expertise is widely sought and opportunities to make best use of them should be shared	IG	SCC Ops Grp		SCC Ops Grp reviews attendance at each meeting while monitoring the progression of the incident and the impact on service delivery to residents and the wider impact on our communities, ensuring that at any time there is the correct level of representation at the meeting from relevant services. This is linked to COVDb 02/14 and COVDb 02/15
COVDb 02/08	All partners should understand how the internal governance relates to the wider resilience response externally	KS/IG	SCC Ops Grp SLRF		This is GREEN for SCC internal Partners AMBER for external partners in the LRF, action are in place for the LRF to address the need for a wider partnership response to support the requirements of the response
COVDb 02/09	An understanding of roles and responsibilities should be done as early as possible when responding to a crisis	EMRT DM	SCC OPs Grp		The SCC EMRT DM is tasked to provide and overview of the responding services and partners roles and responsibilities during the response as required. This includes any legal duties or procedural actions required, and is aligned to JESIP and the JDM requirement to consider Powers, Policies and Procedures
COVDb 02/10	Maintaining the relationships established during the crisis on return to business as usual is important	All	Through BAU working		Further progress is required in ensuring that the support for critical roles in the emergency response is still required. This is in area of admin support to the various groups and task required to manage the response in line with JESIP and the expectations required by a Category one response
COVDb 02/11	The role of the Emergency Management team identified early at the start of the crisis so that its expertise could be utilised	KS/IG	SCC CRG		SCC EMRT have now moved into the Environment and Transport and Infrastructure Directorate. This brings the line management of the team under the CLT Resilience Lead Director (KS). New Governance for planning and response has been agreed (included in this report) to support need for dynamic decision making in incident while maintain governance and oversight This recommendation is linked to, Linked to COVDb 02/01
COVDb 02/12	Establishing how members could be utilised in a major incident so that public accountability is gained i.e. Council expenditure	KS/IG	SCC CRG		Planning session and exercise is being planned with SCC Cabinet to explore this issue. Sessions being held with Town and Parish Councils where incident have occurred to capture leaning Continued work with LGA for their guidance to members A councillor's guide to civil emergencies | Local Government Association
COVDb 02/13	Decision making to be empowered at all levels so that not all decisions are required to be made by the CLT and instead the CLT become informed.	KS/IG	SCC CLT SCC CRG		This has been included in the Governance and C3 arrangements. SCC Director is in place to support manager decisions requiring a step outside the normal operating procedures to meet the needs of residents.
COVDb 02/14	Identify the importance of data early and include to support decisions where appropriate	NK/IG	SCC OPs Grp		Data and Intelligence leads will form part of the Ops Grp with the taks of providing data and intelligence to guide the decisions making as part of the SCC response and where required linked ot the wider SLRF partnership This is linked to COVDb 02/07
COVDb 02/15	Embedding subject matter experts from the communications team into the services to provide guidance and advice at the start of a crisis	AN	SCC Ops Grp SLRF MIG		This is not embedded as the standard approach to the emergency response This is kinked to COVDb 02/07

Appendix One – SCC Covid Debrief Recommendations and RAG Rating

Serial	Recommendation	Owner	Group/Partners	RAG	Comment
COVDb 02/16	National communications being received simplified for all, including residents, so that demand on contact centres does not become overwhelming	AN	SCC Ops Grp SLRF MIG		SCC Comms lead on this for SCC and coordinated the wider partner communication through the Surrey Multi-agency Information Group
COVDb 02/17	Continuing relationships established during the response in business as usual times	All	SCC CRG SCC CRRF		Relationships are maintained through the SCC CRG and CRRF, and include an on-ongoing exercising and training
COVDb 02/18	Transferable skills identified in business as usual times so suitable redeployment can happen with pace in a crisis	All	SCC CRG SCC CRRF		This action has been reopened following learning from the summer period and will form the continual development of the SCC response to incidents and emergencies
COVDb 02/19	Sharing redeployment terms and conditions in advance so staff have a good understanding of expectations and reward.	AF/BS	SCC Ops Grp		This action has been reopened following learning from the summer period and will form the continual development of the SCC response to incidents and emergencies
COVDb 02/20	Individuals identified and ready to deploy as and when required from the resourcing pool	IG/AF/BS	SCC CRRF SCC CRG		This action has been reopened following learning from the summer period and will form the continual development of the SCC response to incidents and emergencies

