Guidance Note 6 – Exercising for Resilience

With critical activities, resources and recovery priorities established, and preparations made for crisis management, all preparations and plans should be tested to ensure that they work, and to make sure that any gaps that would exist in plans can be identified in a controlled environment.

Exercises may be completed on part of a unit plan, on a specific department, or on the whole plan, depending on a variety of factors, such as the maturity of the plan, or the complexity of operations. Typical exercise formats and their benefits are shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exercise Format</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Drawbacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desk check, audit or update</td>
<td>Quick and simple review of content</td>
<td>May not have sufficient depth to notice practical improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keeps plans up-to-date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Risk-free, requires minimal resource</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk-through, Walk-through, scenario test</td>
<td>Involves multiple perspectives, may involve some consideration of scenario</td>
<td>Scenario-based testing may prove limiting due to scope of scenarios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Test, full simulation</td>
<td>Pseudo-real test of a plan, provides a thorough examination of effectiveness</td>
<td>Requires significant planning resource and potential down-time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Every MRC establishment should have within their continuity plan, an exercise schedule, detailing how much time and resource the unit will commit to exercising, the scope, aim and timetable of exercising.

Planning an exercise

An exercise should be planned to test the documented continuity plan. For a desktop or scenario exercise, resources may be required (crisis management team, meeting room, flip-charts, whiteboards etc). The scenario should be decided based on the risk register of the unit.

Post exercise review

Following any exercise of any part of a plan, the Continuity Coordinator should complete an immediate verbal debrief with the crisis management
team, followed by a written post-exercise report to improve resilience to disruption. A template post-exercise report is shown in Appendix 1.
Appendix 1 - Post Exercise Report Template

Executive Summary

Were the objectives of the exercise achieved? What were the main issues and lessons learned? Which parts of the continuity plan need remedial work?

Introduction

The exercise took place on <insert exercise date> at the <insert unit> offices at <insert location>. <insert names> directed the exercise, with assistance from the <insert any other participating agency or support consultancy>.

This exercise provided an opportunity to <describe the exercise in one paragraph> e.g. “explore the PR response to a major incident with significant casualties and telephony outages. This was a high pressure event designed to identify communications fault lines.”

The scenario was current, realistic in the context of <insert unit> and its relevance to reputation is important. Although it is likely that other parts of MRC and external organisations would be involved, the scenario was primarily a problem for <insert unit>.

1. Aim

The aim of this exercise was to <insert the aim>. E.g. test the IT data recovery plan, test the unit plan against a fire scenario.

2. Objectives

The 5 objectives for this exercise included:

1. <Insert Objective>
2. <Insert Objective>
3. <Insert Objective>
4. <Insert Objective>
5. <Insert Objective>

3. Constraints & Limitations

Usually the constraints will be:

• Time: i.e. how long was the exercise allowed to be.
• Participants: perhaps for operational reasons not all the staff could be there.
• Location: perhaps for convenience the exercise was not actually at the real location.

A brief example is offered below:
The following constraints and limitations were considered in the planning of the exercise.

• To maximise the learning opportunity, the exercise was scheduled to take place during the directors’ quarterly meeting in London.
• Because of flight times the exercise had to commence at 1400 hrs and could only last three hours.
4. Methodology

This is just a simple description of how the exercise was delivered, i.e. as a desktop exercise. If a training element is required before the conduct of the exercise, this should be included in the methodology. Below is an example of a desktop exercise methodology.

- Exercise Rising Damp was an access denial scenario, (a flood) for the XXX and YYY departments/buildings/units.
- It was delivered in PowerPoint and hand-out format.
- It was preceded by some didactic training on the Strategic and Tactical relationship.
- The exercise duration was from 1230-1500.
- The session itself was preceded by some training of the executive support team staff.

5. Participants

Three groups of people took part in the exercise

5.1 <insert unit> TEAM

The following people took part in the exercise as members of the <insert unit> CMT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2 Directing staff

The following people planned, delivered and facilitated the exercise.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Findings

This is the 'meat' of the report and whilst all the other details are important this is what will make a difference, so in the event of a lack of time, concentrate effort here.

- All comments should be related back to the stated objectives.
- The 'Finding' is a description of what actually happened as opposed to perhaps what the plan forecast should happen.
- The 'Issue' is a description of what effect the finding had or how it might be dealt with in future.
### 7. Lessons Learned

Relate to the issues from the findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref #</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>Issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 8. Recommendations

There will probably be several lessons identified. The recommendations section describes what these are, how you are going to do something about them and what action is now required. Keep it short and simple. An example is offered below.

*After taking into account the findings, suggestions made in this report and additional feedback, the following 5 recommendations are made:*

- That consideration is given to the location and appropriate staffing of the team.
- That primary team members, alternates and support staff are identified, trained and take part in regular exercises.
- Communications are better integrated into the team, and that all media facing personnel have undertaken appropriate training.
- That the plan references the mechanics of invocation, skill sets and contact details for all internal and external specialists.
- That all relevant personnel take part in the development of plans.

### 9. Conclusions

The conclusions of this Post Exercise Report are based upon the degree to which the Exercise achieved its aim and stated objectives (categorised as fully achieved, broadly achieved, partially achieved, not achieved). Areas for further development should be summarised.

*Example:*
• **Objective 1: Rehearse Early Decision-making**
  o Conclusion: Broadly Achieved. Location, composition and training of the primary and alternate team members and support staff needs to continue to be developed.

• **Objective 2: Exercise notification and communication for major incidents**
  o Conclusion: Achieved. Communication routines need to be developed