

16. PANDEMIC PLANNING

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Council with an update on what planning is being undertaken internally and within the wider community to ensure service continuity during an influenza pandemic.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. Currently the H5N1 flu strain circulating overseas passes from bird to a human where there is close contact with an infected bird, and possibly in one known case from human to human through close physical contact with an infected person. It is generally accepted that even if H5N1 does not mutate to an airborne human to human virus, a new flu strain will occur at some time in the future and that planning and preparation now is essential to minimising the risks of arrival in New Zealand, spread throughout New Zealand, and reducing the health, social and economic consequences that would follow an outbreak. Current pandemic planning is being driven by the possibility that the H5N1 virus will be the one to mutate to a human to human virus.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

3. Nil.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended:

- (a) That the information be received.
- (b) That the Council recognise the existence of the Pandemic Communications Reference Group, to ensure consistency of communications.
- (c) That elected members support the work of the Pandemic Communications Reference Group by promoting pandemic awareness within their own communities.

BACKGROUND ON PANDEMIC PLANNING

4. The World Health Organisation is concerned at the potential for an influenza pandemic and they have advised countries to prepare influenza pandemic action plans. While there is no current suggestion that pandemic influenza is imminent, it is worth planning for on the basis that, if it were to occur, most, if not all, communities and workplaces would be affected.
5. The consequences of a pandemic would be largely health-related and possibly affecting up to 1.6 million people, with social distancing, significant absenteeism and disruption to normal living activities commonplace throughout New Zealand. If it occurred, pandemic influenza would be unlike any other form of emergency. It would almost certainly start overseas and would have an impact on the whole country. District health boards, primary health providers, local authorities, and civil defence emergency management (CDEM) groups, all have key roles in preparing local communities for a pandemic, and in responding to it should it arrive. It is a widely-held view that the 'battle' will be won or lost in the local communities, and therefore community leadership and preparedness will be vital elements in the response to the pandemic.
6. The pandemic management strategy has five stages from 'planning for it' through to 'recover from it' (refer Appendix 1 attached). Actions at a local level are likely to be determined by the national interest, particularly during the 'keep it out' and 'stamp it out' phases.
7. The Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management has recently produced a Pandemic Planning Guide for local authorities and CDEM groups. The guide recommends that local authorities establish an in-house pandemic planning team to develop actions necessary in assessing and reducing pandemic risks, and for response and recovery (ie internal focus on the Council's operations). It is also recommended that multi-agency pandemic teams be established to focus on collaborative planning with health authorities, regional representatives, local authorities, and other stakeholders to develop integrated pandemic response and recovery plans.
8. An in-house CCC Pandemic Planning Team has been established to focus on what the Council needs to do internally i.e. to ensure it is able to function to the fullest possible extent during and after an emergency as required under of the CDEM Act 2002.
9. The Council's internal pandemic planning that is currently underway focuses on the following:
 - Development of a pandemic action plan.
 - Ensuring all business continuity plans are updated to include provision for up to 50% staff absences for periods of two to three weeks at the height of the pandemic and lower levels of staff absences a few weeks either side of the peak. Business continuity plans must also identify essential services that must be maintained during a pandemic; 'key' staff and ensuring adequate backup for those 'key' staff; and develop methods for overcoming shortfalls in personnel and supplies.
 - The development of a pandemic communication plan that advises of actions the Council will follow during each of the various stages during a pandemic.
 - The development of a pandemic policy covering issues such as:
 - Ability for 'key' staff to work from home;
 - Workplace closure;
 - Overseas travel;
 - Civil defence responsibilities during a pandemic.

10. With regard to planning for the health issues that might arise from an influenza pandemic a 'Primary Care Pandemic Reference Group' has been established with representatives from each of the following health sectors:
 - Canterbury District Health Board
 - Community and Public Health
 - Primary Health organisations
 - General Practice
 - Pharmacy
 - Community Nursing
 - Laboratories
 - St John Ambulance
 - 24 Hour Surgery
 - Media and communications
 - City Council
11. This group has been meeting on a fortnightly basis to share and discuss the pandemic health planning arrangements.
12. Furthermore, a 'Pandemic Communications Reference Group' has also been established whose focus is on ensuring consistency of pandemic messages/information and establishing a point where such messages/information can be obtained. The group has representatives from:
 - Canterbury District Health Board
 - Pegasus Health
 - NZ Police
 - Canterbury CDEM Group
 - Christchurch City Council
13. Community leaders, including Councillors and Community Board members, will have an important role in disseminating information to members of the community during the readiness, response, and recovery phases of an influenza pandemic.
14. Staff from the Canterbury CDEM Group Emergency Management Office have been involved in facilitation of planning and readiness preparations by having input into the Canterbury District Health Board and South Island (Pandemic) Health Region planning. Information on planning at this level is being passed to members of the CDEM Group by the Emergency Management Office staff.
15. While the above mentioned reference groups have been established there is a need to establish a further group to focus on how the Council and other non-health organisations will provide support for non-medical care to those affected by the pandemic who can not be cared for in hospital or at a community based assessment centre but will need to be cared for at home. This group will also need to focus on other issues such as maintaining essential services; shortage of supplies etc. There is general support for the establishment of such a group and it is anticipated that by the end of June this group will have been formed.
16. Figure 1 below, identifies the various pandemic planning streams at the national level and within the Canterbury CDEM Group (regional/local) levels. It should be noted that there is some frustration in endeavouring to ascertain what planning has been undertaken at the national level in order that the planning at a regional/local level is consistent.

Figure 1. Canterbury Pandemic Planning

| National Work Stream | Lead Planning Agency | CDEM Group Level | Regional Outputs |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--------------------------|
| Health | Ministry of Health | DHBs | Plans 30 April |
| Border | NZ Customs | NZ Customs | Plan in place |
| Economy | Treasury | Canterbury Employers Chamber of Commerce | Briefings commencing May |
| Workforce | Ministry of Labour | (Group EMO) | Plan August |
| Welfare/Social | Ministry of Social Development | Work & Income NZ | BCP's June |
| Education | Ministry of Education | Ministry of Education | |
| Law + Order | NZ Police | NZ Police [Justice Sector Group] | Plan June |
| Death Management | Ministry of Justice | | Outline plan June |
| Legislation | Dept. Prime Minister & Cabinet /Crown Law | DHBs | Ongoing |
| Community Logistics | Ministry of CDEM | Group EMO | Plan August |
| Communications | Dept. Prime Minister & Cabinet /Ministry of Health | DHBs | Under development |
| Infrastructure | Ministry of Economic Development | Canterbury Lifelines Group | Ongoing |
| External | Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade | NA | NA |