

REPORT OF HEAD OF FINANCIAL SERVICES

Portfolio: STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

UPDATE ON PLANNING FOR A PANDEMIC 'FLU OUTBREAK

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 Experts predict that an international human pandemic is inevitable. Whilst timing is uncertain, in that it may be neither imminent nor a mutation of the recent H5N1 'Bird Flu', the recent spread of 'Bird Flu' throughout the world increases the risk that the virus will mutate into one that will pass from human to human.
- 1.2 The impact of a human pandemic virus could severely affect the Council's ability to maintain its services. It is therefore essential that preparatory work is undertaken to minimise, as far as practicable, the extent of any disruption that will result.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report therefore, is to inform Members of the arrangements being made to address expected disruption to the Council's services at some point in the future.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- That the information be noted.
- That a further progress report be considered in six months time.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 requires the Council to:
 - Prepare Business Continuity Plan(s).
 - Warn and inform the public in pre-emergency awareness raising and during emergencies.
- 3.2 Pandemic 'Flu, at some point in the future, could inevitably create a severe business continuity problem for the Council and it is therefore essential that preparatory work be undertaken to minimise the expected disruption to the services provided by the Council, businesses and the voluntary sector within the Borough during a pandemic.
- 3.3 A number of actions have been undertaken to start to address the potential problems of a Pandemic 'Flu outbreak:

3.3.1 County Durham and Darlington Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU)

The CCU, which is funded by all local authorities within the county, has been developing a Pandemic Flu Plan on their behalf. They have recently completed a Draft Plan for the County Council and have now submitted a modified version of that document to all of the District Councils within the County for their consideration.

The CCU have asked for feedback on the Draft Plan in early September and consequently a meeting of the Business Continuity Working Group was held on 31st August to consider it in detail. It is expected that an Action Plan will be developed to ensure that all of the recommended actions are addressed in a timely manner. Issues such as developing flexible work arrangements, including home working etc, to cope with a Pandemic 'Flu outbreak, are expected to be considered.

The CCU are also organising a Multi Agency exercise in October to test the Pandemic Flu Plans, Emergency Plans, Business Continuity Plans and Mutual Aid Arrangements within the County at which this Council will be represented

3.3.2 Business Continuity Working Group

Representatives from the Group attended a Seminar organised by the Health Protection Agency (HPA) in August 2005 and participated in a Multi Agency Exercise arranged by them in December.

The Group held a Workshop in November 2005 to gain an greater appreciation of the problems that will arise following a Pandemic 'Flu outbreak and a representative from the HPA provided a detailed insight into the problem from its perspective. All service areas of the Council were represented at the Workshop and 'Business Critical Services' were identified.

As part of the Council's Statement of Internal Control and Corporate Governance arrangements, it has been agreed that appropriate detailed procedural notes will be prepared for each business critical service. The notes will attempt to ensure that these services in particular can be maintained as far as practicable, by any member of staff who is able to attend work during a pandemic, when large numbers of staff are expected to be either absent from work due to the illness itself or are at home looking after a family member who is ill or providing child care when schools will probably be closed to prevent the spread of the pandemic.

3.3.3 Sedgefield Primary Care Trust 'Flu Pandemic Operational Management Group

The Council is also working in close co-operation with the local PCT, which has been developing its own Pandemic 'Flu Plan and invited officers of the Council to attend their meetings to ensure that both organisations could work together to address this problem. During discussions concerning the distribution of anti virals and later vaccines, it was agreed that the Council's Leisure Centres would be considered as possible locations, since it is expected that they would be closed for normal leisure activities during a pandemic, to prevent the spread of disease. It is expected that Council

employees would provide assistance to NHS/PCT staff during the process of distributing anti virals and vaccines from Leisure Centres.

From a geographical point of view, the Health Protection Agency has advised the Council and the PCT that Ferryhill Leisure Centre would be the preferred distribution centre within the Sedgefield PCT area, with Newton Aycliffe Leisure Centre as an alternative, although it is recognised that Ferryhill Leisure Centre is not as accessible as some other Centres within the Borough from a public transport point of view. It is not considered practicable to use all of the Council's Leisure Centres as distribution points, due to the large numbers of staff required from the NHS/PCT to distribute anti virals and vaccines.

