

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

Cabinet Member	Councillor Douglas Mills (Civil emergencies lead) Councillor Ray Puddifoot Councillor Scott Seaman-Digby
Cabinet Portfolio	Cabinet Member for Improvement, Partnerships & Community Safety Leader of the Council Cabinet Member for Co-ordination & Central Services
Officer Contact	Khalid Ahmed, Deputy Chief Executive's Office.
Papers with report	Corporate Services and Partnerships Policy Overview Committee review of the 'Impact of a Pandemic in Hillingdon and the Effects on Council Services'.

HEADLINE INFORMATION

Purpose of report	To receive the Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee's report which provides recommendations on strengthening the Council's business and continuity plans and ensuring Council services will not be adversely affected in the event of a major 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	Nil
Relevant Policy Overview Committee	Corporate Services and Partnerships
Ward(s) affected	All

RECOMMENDATION

That Cabinet:

1. Notes the progress made in relation to the review's three initial recommendations which were considered at the Cabinet meeting on 15 October 2009.
2. Welcomes the review's final report from the Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee and officers be asked to give consideration, when appropriate, to the following recommendations:

- a) **That important appropriate information regarding a Pandemic be communicated to all staff and not just to managers, to ensure the full cascading of important information during a Pandemic.**
- b) **That, subject to the longevity of the present Swine Flu Pandemic, consideration be given to preventative measures being taken in Polling Stations and at the Election Counts, for both the Local and General Elections in 2010.**
- c) **That the Council and Hillingdon Primary Care Trust continue to give urgent consideration and priority to administering the swine flu vaccine to essential front line Council staff, including teachers and ancillary staff in schools, to ensure the continuity of the delivery of services.**

Reasons for recommendation

The review was undertaken at an opportune time as in the summer of this year, the world has been affected by a Swine Flu Pandemic. Swine flu originated in Mexico and has spread rapidly to most parts of the world, including this country.

The review's recommendations will ensure that the Council's business and continuity plans are in good shape to ensure that a major pandemic will have the minimal disruption to Council services. The review's recommendations will add value to the already excellent preparations which have been taking place for a Pandemic for a number of years as part of the Civil Protection Policy.

Alternative options considered / risk management

The Cabinet could decide to reject or amend the Committee's recommendations.

Supporting Information

1. The Committee began its review in the summer of 2009 when the present Swine Flu virus became a Pandemic. The review was therefore timely and important in terms of looking at the preparations the Council has in place to mitigate against the impact of a Pandemic against its staff, and on the services provided. Included in this was examining the multi-agency planning which has taken place, together with the programme for vaccinations of priority Council staff.
2. Due to the potential impact of the present Swine Flu Pandemic and the possible emergence of a more deadly second wave an interim report of the review was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 15 October 2009. The Cabinet decision was:

"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."

Progress on 3 initial recommendations of the review

3. At the Cabinet meeting held on 15 October 2009 Members asked that details of progress made on the three initial recommendations from the Pandemic review be reported back to Cabinet. In relation to the recommendation relating to a skills and knowledge audit, strategic HR have written out to all staff to collect information on staff skills which are not reflected in the duties they perform in their day to day jobs, and which could be called upon in an emergency. The skills audit will provide a snapshot of the skills currently held by Council staff. The skills information will allow the emergency management team of the Council to quickly identify staff with appropriate skills to backfill front line staff absences. The data collected will be held by Business Support Units and the Civil Protection Team and will be securely stored, in line with relevant data protection rules. It is envisaged that over time the skills information will be electronically stored on Resourcelink or something similar, to enable staff to update their information.
4. In relation to looking at decision making in the Council in the event of a major emergency such as a Pandemic, officers have been looking into this and found that the Council already has adequate provision in the Constitution in terms of rules relating to quorums and delegations to the Leader if Cabinet Members are unavailable. However if a Pandemic seriously affected the Council there could be greater use of electronic email, the collaborative sharing of electronic documents and the use of conference calls, all of which would mitigate putting officers and Members at risk from a Pandemic such as Swine Flu. Further investigations and liaison with other local authorities will take place on this issue.
5. In exceptional circumstances when the numbers of officers and Members of the Council affected by a Pandemic is such that the decision making process is compromised, provision could be made by instigating urgency powers in the form of changing delegated powers This would require an amendment to the Council's Constitution and further consultation with the Leader.
6. If a Pandemic reached levels where public safety was at risk from gatherings of people such as the attendance of people at various Council meetings, consideration could be given to web casting of meetings. However there are legal implications to doing this and both London Councils and the Association of London Government are not in favour of this. Officers would investigate this further.
7. A further recommendation was ensuring Business and Continuity Plans are in place at the Borough's educational and care establishments. Work has been well underway in relation to this recommendation with the Education and Children's Services Department overseeing schools and children's homes in the Borough. Schools have been working from a business and continuity template which provides details of what precautions and preventative measures should be put in place in the event of an upsurge in the number of Swine Flu victims.

8. Adult Social Care, Health and Housing Directorate who have responsibilities for the social care establishments in the Borough have contacted some 87 organisations who provide social care services and asked them to fill in a questionnaire based on the PCT template checklist and also requesting copies of their contingency plans for the Pandemic. This also extended to agencies who supplied agency staff to homes and officers had received all the contingency plans from agencies. Close working has taken place with the PCT and discussions have taken place regarding the possibility of sharing resources i.e. District Nurses performing some of the social care duties in the event of an increase in the numbers affected by the Swine Flu Pandemic.