Glossary

KS – Katie Stewart
IG- Ian Good
AM – Alan Morris
HD – Helen Doherty
AF – Ashley Field
BS – Bells Smith
NK – Nicola Kilvington
AN – Andrea Newman

SCC CRG – Corporate Resilience Group

JESIP – Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles

SCC Ops Grp – SCC Operational Group

JDM – Joint Decision-Making Model

EMRT DM- SCC Emergency Management Team Duty Manager

SLRF MIG – Surrey Local Resilience

SCC EMRT – SCC Emergency Management and Resilience Team

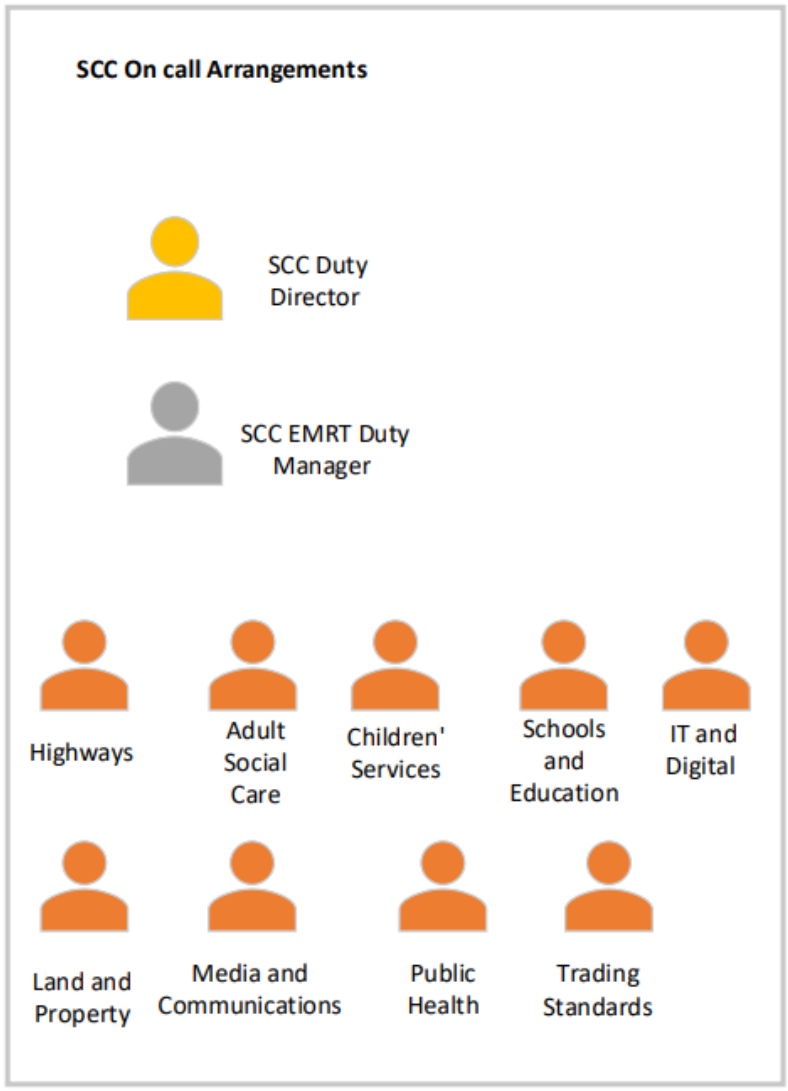
C3 – Command, Control and Coordination

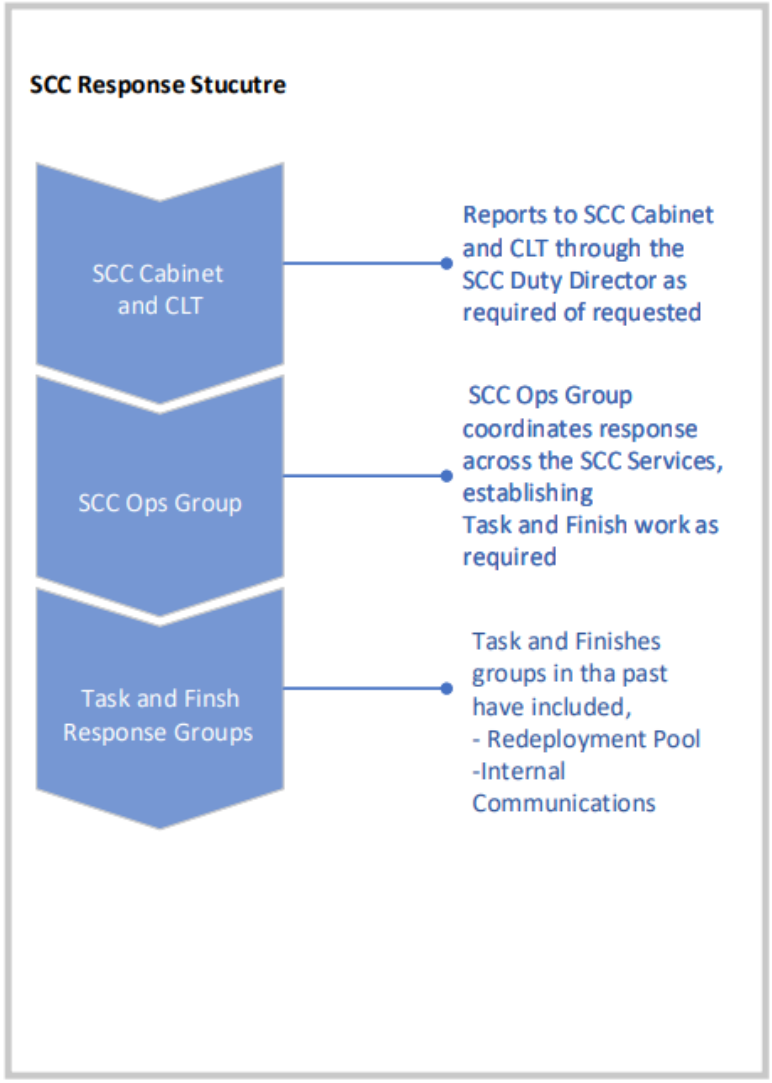
SCC CRRF – SCC Council Risk and Resilience Forum

