

Major review: Impact of a Pandemic in Hillingdon and the Effects on Council Services

Witness session 2

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REASON FOR ITEM

To enable the Committee to continue to gather evidence as part of their review into the impact of a pandemic in Hillingdon and the effects on Council services and residents.

OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO THE COMMITTEE

1. Question the witnesses using the suggested questions
2. Ask additional/supplementary questions as required
3. Highlight issues for further investigation

INFORMATION

1. At the Committee's meeting on 23 July the Committee had their first witness session for the review into a Pandemic in Hillingdon. During discussion on the scoping report for the review Members felt that the scope of the review should be narrowed and should concentrate on the effects of a pandemic on Council services, including schools and further education colleges. An updated scoping report to reflect this change is attached to this report as appendix 1.
2. The first witness session concentrated on the business and continuity plans which the Council already had in place in the event of a pandemic. Members heard evidence from the Civil Protection Manager, the Head of ICT, the Head of HR, the Council's Bereavement Officer and the Head of Democratic Services. Details of the first witness session are found in Agenda item 3 - Minutes of the last meeting.
3. During the meeting Members made the following initial recommendations:
 - That a skills and knowledge audit be undertaken of the Council's workforce to enable a computerised database to be stored.

This recommendation was made to enable the re-deployment of staff to front line, public facing services and to enable essential services to be

continued to be provided in the event of a pandemic having a major impact on the Council's workforce. The data base could also carry information about staff that had been vaccinated against a virus, those who had had the virus, those with child care responsibilities, those who were carers, those who were front line staff and those who came into with members of the public. Members noted that the system capacity to deliver this would need to be determined.

- That changes be made to the Council's Constitution to make provision for contingency arrangements to be in place to enable the decision making process to continue in the event of a major pandemic.

This recommendation was made as a result of discussion around the possible option of web casting of Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings, to mitigate the problems caused by a severe pandemic.

4. After Members had heard the evidence from the witnesses a general discussion took place on the information provided and Members made the following observations:

- 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
- Robust contingency plans were also required for Council contractors
- 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
- 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
- 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
- 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

WITNESSES

5. To reflect the points and issues raised at the last meeting the following witnesses have been invited to attend the second witness session:

- Kevin Mullins, Hillingdon Primary Care Trust
- Emma Marsh, Deputy Head of Communications, LBH
- Steve Smith, Head of Facilities Management, LBH

- An officer from Education and Children's Services. LBH
- A representative from Uxbridge College

Suggested questions

- i) Can the PCT outline the current position with regard to swine flu, in terms of numbers in the Borough who have contacted the virus?
- ii) What joint working is taking place between the PCT and this Council during the present swine flu pandemic?
- iii) What will the effects of a pandemic be on the PCT's budget? How will providing both Tamiflu and/or vaccines to patient's impact on the budget?
- iv) How will the distribution of Tamiflu and/or vaccines take place? Will consideration be given to vaccinating staff at the Council who provide essential front line services to the most vulnerable people in the Borough?
- v) What communication is taking place to the Council's staff in relation to the swine flu pandemic? Are the messages being sent to all staff and not just managers?
- vi) What lessons can be learnt from the way the Communication's Team dealt with the recent tragic death of a pupil from the Borough?
- vii) What hygiene precautions are taking place during the present pandemic and how is this being communicated to staff?
- viii) Has consideration been given to additional hygiene measures to mitigate the impact of a pandemic i.e hand gels, paper towels in toilets?
- ix) Could the Council's Occupational Health Suite be used to carry out the vaccination of Council staff?
- x) What preparations are being made for the start of the new school year to mitigate the effects of the swine flu pandemic?
- xi) What contingency arrangements have been made for the education of children if schools have to be closed down?
- xii) What plans are in place for students in Further Education establishments such as Uxbridge College?

PAPERS WITH THE REPORT

Revised scoping report (as agreed at meeting of 23 July 2009) - Appendix 1

Improvement and Development Agency – Prepared for a Pandemic – Swine Flu Information for Elected Members - Appendix 2

Cabinet Office and Department of Health – Swine Flu Planning Assumptions – Appendix 3

Improvement and Development Agency – Swine Flu: crisis management – Appendix 4

SUGGESTED COMMITTEE ACTIVITY

1. Members question the witnesses and identify important issues for their review.
2. Members consider the written evidence provided.
3. Members to discuss the evidence gathered to date on their review and note any potential draft recommendations.