

Melton Borough Council

Waking up to find head office gutted overnight by fire

Dealing with the immediate aftermath of a fire is a daunting and stressful time for any business or organisation. When you have nearly 50,000 customers relying on you daily for essential services and provision the potential is even worse. For Melton Borough Council, waking up to find their head office gutted by an early morning fire it was essential that they could operate 'business as normal' as quickly and efficiently as possible – and with ICM Continuity Services they achieved exactly that.

Covering a population of 48,000, Melton Borough Council is a busy local authority responsible for the full range of Council duties across the bustling town of Melton Mowbray and the surrounding area, in Leicestershire – from benefits payments to refuse collections, amenities to street cleaning.

When, in early Summer 2008 a fire ripped through the Council's offices the Chief Executive, Lynn Aisbett was looking at a potential double-disaster. "A Council's office acts on two fronts", she explained. "It is both a store for countless records, data and files covering the huge range of services we provide, and also a highly networked organisation HQ. The building comprises many developed systems in place to keep services running smoothly and also to ensure that, when we receive enquiries from the public or need to find information in hurry, we can find it as efficiently as possible."

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Lynn Aisbett
Chief Executive, Melton Borough Council



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With the fire hit, the loss of this HQ, fundamental to the smooth operation of the borough, brought with it the potential to bring the council's services grinding to a halt. "The consequences of the council being unable to fulfil its role would have been extremely far reaching", commented Lynn. "We operate across so many areas of the borough's day to day operations it would have only been a short matter of time before essential services were effected and local residents began to suffer the consequences."

Essential planning

Luckily for the residents of Melton Mowbray, Melton Borough Council was quick to turn to its business continuity supplier, ICM Continuity Services to organise alternative office accommodation for key staff and ensure that downtime for the Council would be as minimal as possible.

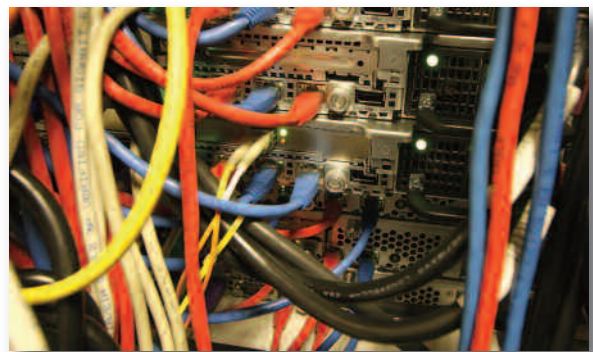
"As events unfolded throughout the morning we were in contact with the council and were able to invoke the previously agreed business continuity strategy", explained John Mills, Service Director, ICM Continuity Services. "Melton Borough Council had an existing arrangement with us for the provision of work stations and facilities at our East Midlands Business Continuity Centre in Nottingham – only a short distance from the council offices."

John continued, "We had previously agreed with officials at the council on the level of resource they would need – things such as workstations for key members of staff, networked phone lines, internet access and the such like, so that should something like a fire ever strike we would be ready and waiting for them in Nottingham at a moment's notice. What was also essential for the council was our ability to provide a top-level facility for them - a factor that paid dividends for the council as staff quickly found that our East Midlands Business Continuity Centre provided an outstanding home-from-home experience, and initial doubts they had about working from a new office were quickly dispelled."

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Proof in the pudding

For Lynn Aisbett this forward planning proved essential on that Summer morning. "I don't want to think what we would have done should we not have planned for an eventuality like this. When you're faced with suddenly losing your offices you have so many things to do and people to organise you need the help of someone like ICM to absorb a huge part of the stress – trusting them completely to have a new, working premises ready for you straight away."

Lynn further said "There's also no doubt that the extensive testing programme we had with ICM left us fully confident that our IT systems would actually work in their new location! Working with ICM left us free to concentrate on other essential matters and made a massive positive difference to how we coped with the disruption the fire caused."

"Council's and public bodies often have 'best practice' guidelines to adhere to when it comes to business continuity", commented Mike Osborne, Managing Director, ICM Continuity Services. "Because of the essential role they play in so many areas of public life there is a requirement for them to assure a clear strategy should they suffer a potential business interruption. Melton Council is a perfect example of planning and forward thinking help avert what could otherwise have been not only a fire, but a serious breakdown in council services across the borough."

He added, "With Melton it's also worth considering how the invocation worked so well for the council over a protracted period of time. It's often the perception that a disruption typically only lasts a few days or weeks at most. Melton Council had a requirement that lasted four months, which demonstrates why the functionality and comfort of our Business Continuity Centres is essential to maintain the smooth running of an organisation."

Moving on

With the building now repaired, the council is moving back home. "Events such as these really do bring home to us all the value of those business continuity planning and strategy meetings, which at the time can seem too hypothetical", says Lynn. "To anyone who doubts the value of business continuity strategies, or thinks events like a fire will never happen to them, you need to think again – without planning and a partner such as ICM to be there the moment you need them the potential for a drama turning into a business-fatal crisis is just too risky."



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