SCC CRG – Corporate Resilience Group

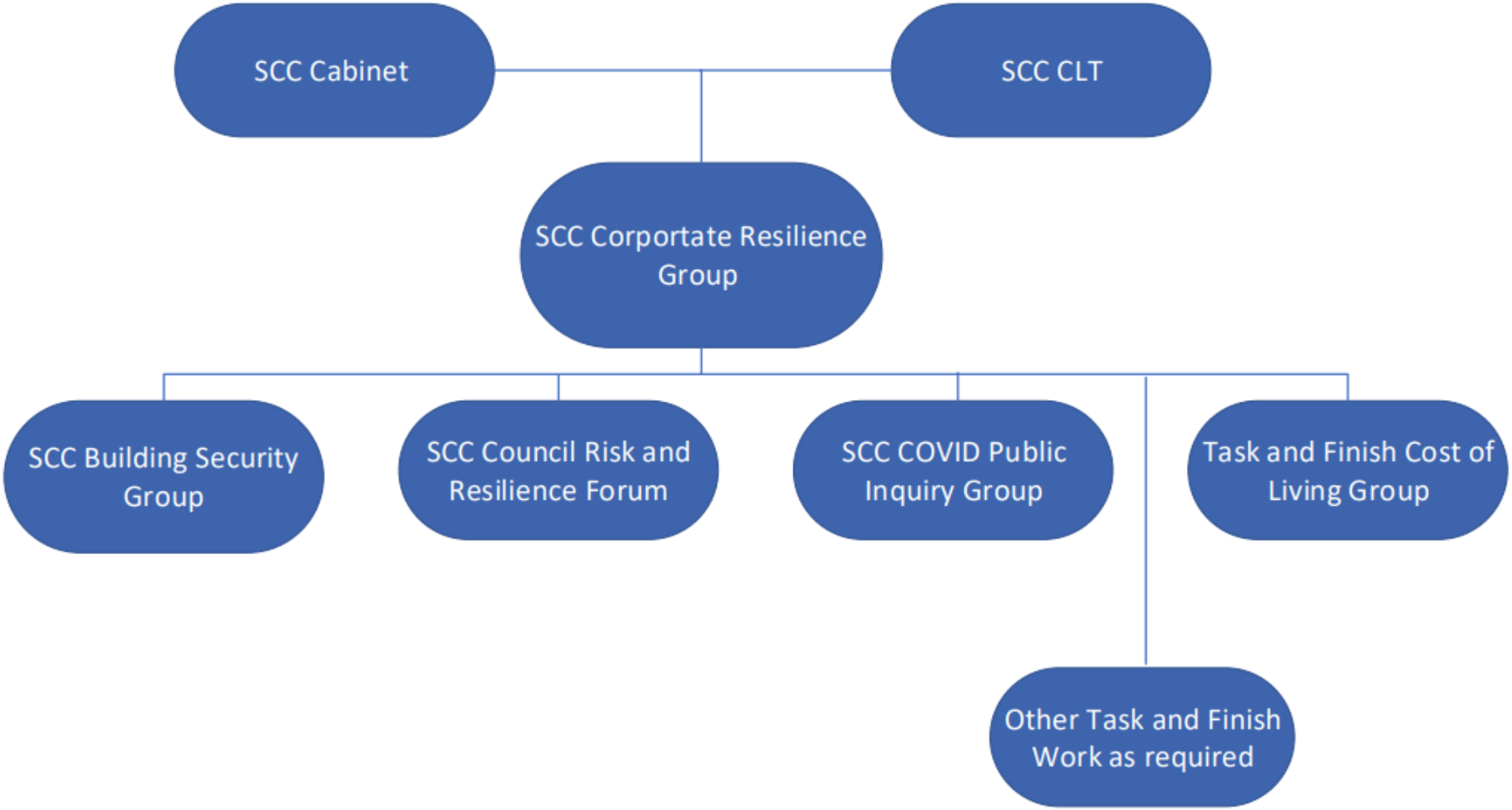
SCC Ops Group – SCC Operational Group

Appendix 2 - SCC Oncall and Response Structures





Appendix 3 - SCC Resilience Planning Groups



Appendix 4. SCC Service Prioritisation

Group A	
Health, Wellbeing & Adult Social Care	Adult Social Care LD Autism and Transition Adult Social Care Service Delivery Mental Health
Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture	Children's Services Commissioning & Prevention
Public Service Reform	Public Health
Customer & Communities	Customer Services Trading Standards Health & Safety
Environment, Transport & Infrastructure	Emergency Management & Resilience Team
Chief Executive Office	Communications & Engagement Coroners
	Surrey Fire & Rescue Service
Group B	
Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture	Schools & Learning
Corporate Resources	IT & Digital Land & Assets Transformation Finance Procurement & Commissioning Insight & Intelligence
Customer & Communities	Registration Services Library Service
Environment, Transport & Infrastructure	Highways & Transport Waste
Chief Executive Office	Human Resources & Organisational Development
Public Service Reform	Strategy and Commissioning
Group C	
All Other Services	