

**Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy  
Overview Committee**

**23 July 2009**

**Minutes**



**HILLINGDON**  
LONDON

	<p><b>Members Present:</b> Councillors Richard Lewis (Chairman), Sid Garg, Carol Melvin, Robin Sansarpuri and Michael White.</p> <p><b>Apologies:</b> Councillor Liz Kemp</p> <p><b>Officers Present:</b> Amanda Marsh (Head of Human Resources), Chris Norman (Head of Business Services), Steve Palmer (Head of ICT), Mike Price (Civil Protection Manager), John Purcell (Bereavement Manager), Lloyd White (Head of Democratic Services) and Khalid Ahmed (Democratic Services Manager).</p>	
<b>15.</b>	<p><b>Declarations of Interest</b></p> <p>None.</p>	
<b>16.</b>	<p><b>Minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2009</b></p> <p>Agreed as an accurate record.</p>	
<b>17.</b>	<p><b>Exclusion of the press and public</b></p> <p>It was agreed that all items of business were considered in public.</p>	
<b>18.</b>	<p><b>Budget Outturn and Context for 2009/10</b></p> <p>The report was withdrawn.</p>	<p>Action By:</p>
<b>19.</b>	<p><b>Major Review: Impact of a Pandemic in Hillingdon and the Effects on Council Services and Residents – Witness Session</b></p> <p>The draft scoping report was considered and Members agreed that the review should only concentrate on the effects of a pandemic on Council services, including schools and further education colleges. The scoping report should be amended to that affect.</p>	

This first witness session was to focus on the business and continuity plans that the Council had already in place in the event of a major pandemic.

**Mike Price – Civil Protection Manager**

Members were informed that pandemic planning had been carried out for a number of years based on Government guidance. Issues raised in the presentation included:

- Hillingdon Primary Care Trust was the lead agency for a pandemic in the Borough
- The Council had an Influenza Pandemic Group and a Flu Working Group which met weekly. There was a “Gold Officer” rota which operated 24 hours a day and which could make strategic level decisions
- The Council had been planning for a pandemic for many months, at a local and pan-London level. Reference was made to the London Regional Resilience Flu Pandemic Response Plan and other pandemic documents, which had guided the Council’s planning
- The Council’s Corporate Communications Team would be heavily involved and would make sure communication links were clear with the Council’s multi-agency partners
- Reference was made to the hygiene information which had been given to staff. This included the covering of noses and mouths with a tissue when a person coughed or sneezed and throwing the tissue in the bin after it was used. Washing hands frequently with soap and water, especially after coughing and sneezing on hands, and after going to the toilet. The cleaning of keyboards, phones and desks before finishing work with surface disinfection wipes. This was particularly important for staff who “hot desked”
- Those staff that did not have easy access to hand washing facilities would be issued with hand gels. Hand gels would also be positioned at entrances to Council buildings to enable members of the public and visitors to use them
- Work was underway to source mass communications and business continuity software. This followed the identification of a capability gap during snow and power failure events in early 2009. This software would be extremely beneficial not only during a pandemic but also during any other emergency / business continuity response

**Steve Palmer – Head of ICT**

- The Council's IT facilities and Customer Contact Centre had emergency planning for a number of scenarios. Mutual aid was available from neighbouring West London Councils
- If the Civic Centre's IT network was not available there was a private network the Council could use which was used across London
- Priority applications would be run and remote access could be given for around 75 staff
- The staff in public facing services such as the Customer Contact Centre were multi-skilled. Home working would be an option to reduce the threat of the spread of a virus
- Multi-skilled staff had been trained in areas such as Council Tax to enable these essential services and duties to be carried out. Provision had been made if there was a serious escalation of the present flu pandemic to transfer staff to those essential front line services
- Communications take place through the Council's intranet site but information would be communicated through team briefings. HR would provide updates on the intranet as they were presently doing with the swine flu pandemic
- The storing of electronic information off site was being looked at
- There was provision within Breakspear Crematorium for IT backup

#### **Amanda Marsh – Head of HR**

Members were provided with details of the managing attendance arrangements which currently existed during the swine flu pandemic.

- At the present time there were no plans to change the present policy in relation to trigger levels for sickness absence and the payback scheme, although the situation would be continued to be monitored
- In relation to those people who would have to stop at home to care for a family member who had flu, no special provision had been made at this stage. Staff would have to take special or unpaid leave. However if the effects of the pandemic increased and there was a major impact on Council staff, each case would be looked at on an individual basis and the policy could change. This was in keeping with other London authorities.
- During a major pandemic the managing attendance policy would have to be flexible and consideration would

have to be given to cost implications and balance this with sensitivity

- Regular reports of swine flu cases within the Council was reported to the London control room which fed into the national statistics
- Performance management targets could be affected if Council staff were majorly affected by a pandemic
- The redeployment of staff would be looked at to enable essential front-line services to be maintained. However, it would need to be ensured that staff had the necessary skills and the appropriate CRB checks.

