

INTERIM REPORT OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES & PARTNERSHIPS POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE ON THE IMPACT OF A PANDEMIC IN HILLINGDON AND THE EFFECTS ON COUNCIL SERVICES

Cabinet Members	Councillor Ray Puddifoot Councillor Douglas Mills Councillor Scott Seaman-Digby
Cabinet Portfolios	Leader of the Council Cabinet Member for Improvement, Partnerships & Community Safety Cabinet Member for Co-ordination & Central Services
Officer Contact	Khalid Ahmed, Democratic Services, Deputy Chief Executive's Office
Papers with report	None

HEADLINE INFORMATION

Purpose of report	Given the expected re-emergence of Swine Flu, the Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee has speedily brought forward an interim report with initial recommendations to improve the Council's proactive response to a pandemic.
Contribution to our plans and strategies	Corporate Business Continuity and delivery by staff of the Council Plan and Draft Civil Protection Policy.
Financial Cost	There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations set out in this report.
Relevant Policy Overview Committee	Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee.
Ward(s) affected	All.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Cabinet ask officers to consider, if feasible, the following initial recommendations of the Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee which relate to their review into the effects of a pandemic in Hillingdon and the effects on Council services:
 - a) That a skills and knowledge audit be undertaken of the Council's workforce to build up a computerised database. This information to include details about staff who have been vaccinated against the swine flu virus, those who have had swine flu, those with children and childcare responsibilities, those staff who were front line staff and those that come into contact with the public.
 - b) That enhancements be considered to the Council's Constitution to provide further contingency arrangements for the decision making processes of the Council, in consultation with the Leader of the Council.
 - c) In order to mitigate the impact of a major pandemic, officers ensure that business and continuity plans are in place at all educational and care establishments operating within the borough. This includes but is not limited to playgroups, nurseries, schools, further education and higher education establishments as well as social care homes.
2. That progress on implementing the above is reported back to Cabinet as and when the Policy Overview Committee submits its final report.

INFORMATION

Reasons for recommendation

The POC's review has been undertaken to ensure that the Council has business and continuity plans in place to ensure that there is minimum disruption to the Council's services in the event of a major pandemic. The interim report contains recommendations which need to be urgently implemented to enable the Council to be prepared for a possible increase in the number of staff affected by the swine flu pandemic

Alternative options considered / risk management

The alternative option would be for the Council not to put in place any continuity and business plans for the potential increase in the numbers affected by the swine flu pandemic.

Comments of Policy Overview Committee(s)

The report has been commissioned by the Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee which has been undertaking a review into the effects of a pandemic on Council services.

Supporting Information

1. Background

- 1.1 The Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee commenced a review into the effects of a pandemic on Council services at their meeting on 7 July 2009. The aim of the review is to look at how the Council has prepared for a pandemic in terms of the effects on Council services, including schools and further education establishments.
- 1.2 The Government has judged that one of the highest current risks to the UK is the possible emergence of a human influenza pandemic – that is the rapid worldwide spread of influenza caused by a novel virus to which people would have no immunity, resulting in serious harm to human health, and wider social and economic damage and disruption.
- 1.3 As Members will be aware large areas of the world has been affected by a swine flu pandemic, which originated in Mexico. The first wave of the pandemic has not resulted in huge numbers of people in this country being affected but projections from the Department of Health and the Cabinet Office indicate that a second wave of the flu pandemic may result in a greater number of people being affected.
- 1.4. Department of Health planning assumptions which provided details of the potential effects of the infection indicate that the stand out figures were that the projected case fatality rate was up to 0.1% of clinical cases.¹ The projection as reported by a representative of Hillingdon Primary Care Trust at a meeting of the POC on 8 September was that 700 plus people in the Borough would end up in hospital.

2. Evidence

- 2.1 At the POC's first two witness sessions, the focus has been on the business and continuity plans that the Council already have in place in the event of a major pandemic. Evidence was heard from the Council's Civil Protection Manager, the Head of HR, the Head of Democratic Services and the Head of Resources, Policy and Performance from Education & Children's Services.
- 2.2 Members were made aware that the Council had been planning for a pandemic for a number of years, both at a local and a pan-London level. Discussion took place around the disruption to Council services which a major pandemic would cause in terms of staff absence due to sickness, staff having child care responsibilities, staff who were carers, and the impact this would have on the Council's delivery of services, particularly to the most vulnerable in society.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Members at their first two witness sessions have agreed three initial recommendations for the review and comments on their feasibility for implementation are included as follows:
- 3.2 **Recommendation 1: *That a skills and knowledge audit be undertaken of the Council's workforce to build up a computerised database. This information to include details about staff who have been vaccinated against the swine flu virus, those who have had swine flu, those with children and childcare responsibilities,***

¹ Cabinet Office Department of Health – Swine Flu UK Planning Assumptions – 3 September 2009

those staff who were front line staff and those that come into contact with the public.

- 3.3 The Head of Human Resources has discussed with the officer Strategic Pandemic Influenza Group the best way of assembling the information required to undertake a skills audit. Members may wish to note that work is already taking place across the Council to identify key skill areas. Individual departments also hold such information.

Human Resources already collects data on swine flu cases swiftly and it is also feasible that data on those vaccinated can be collated when the vaccination programme starts in earnest.