It was also agreed that the PCT would be able to use the Council's INFORM publication to update residents of the Borough on any relevant issues relating to Pandemic 'Flu and an article was subsequently placed in the November 2005 issue of INFORM, based on information supplied by the Department of Health, the Lead Government Department. A number of messages have also been placed on the Council's INTRANET site in recent months following consultation with the PCT, to advise Council staff and Members about Pandemic 'Flu issues.

It is envisaged that the Council will also assist in the transportation of anti virals and vaccines from Sedgefield Community Hospital to the distribution centre/s.

3.3.4 *Warning and Informing the Public in Pre-emergency Awareness Raising and During Emergencies*

The Council's Emergency Plan has recently been completely revised and agreed by the Crisis Management Team.

The Emergency Plan together with the Council's Generic Business Continuity Plan, which was also recently completed, will be published on the Council's website. A brief article will also be included in 'INFORM' to advise Borough residents of their existence.

Once the Pandemic 'Flu Plan has been agreed that will also be placed on the Council's website. These documents have previously only been available on the Council's Intranet site for the availability of officers and members but, in accordance with the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and advice from the CCU, it is accepted that relevant information should be made more accessible to the public. As mentioned earlier, an article has already appeared in INFORM, specifically aimed at passing on information made available to the Council and/or PCT from the Department of Health, to ensure public awareness. Arrangements will be made to keep the public informed during any 'Pandemic Flu outbreak' via TV, radio, newspapers and the Internet as deemed appropriate at that time.

4. CONCLUSION

The officers of the Council are continuing to work with the CCU and the PCT to ensure that disruption to service provision is minimised as far as practicable during a Pandemic 'Flu outbreak. There is much work still to be undertaken and the Council's Business Continuity Working Group will identify and monitor

the work. The Minutes from meetings have been reported via the Council's Risk Management Group to the Strategic Leadership Working Group and distributed to all members of Management Team. Regular updates will be provided in the future to ensure that Members are also aware of progress being made.

5. CORPORATE POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This report does not contain proposals that would require any changes to the Council's agreed policy framework and corporate objectives.

6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no significant resource implications arising from this report at this stage. There could be significant financial implications when a Pandemic Flu outbreak does occur with the potential of severe disruptions to Council services, the possibility of Leisure Centres having to be closed or suffering from significant reductions in income because of lower usage over a number of weeks.

7. CONSULTATION

The Council has been working in close co-operation with the CCU and the PCT to develop the approach to tackle this particular issue.

8. OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 *Links to Corporate Objectives/Values*

The Council's corporate ambition of being a 'healthy' Borough will be threatened if effective arrangements are not made to safeguard public health.

8.2 *Risk Management*

The major risk is that the Council will not be able to provide essential services such as refuse collection and Carelink services during a pandemic outbreak as a result of experienced employees being unavailable to carry out their normal duties. A skills audit may therefore be required to be undertaken to identify employees who would be able to undertake critical services during a pandemic outbreak.

8.3 *Health and Safety*

The Council will attempt to effectively communicate with its employees and the public before and during a pandemic outbreak to reduce the risk of it spreading. It will be necessary to ensure that adequate health and safety training is provided to inexperienced employees when undertaking work with which they are not familiar. Appropriate personal protective equipment may need to be purchased by the Council to protect its employees from infecting or being infected by other employees and/or members of the public.

8.4 *Equality and Diversity*

No material considerations have been identified.

8.5 **Legal and Constitutional**

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 requires the Council to prepare for any event which may disrupt services. The Council is therefore fulfilling its legal obligations in addressing this potential issue.

8.6 **Crime and Disorder**

The Council may need to consider the implications of the potential inability of the Police Service to provide adequate cover at Distribution Centres sited within Council premises because of their own staff shortages during a Pandemic

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Ward(s): Not Ward Specific

Key Decision Validation: Not a key decision

Background Papers: Civil Contingencies Act 2004
Inform-November 2005

Examination by Statutory Officers

	Yes	Not Applicable
1. The report has been examined by the Council's Head of the Paid Service or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The content has been examined by the Council's S.151 Officer or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The content has been examined by the Council's Monitoring Officer or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The report has been approved by Management Team	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>