In relation to workforce skills Members agreed that an initial recommendation of this review should be that a skills and knowledge audit be undertaken of the Council's workforce to enable a computerised database to be stored. This would readily identify staff that could be redeployed to essential front line services if required. This information could also carry the following information about staff: those that had been vaccinated, those that had had the virus, those with children, and those who were carers, those that were front line staff and those who come into contact with the public. The system capacity to deliver this would need to be determined.

#### **John Purcell - Bereavement Manager**

Members were provided with details of the Bereavement Services within Hillingdon and the contingency arrangements for a major pandemic. The main issues in the presentation were:

- Bereavement Services comprised of Breakspear Crematorium, cemeteries and the mortuary. The crematorium had two qualified technicians, with five in reserve. Staff were multi-skilled and if needed, the crematorium could operate 24 hours a day
- 70% of people were cremated and 30% buried. Burials had been outsourced
- Robust business continuity plans were in place in the event of emergencies such as a pandemic
- Mortuary storage was limited but in the event of an emergency, legislation would be passed to enable the use of mass graves. For increased numbers extra storage space could be provided and the service would work closely with neighbouring authorities
- For post mortems, staff wore protective clothing and face masks for people who had died of swine flu as the virus stayed alive for 24 hours after the person had died
- Reciprocal arrangements existed with neighbouring local authorities

- Cremations could be speeded up from 30 minute slots down to 10 minute slots.
- In case of orders that there should be no congregating of crowds, funerals could be limited to immediate family and the service webcast to family and friends enabling them to be able to watch and/or participate in the service
- Burials in mass graves could be initiated if required as a last resort

### **Lloyd White – Head of Democratic Services**

Lloyd White had responsibilities for Registrars and the Council's democratic processes and outlined to Members the main issues:

- Robust contingency plans were in place for Registrars in the event of an increase in deaths caused by a pandemic
- Extra stationery was available, other administrative staff within Democratic Services could be used to assist in registering an increased number of deaths
- For May 2010 for the local elections mitigation measures would be required in polling stations and at the count with hand gels etc. Further planning would be needed for this
- Provision would be made in the Council's Constitution to enable the Council's decision making process to continue in the event of meetings being inquorate due to a pandemic
- Web casting of meetings would be an option to mitigate the spread of a virus

Members agreed that an initial recommendation of the review should be making changes to the Council's Constitution to provide contingency arrangements for the decision making process. This should also include the option of web casting of Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings.

Discussion took place on the issues raised by witnesses and the following points were made:

- There were presently around 30 reported cases of swine flu amongst staff within the Council. This was a rolling number and did not mean that 30 people were absent
- Lessons could be learnt from other countries that have had experience of dealing with other health related emergencies such as a pandemic
- Communication was important and should be to all staff and not just to managers. Giving clear and concise information would prevent the rumour mill

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Robust contingency plans were also required for Council contractors</li> <li>• Special reference was made to schools and that priority should be given to planning for the expected upturn in swine flu for the autumn which would have an impact within schools</li> <li>• A vaccination programme for swine flu was expected to take place in the autumn or towards the end of the year, with possible prioritisation being given to healthcare and social care professionals and emergency service workers</li> <li>• The Council needed to identify the staff to prioritise for vaccinations and to look at using the Occupational Health Suite to possibly carry this out</li> <li>• Additional hygiene measures should be looked at such as the provision of tissues, paper towels within toilets, and looking at ways of improving the hygiene of toilet door handles</li> </ul> <p>Members thanked officers for the information provided and it was agreed to amend the scoping report to enable the following witnesses to be invited to the next meeting on 8 September:- PCT representative, an officer from Education and Children’s Services, an officer from Facilities Management, an officer from Corporate Communications and a representative from Uxbridge College.</p> <p><b>Resolved –</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That the information provided by the witnesses be noted and approval be given to the initial recommendations of the review.</li> <li>2. That the scoping report be amended to reflect the invited witnesses for the Committee’s next meeting.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Khalid Ahmed</b></p> <p><b>Khalid Ahmed</b></p>
<p><b>20.</b></p>	<p><b>Work programme 2009/10</b></p> <p>The Work programme was amended to reflect the witness session for 8 September 2009 meeting.</p> <p><b>Resolved –</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That the Work Programme as amended be noted.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Khalid Ahmed</b></p>
<p><b>21.</b></p>	<p><b>Cabinet Forward Plan</b></p> <p>Noted.</p>	

	<b>Meeting closed at 8.50pm</b> <b>Next meeting: 8 September 2009 at 7.30pm</b>	
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These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Khalid Ahmed on 01895 250833. Circulation of these minutes are to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.