In terms of a central database, the current HR/Payroll system (Resourcelink) as it has been configured for Hillingdon does not have a means for recording employee skills, vaccinations, childcare responsibilities and those staff who are front line at the present time.

The Head of Human Resources has therefore concluded that the most appropriate means of gathering the information required, without additional resource implications, would be by way of using existing data bases across the Council.

Members may also like to note that in addition to this, the Civil Protection Service have now provided a list of skills relevant to the need to maintain priority services. Work is now proceeding to identify information sources that would enable the Council to draw up a list of actual employees possessing the skills required.

- 3.4 ***Recommendation 2: That enhancements be considered to the Council's Constitution to provide further contingency arrangements for the decision making processes of the Council, in consultation with the Leader of the Council.***

- 3.5 This recommendation arose as a result of discussion around the pandemic affecting the Council's decision making framework. For example if the swine flu pandemic affected Councillors, the attendance at meetings could create a problem. The Constitution at present states that the quorum for meetings be as follows:

- Council meetings, the quorum of a meeting will be $\frac{1}{4}$ of the whole number of Members
- Committee meetings, the quorum of a meeting will be $\frac{1}{3}$ of the whole number of Members of the body concerned or 3 Members of the Committee whichever is the greater
- Audit Committee the quorum shall be 4 Members of the Committee
- The Cabinet, the quorum is $\frac{1}{4}$ of the total number of Members of the Cabinet, or 4, whichever is the larger
- For Policy Overview Committees and Scrutiny Committees the quorum shall be half of the whole number of the Committee

- 3.6 In addition in relation to the Cabinet, as circumstances require and to cover planned and unplanned absences, the Leader may assign Cabinet portfolio responsibilities from one Cabinet Member to another. Under the Scheme of Delegation for Cabinet Members, the Deputy Leader deputises for the Leader in his absence.

- 3.7 The above provisions are adequate for most eventualities, but in extreme emergencies, such as, if there is a major pandemic, further emergency measures are needed to be put in place to ensure the primary business of the Council can be conducted. Officers should be asked to investigate this, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, and provision should be made in the Constitution.
- 3.8 Members may like to note that in Democratic Services a comprehensive Business Continuity Plan has already been put in place in the event of a major incident affecting the Civic Centre. The plan provides for the fast cascade of information and actions to Councillors and staff, contains full contact details for everyone and lists in detail the human and physical resource requirements for the service, if it needs to either be temporarily relocated or set up again from scratch. Such a plan will enable the service to continue to provide support to the decision-making, committee and support functions critical to the Council. Managers in Democratic Services also hold the plan at their home or other address away from the Civic Centre for obvious reasons.
- 3.9 ***Recommendation 3: To mitigate the impact of a major pandemic, officers ensure that business and continuity plans are in place at the Borough's educational and care establishments. This includes but is not limited to playgroups, nurseries, schools, further education and higher education establishments as well as social care homes.***
- 3.10 Particular concern has been expressed with regard to the possible second wave of swine flu which may result in an increased number of cases of people affected. Special mention was made of the impact this would have on educational and care establishments, in terms of children and those people being cared for, but also in terms of the repercussions this would have on teaching staff, social care staff, working parents of those children who are affected and so on.
- 3.11 Members at their meeting on 8 September were informed that Education and Children's Services Department provided guidance and leadership to the Borough's schools and children's homes. Information was provided on the Department's website which included information on business continuity. Work was taking place with the Communications Team and the Civil Protection Team on devising a template for schools to produce their business and continuity plans. However the Corporate Services & Partnerships feel that this should be given the highest priority to ensure that the effects of a pandemic can be mitigated.
- 3.12 Areas which should be included in business and continuity plans are:
- Agreed roles and responsibilities
 - A list of minimum staffing requirements to ensure the provision of the establishment's services
 - Essential work which would be required to continue
 - Which work was of a lesser priority which could be reduced during a pandemic or even not be carried out
 - Is there agreement on communication processes
- 3.13 Additionally in relation to individuals, have these organisations undertaken a skills and knowledge audit to ensure essential services are covered if staff are off sick This to include:
- Cover arrangements
 - A list of staff contact details

- Those staff with childcare or care responsibilities
- Working arrangements if there were transport disruptions
- Flexible working policies i.e. home working, remote working

3.14 Officers are currently revisiting the Council's Civil Protection Policy and it is recommended that the above recommendations are reflected in this.

4. Conclusion

4.1 The POC's review into the effects of a pandemic will produce a final report by the end of the calendar year but because of the likelihood of a second wave of the swine flu pandemic and the importance of putting into place plans to mitigate its impact, the POC has asked that Cabinet consider three interim recommendations which are important for the continuation of Council services.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations set out in this report.

EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

What will be the effect of the recommendation?

The implementation of the recommendations will ensure that the Council is prepared should the swine flu pandemic seriously impact on the Council's workforce. Putting in place business and continuity plans will limit the effects the pandemic would have on the delivery of Council services and its impact on service users, particularly the most vulnerable.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

Consultation has taken the form of the Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee hearing evidence from officers of the Council on the existing preparations which Council departments have in place if there is an upsurge in the cases of swine flu.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance is satisfied that there are no direct financial implications to the Authority, arising from the recommendations set out in this report.

Legal

There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee agenda – 23 July and 8 September 2009