

Executive

Planning for a Flu Pandemic

3 August 2009

Report of Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Head of Human Resources and Head of Safer Communities & Community Development

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform the Executive of the current situation and seek approval for proposed actions in the event of significant levels of illness.

This report is public

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended:

- (1) To note that the government may consider extending self certification from 7 days to 14 days and that a signed medical certificate will not be required.
- (2) To utilise the ICT contingency reserve to fund expenditure of £15 000 to upgrade the IT infrastructure and ensure that home working is available to all who need it.
- (3) To agree to provide mutual aid and assistance to the PCT as requested which will include making available the locations noted in the report as antiviral distribution centres and redeploying staff if requested provided those staff have the same level of protection as NHS staff. To agree that mutual aid be made available to neighbouring local authorities subject to local circumstances and availability.
- (4) To agree that the trigger for activating the Council's Pandemic Flu Plan will be when the first case is reported in a current employee.
- (5) To agree that if necessary all Executive powers be delegated to an urgency committee made up of any three of the Executive which shall include the Leader or Deputy Leader of Council if possible.
- (6) To recommend to Council that in the event of an ongoing emergency an Emergency General Purpose Committee be constituted to make any decisions the Council is able to make which are not part of the Executive

functions or reserved in legislation to full Council. The composition of the Emergency General Purpose Committee would be the Leader of Council with any member of the Executive as substitute, the Deputy Leader with any member of the majority group as substitute and the Leader of the opposition, with any member of the opposition group as substitute.

Executive Summary

Introduction

- 1.1 The government is forecasting 100 000 cases per day of flu by the end of August. To date there have been 30 deaths in the UK with 652 patients hospitalised in England. The World Health Organisation has moved to phase 6 which means there is human to human spread of the virus in at least two geographical regions. The UK government has moved from “containment” to “treatment” phase. There are 14 cases in the Cherwell district confirmed by laboratory testing at the time of writing this report. These statistics are changing daily.
- 1.2 “Treatment” means that doctors will diagnose from symptoms rather than laboratory testing. This means the figures will be less reliable than they have been. Schools and colleges will not now close. Antiviral drugs will not be given to slow the spread. Plans for distribution centres for antiviral drugs are being put in place across the country. A National Pandemic Flu Service will be launched by 24th July.
- 1.3 There is detailed provision in the constitution for the Chief Executive to take such action as is necessary in an emergency. It is likely that this power will need to be exercised as a rapid response to a quickly changing situation will be needed. However, this emergency is expected and as such this is an opportunity both to inform the Executive and seek approval for the actions we need to take now, and the likely action we will need to take in the future.
- 1.4 If we assume a 25% illness level then the Council is likely to suffer absences by 40% of staff over a 12 week period. It is assumed that staff will be off between 7 and 14 days but time off may be extended by responsibility for caring for dependants.

Proposals

- 1.5 We need to ensure disruption to service is minimised. However we might need to suspend some non-essential services temporarily and re-deploy staff (dependant on skills) to maintain essential services.
- 1.6 Up to date accurate information needs to be readily accessible for all staff, councillors and the public. We propose that there is a standing item in the weekly members bulletin telling councillors current position as well as information on the front of the website. This will happen once the trigger has been hit. The Corporate Management Team is reviewing the situation weekly and will implement the Pandemic Flu Plan as soon as there is one reported case in a current employee

- 1.7 When the trigger is hit, changes will be made to the sickness absence reporting procedure to the extent that Human Resources should be informed daily of absences due to flu like symptoms. The self certification period will be extended to 14 days if and when there is a government decision to do so and paid time off for dependants shall be granted at the discretion of any member of the Corporate Management Team or the Head of Human Resources.
- 1.8 These proposals have been discussed in detail with the Trade Union and will be communicated to all staff.
- 1.9 The Primary Care Trust has asked that distribution centres be made available and to date the following will be used:
- Bicester Leisure Centre (sports hall) – when required
 - Kidlington Leisure Centre (sports hall) – when required
 - Woodgreen Leisure Centre (bowls area) – opened July 20th
 - Windmill Centre, Deddington – when required

Conclusion

- 1.10 It is important that the Council ensures that essential services can continue for residents of the district and the proposals in this report should enable this to happen.

Background Information

- 2.1 Council officers attended an emergency planning exercise at Newport Pagnell on 13th July to test the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum's pandemic flu plan. All the district council representatives agreed we are likely to have a limited role in the wider community with the exception of Communications who can play a key part in issuing advice. It was also recognised that environmental health staff might be called upon to assist the PCT in "non-council" activities. Therefore we see our focus should be on maintaining the Council's essential services.
- 2.2 A Business Continuity Plan has therefore been produced specifically to address these issues. Our essential services have been identified as;
- Customer Service
 - Dangerous Structures (Building Control)
 - Environmental Services
 - Housing
 - Revenues and Benefits
 - Communications
- 2.3 Subject to staff absence levels, there might be a need to suspend some non-essential services and move staff (with appropriate skills) around the organisation to maintain these essential ones. Decisions will be taken by the Corporate Management Team which is now keeping the situation under weekly review. No swine flu staff absences have been identified to date. We will also be in contact with neighbouring authorities to explore opportunities for mutual aid.
- 2.4 Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust expect up to 40 000 cases a week in Oxfordshire when the pandemic reaches a peak. It expects a peak in September then later in the year around Christmas. At the moment the illness is mild in 98% of cases.

Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options

- 3.1 It will be necessary to invoke the emergency powers at page 21 of the constitution. This report confirms action taken to date and gives as much notice as possible of the action proposed. Any action taken will be reported to the next available Executive in accordance with the constitution but it may be necessary to suspend meetings at the height of an outbreak either to limit infection or because there are insufficient healthy staff or councillors to attend. This report therefore seeks authority, if necessary in the opinion of the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to delegate all executive powers to a committee of any three of the Executive. If possible that committee shall include the Leader of Council or Deputy Leader.

The following options have been identified. The approach in the recommendations is believed to be the best way forward

- Option One** Invoke the pandemic flu plan as and when the Corporate Management Team agree it is appropriate.

- Option Two** Invoke the pandemic flu plan at the agreed trigger point of the first reported case amongst current employees.
- Option Three** Do not invoke the pandemic flu plan.

Consultations

Trade Unions Supportive of focusing on essential services for the district

Implications

Financial: The cost of upgrading the infrastructure (£15 000) will be met from the ICT contingency reserve

Comments checked by Karen Curtin, Head of Finance
01295 221551

Legal: Whilst there are emergency powers under the constitution we do have notice of the emergency in this case and are therefore seeking authority to anticipated actions.

Comments checked by Liz Howlett, Head of Legal and Democratic Services 01295 221686

Risk Management: By the nature of the report this is dealing with a risk to the district, the residents and to the services we provide. This report seeks to clarify the priorities and ensure that at least essential services will continue to be delivered

Comments checked by Rosemary Watts, Risk Management and Insurance Officer 01295 221566

Wards Affected

All

Corporate Plan Themes

Safer healthier communities

Executive Portfolio

Councillor Pickford
Portfolio Holder for Democratic Services and Member Development

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
One	<i>Cherwell District Council's Decision making contingency plans</i>
Background Papers	
Cherwell District Council Pandemic Flu Plan	
Report Author	Liz Howlett, Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Contact Information	01295 221686 liz.howlett@Cherwell-dc.gov.uk