

report

meeting	NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND CITY OF NOTTINGHAM FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY	
	POLICY & STRATEGY COMMITTEE	
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REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

FLU PANDEMIC: SERVICE PREPAREDNESS

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform Members of the preparations that have been made to reduce the effect on service delivery in the event of a flu pandemic.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Influenza pandemics have occurred at irregular intervals throughout history, three in the last century: in 1918 ('Spanish' flu), 1957 ('Asian' flu) and 1968 ('Hong Kong' flu). Each of these events was associated with illness, deaths and major societal disruption far in excess of that experienced in a 'normal' winter.
- 2.2 A pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges and starts spreading as easily as normal influenza – by coughing and sneezing. Because the virus is new, the human immune system will have no pre-existing immunity. This makes it likely that the people who contact pandemic influenza will experience more serious disease than that caused by normal influenza.
- 2.3 There are six distinct phases that have been defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) to help global preparedness planning. The present international situation is categorised as phase 3: a virus new to humans is causing infections, but does not spread easily from one person to another. The UK alert level is 0 as there are no cases of pandemic flu in the UK.
- 2.4 The Department of Health has carried out detailed modelling up to a reasonable worst case where 50% of the population will contract pandemic flu (the attack rate). While the central 25% figure is taken as the illustrative base scenario, the Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service (NFRS) Pandemic Plan considers the full range from 10% to 50% in attack rate as well as ranges of 0.37% to 2.5 % for case fatality rate. This range of scenarios gives mortality estimates ranging from around 20,000 to in excess of 700,000 excess deaths, depending on attack rate and case fatality rate. We will not know which groups within the community will be most at risk until the pandemic virus emerges.
- 2.5 The pandemic is likely to occur in 2 waves, 3-9 months apart lasting around 12 weeks each. The Health Protection Agency is the lead agency for producing the local risk assessment on Pandemic Influenza and the Service is in regular contact through the Local Resilience Forum flu group and Emergency Planning Liaison Group. The individual risk assessment on Pandemic Influenza has a risk description of **Very High**.

3. REPORT

3.1 Due to the close contact environment in which most of our personnel work it is most likely that an influenza pandemic would have significant impact on the Service. NFRS have developed an Influenza Pandemic Plan as part of its Business Continuity Management strategy. The aim of the plan is to enable NFRS to continue to provide essential services during an influenza pandemic, whilst also safeguarding the health, safety and welfare of staff, and supporting its partner agencies.

3.2 At international level the World Health Organisation, and at national level the UK Government, have set response levels for a pandemic as it develops. NFRS's planning and response to an influenza pandemic is divided into four levels, which sit alongside these international and national phases.

3.3 **Level 1 – Pre-pandemic preparations**

This level consists of preparatory steps that should be taken now. (NFRS are working at level 1 at the time of this report)

Level 2 – Alert actions

Actions to be taken when the WHO announces the move to WHO phase 5, signifying large clusters of disease with limited person-to-person transmission, and a significant pandemic threat. This is also the point at which the UK Government convenes the UK Influenza Pandemic Committee.

Level 3 – Pandemic response actions

The actions to be taken when a pandemic is declared in the UK

Level 4 – Return to normality

Steps to be taken to ensure that NFRS gets back on track with service delivery as soon as possible, and also addresses staff welfare issues.

3.4 The flu plan includes detailed guidance at each of the levels to ensure the Service is best prepared. It should also be noted that each department has been developing Business Continuity Plans that will include the reduction of available staff. In addition the Service has developed a series of 'Action Cards' which provide an aide memoir for the early stages of each action level.

3.5 Posters have already been acquired from the Department of Health on personal hygiene and displayed in all Service establishments; it is considered that improved personal hygiene will dramatically reduce the speed and spread of the virus through the workforce.

3.6 As part of the Service Business Continuity Planning strategy a group of senior managers form what is known as the Risk and Emergency Management Group (REMG). This group will be responsible for managing the Service at a tactical level throughout any pandemic outbreak.

3.7 In February the REMG were tested in their preparedness to deal with an influenza pandemic outbreak by means of a full day exercise based on, firstly, a reduction of 25% of the staff, and secondly a reduction of 50%. The outcome from this exercise has lead to the production of an action plan that is being managed by the Chair of the Performance and Coordination Team.

3.8 Recently Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Safety Services took part in a national flu pandemic exercise (Winter Willow) which involved Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBR), Department of Health (DoH), Strategic Health Authority (SHA), Regional Resilience Forum (RRF) and the Local Resilience Forum (Strategic Coordination

Group). 'Winter Willow' was run over several days to test national arrangements and identify any issues at local level that Central Government needed to consider in the event of a pandemic. A full report will be made available to each LRF in the near future.

3.9

4. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The production of the Flu Pandemic Plan and associated Action Cards have enabled the Service to respond to an outbreak in a methodical and clear way and therefore reduce the risk of major disruption to our service delivery.

4.2 Testing our Risk and Emergency Management Team during an exercise has prepared individuals and focused departments on reducing the impact on front line services.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. There will however, there will clearly be a financial impact on the Authority should a flu pandemic hit Nottinghamshire. The Chief Fire Officer will keep the Authority fully briefed during such an event.

6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct personnel implications associated with this report, however there will inevitably be personnel issues associated with a flu pandemic.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

A Equality Impact Assessment was carried out during the production of the Services Flu Pandemic Plan, there were no identified issues.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Member's accept the current progress made by the Service on preparation for pandemics and continue to receive updates as and when appropriate.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION

- Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service Business Continuity Flu Pandemic Plan
- Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service Business Continuity Action Cards

Frank Swann
DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

CONTACT OFFICER	
Name :	David Horton Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Tel. No :	0115 967 0880
E-mail :	david.horton@notts-fire.gov.uk