

# MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE COUNCIL AND THE HEALTH PROTECTION AGENCY

**Report By: Emergency Planning Manager**

## Wards Affected

County-wide

## Purpose

1. To provide an update on the preparation of a memorandum of understanding between the Council and the Health Protection Agency.

## Financial implications

2. None identified.

## Background

3. In March 2007 the Committee received an update on emergency planning arrangements following on from the Committee's Review of the response to the 2003 outbreak of Legionnaires disease in Hereford.
4. It was reported that since the Committee's Review, the national profile of infectious diseases had been raised by the possible threat that avian influenza might pass from birds to humans and then mutate into a human-to-human disease of pandemic proportions. Whilst the emergency planning focus on health had been on the pandemic influenza threat, the lessons learned from the Legionnaires outbreak in Hereford had helped to inform planning and training. Specifically:
  - a. The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 had considerably enhanced the sharing of information and the co-operation between Category 1 responders (local authorities, police forces and British Transport Police, fire and rescue authorities, ambulance services, National Health Service, Health Protection Agency, port health authorities, Environment Agency, Maritime and Coastguard Agency) through the West Mercia Local Resilience Forum (LRF). More locally, this was facilitated through membership of the Herefordshire Emergency Response to Major Incident Team (HERMIT) and there was a Primary Care Trust (PCT) led Herefordshire Pandemic Influenza Planning Committee, supported by emergency planning and social care representatives from the Council.
  - b. The lead and roles of agencies involved in the identification of trigger points and the management of an infectious disease outbreak were more clearly defined.
  - c. Multi-agency emergency plans had been revisited and updated. Whilst the current local risk assessment, published in the West Mercia LRF Community Risk Register, does not require there to be a specific emergency response plan for legionnaires disease, the health authorities have published pandemic influenza specific response plans for multi-agency use.

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
Philip Wilson, Emergency Planning Manager on 01432 260567

- d. There had been a series of exercises to test and evaluate the emergency response arrangements for dealing with pandemic influenza at the local, regional and national level, in which Herefordshire Council participated throughout. The latest of these, Exercise Flute, sponsored by Herefordshire PCT, takes place on 30<sup>th</sup> November
5. However, in relation to point (b) above it was noted that a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), between the Council and the Health Protection Agency (HPA), dealing with the protocols for infectious diseases had not yet progressed beyond draft status. The Committee was informed that this not been progressed by the Agency because of national work on a new MoU taking account of changes to PCTs and Strategic Health Authorities. Whilst the absence of the local MoU had not hindered the Council's ability to work with the HPA the Emergency Planning Officer considered that it would be worthwhile to put it in place.
6. The Committee agreed that an update on the preparation of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and the Health Protection Agency dealing with the protocols for tackling infectious diseases be made in six months time.

## Progress

7. The current position is that progress on the national generic HPA/LA MoU has been slow, but is still in process. Health Protection Units and Local Authorities agreed that its development remained a priority in 2005-2006 and since the last report in March 2007 the HPA has produced the requested HPA/Herefordshire Council MoU. The MoU builds upon pre-existing working arrangements between the two organisations and the longer history of joint work between the Council and the former Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health Protection Unit. As such it codifies joint response arrangements that are already in practice.
8. The MoU contains, in a series of annexes and appendices, a set of specific actions in relation to certain health protection threats. It is not possible to include all guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that are held in response to a wide range of threats, such as Pandemic Influenza or Legionnaires, or the joint response to extreme weather conditions. However specific guidance and responses are immediately accessible via databases held by the HPA and other organisations and would be made available to the local multi agency incident response teams.
9. The MoU is currently awaiting formal ratification between the Head of Environmental Health Services and the Director of West Midlands West Health Protection Unit. It has been circulated separately to Members of the Committee, as an unsigned document, for information, and is available to the public on request. However, it will need ongoing review during the next 12 months in response to:
  - a. The eventual publication of the national generic HPA/LA MoU.
  - b. Local organisational changes within Herefordshire Council and Herefordshire Primary Care Trust.
10. In September Herefordshire Council, Herefordshire PCT and Hereford Hospitals Trust (HHT) agreed that the emergency planning functions would be brought together under the umbrella of the Council's Emergency Planning Unit. To this end, an additional Emergency Planning Officer (Health), funded by the PCT and HHT, has been appointed and will start work in January 2008. This appointment will further enhance the already close working relationships and co-ordination of emergency

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planning between the Council, PCT and HHT forged through the fora of the West Mercia LRF and HERMIT since 2004.

11. The Committee, in March, also requested that consideration be given to offering Members the opportunity to observe future emergency planning exercises. An emergency planning seminar for Members is being programmed to take place in the New Year, following which invitations to Members to observe future emergency planning exercises will be made.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Committee notes the development of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and the Health Protection Agency**

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- HPA/Herefordshire Council MoU (unsigned)