Additional Recommendations

That important appropriate information regarding a Pandemic be communicated to all staff and not just to managers, to ensure the full cascading of important information during a Pandemic.

9. The review recognised that the Communication Strategy of the Council was excellent and the flow of important information in relation to the present Swine Flu Pandemic was comprehensive. However, should a Pandemic have a major impact on Council staff, and to ensure messages were getting through to all staff, the review requested that communication be to ALL staff. The present communication in relation to the Swine Flu Pandemic was communicated through team briefings, through Horizon and through emails to managers. However, in the event of a major Pandemic, it was important that information regarding for instance hygiene and other mitigation measures against the spread of a virus, was communicated to all staff and not just to managers. This recommendation will ensure vital information was received by all staff in the Council and the whole workforce was aware of vital information regarding a Pandemic.

That, subject to the longevity of the present Swine Flu Pandemic, consideration be given to preventative measures being taken in Polling Stations and at the Election Counts, for both the Local and General Elections in 2010.

10. Although the present Swine Flu Pandemic has so far not impacted too severely on the Council, the virus could still have a major impact on the Council and society in general. Next May, Local Government Elections as well as a General Election will be taking place. Should the numbers of people infected by the present Swine Flu Pandemic rise, the staff the Council will employ to work in the Borough's Polling Stations and at the venue for both the Counts, will require hygiene and mitigation measures to ensure they are not put at risk from the virus.
11. If the present Swine Flu Pandemic is still prevalent in the spring of 2010, mitigation measures will be taken at Polling Stations and at the Counts. These will include information regarding hygiene and the placing of hand gels at the entrances to Polling Stations and at the venue for the Counts. Contingency arrangements and procedures being considered also include having arrangements in place for Polling Station staff who fail to turn up due to illness at Polling Stations to perform their duties as Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks, ensuring there are reserve staff on stand by who are fully trained for Polling Station duties and verification of ballot papers and counting duties.

That the Council and Hillingdon Primary Care Trust continue to give urgent consideration and priority to administering the Swine Flu vaccine to essential front line Council staff, including teachers and ancillary staff in schools, to ensure the continuity of the delivery of services.

12. It was important that the staff who provided front line services for the Council, such as meals on wheels, carers, teachers and ancillary school staff, cleaners of care homes etc should be given the highest priority in terms of receiving the Swine Flu vaccinations. The PCT has assured the Council that the second string of priority groups for vaccinations will involve those front line Council staff. Initially 256 staff within the Council's priority groups have been identified to receive the vaccine. These will be frontline social care staff who will need the vaccine to help prevent them and their families getting the virus from patients and stop them passing the virus onto others. The Department of Health will bear the costs of the vaccinations and there will be no cost to the Council.

Evidence

13. In total three witness sessions were held for the review and Members heard evidence from officers of the Council on the Business and Continuity Plans in particular service areas and from representatives of the Hillingdon Flu Pandemic Committee which included the PCT. The recommendations contained in the report are based on the evidence given during the review.

Financial Implications

14. The general true cost of a severe Pandemic cannot be established but costs to the Council will be staff off work, possible delays in the delivery of services, the implementation of policy and so on. At the start of the present Swine Flu Pandemic £10,000 was allocated from within existing resources for the introduction of additional preventative measures such as the distribution of desk and surface wipes across the Council and the placing of hand gels in reception areas in over 40 locations across the Borough.

15. In relation to the costs for Swine Flu vaccinations, Local authorities were provided with financial support from the Department of Health to help meet the costs of the vaccination programme which has been offered to around 256 front line social care staff.

EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

What will be the effect of the recommendation?

The Committee's recommendations will ensure that the services provided by the Council, particularly those front line services to the most vulnerable, will not be compromised or disrupted in a Pandemic, such as the present Swine Flu Pandemic.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

The review has taken evidence from Council officers and a number of key stakeholders who have all contributed greatly to this review and this has formed the consultation.

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

Article 7.08 (b)(3) authorises Cabinet to decide on this matter.

Part 1 of the *Civil Contingencies Act (2004)* (CCA) establishes a statutory framework of roles and responsibilities for organisations involved in civil protection at the local level. It creates two categories of responders and places a different set of duties on each. In England, Category 1 responders include local authorities, emergency services, health bodies and the Environment Agency.

The main civil protection duties fall on Category 1 responders and these are:

- risk assessment;
- business continuity management;
- emergency planning; and
- maintaining public awareness and arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public.

A further duty applies specifically to local authorities alone: provision of business continuity advice and assistance to the commercial sector and voluntary organisations. Two further

The *Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (Contingency Planning) Regulations 2005* led to the establishment of multi-agency local resilience forums which promote the duties of cooperation, information sharing and local level partnership working between both categories of responders. The North West London Resilience Forum, of which the London Borough of Hillingdon is a member, is an example of such an organisation. Any pandemic or contingency plan approved by the Council must therefore correspond with contingency plans laid out by the North West London Resilience Forum.

In the event that a decision is taken to authorise the webcasting of Council meetings, it is vital that the technology used ensures that contents of a Part 2 report does not become part of publicly available information archived by the Council.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Impact of a Pandemic in Hillingdon and the Effects on Council Services - Report of the Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee