

North Tyneside Council

Report to Audit Committee

Date: 15 November 2023

Title: Pandemic Influenza Corporate Risk

Report from Service **Public Health**
Area:

Responsible Officers: **Wendy Burke, Director of Public Health** **Tel: (0191) 643 2104**

Wards affected: **All**

PART 1

1.1 Executive Summary:

Influenza pandemics are a natural phenomenon that occur globally and have occurred from time to time for centuries including, for example, 3 times during the 20th century. They present a real and daunting challenge to the economic and social wellbeing of any country, as well as presenting a serious risk to the health of its population.

This century, an influenza pandemic occurred in 2009 and was caused by the H1N1 virus, commonly known as 'swine flu'.

Given the likelihood of occurrence, coupled with the potential severity of impact, the Authority has diligently included the risk of an influenza pandemic as a corporate risk.

This risk is owned by the Director of Public Health and, through the controls in place, assurance is provided that the Authority is prepared to respond should such an event take place. This report outlines the nature of the risk and the approach to managing it.

1.2 Recommendation:

It is recommended that Committee note the approach to managing the pandemic flu risk outlined in this report.

1.3 Council Plan and Policy Framework

This report relates to all themes within the 2021-2025 Our North Tyneside Plan.

1.4 Information:

1.4.1 Global context

An influenza pandemic is a global epidemic caused by a new influenza virus to which there is little or no pre-existing immunity in the human population. Influenza pandemics are impossible to predict; and they may be mild or cause severe disease or death. Severe disease may occur in certain risk groups, which may correspond to those at risk of severe disease due to seasonal influenza. However, healthy persons are also likely to experience more serious disease than that caused by seasonal influenza.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines a pandemic as:

".....the worldwide spread of a new disease. An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges and spreads around the world, and most people do not have immunity."

Influenza pandemics are a natural phenomenon that have occurred from time to time for centuries – including 3 times during the 20th century. They present a real and daunting challenge to the economic and social wellbeing of any country, as well as a serious risk to the health of its population.

There are important differences between 'ordinary' seasonal flu and pandemic flu. These differences explain why 'pandemic flu' is regarded as such a serious threat. The H1N1 virus of 2009 was the last pandemic flu.

1.4.2 National context

Pandemic flu is one of the most severe natural challenges likely to affect the UK and is identified in the National Risk Register 2023, published by the UK Government. It assumes, as a reasonable worst-case scenario, that such a pandemic could last for at least 9 months and affect 50% of the population with over 1 million people requiring hospital treatment.

Specifically, government has also produced a UK Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Strategy. The strategy provides a framework for coordinating a national response and incorporated learning from the 2009 pandemic. Within that it sets out some local expectations for public sector organisations.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), an executive agency of government, and has a key role in planning for and responding to pandemics. UKHSA is responsible for providing intellectual, scientific and operational leadership for health security at national and local level.

Working alongside UKHSA, and as with COVID-19, there is a community health response to consider with partners such as the Integrated Care Board and NHS England. Similarly, there are also service level consequences to manage to ensure that vital services to communities can be delivered. Ensuring the presence of robust business continuity arrangements forms an important part of the wider preparedness for pandemic flu.

1.4.3 Local context

Pandemic flu is included as a risk in the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum Community Risk Register 2021-2023.

To supplement its strategy, the government has published guidance entitled, 'Preparing for Pandemic Influenza: Guidance for Local Planners'. This sets out what should be done locally in order to respond to pandemic flu. The Authority has used that as a basis for formulating its plan.

1.4.3 Lessons learned from COVID-19

Although not flu, there are many recent lessons to be learned from the global handling of coronavirus at an international, national and local level. This will

undoubtedly inform how pandemics more generally are prepared for and responded to.

Committee should be assured that North Tyneside performed well during COVID-19, leading to the Local Government Association to describe the Authority's response as 'commendable'. Our response has been captured in two key documents:

- Variants, volunteers and vaccines: North Tyneside's journey through the COVID-19 pandemic, Director of Public Health Annual Report 2020-2022, and
- North Tyneside COVID-19 Recovery Programme, End of Programme Report, Sept 2021

Highlights include, adding strength to our pre-existing relationships with the voluntary sector in supporting the clinically extremely vulnerable, establishing tracing, testing and vaccination capacity, supporting businesses with advice and financial assistance and delivering a comprehensive public communications effort. And we were able to rapidly transform the way in which vital services were delivered to our residents.

Like the rest of the country, the Authority is watching with interest the UK COVID-19 Inquiry set up to examine the UK's response to and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and learn lessons for the future. Public hearings have already taken place surrounding resilience and preparedness and, earlier this month, core decision-making.

1.4.5 Corporate Risk Management

The risk identified in the Corporate Risk Register is:

Pandemic Flu – 1102 'There is a risk that the arrangements and plans in place for pandemic flu do not provide assurance of a coordinated response in the event of a national pandemic.'

1.4.6 Controls

There are number of controls that have been identified to manage the risk and these are currently in place. They are:

- The Emergency Planning Leadership Group arrangements -The Emergency Planning Leadership Group (EPLG) is an internal senior officer forum that sits monthly. EPLG oversees the Authority's response arrangements (including out of hours capability), training and exercising, managing lessons learned from incidents and exercises. And it manages identified risks.

The EPLG is chaired by the Director of Public Health and includes members of the senior leadership team together with Resilience and Communications advisors.

- Local Pandemic Flu Plan -The plan sets out the national response framework and the Authority's statutory responsibilities. It describes the WHO triggers and local actions to be taken upon reaching a trigger. The plan also describes national reporting mechanisms and gives an overarching steer on considerations and decisions to be made during the response phase.

The plan is periodically reviewed and refreshed. Following COVID-19; and to reflect improvements made to the Authority's overarching emergency response arrangements; it has recently been reviewed. The updated draft plan is scheduled to be presented to the EPLG for approval later this month.

- Business Continuity Plans for all services - Business continuity plans are subject to continual review and improvement. To support that work, EPLG commissioned an internal audit to help direct a comprehensive refresh of the Authority's approach. Good progress is being made and detail is provided in the Strategic Audit Plan 2023-24 Interim Monitoring Statement report to be considered by Committee at the meeting (item 8).
- Partnership working with the Local Resilience Forum - The Authority is an active participant at strategic and tactical levels with the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum (LRF). For example, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the Authority played a key role by chairing key groups and coordinating data.

The LRF is formed by regulations made under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the principle national legislation governing emergency preparedness. The Authority is a 'Category 1 responder' placing it on the same footing as the blue light services, health, and the Environment Agency.

- Keeping the Elected Mayor, elected members and local MPs briefed - Briefings on emergency preparedness, response and on specific plans such

as pandemic flu are provided regularly to the Cabinet Member. And through regular monitoring of the corporate risk register the Elected Mayor and her Cabinet are sighted. Periodically, elected members are briefed including, from time to time, at Members' Briefing sessions.

1.6 Appendices:

There are no appendices. See background information referred to in section 1.8 below.

1.7 Contact officers:

Wendy Burke, Director of Public Health, Tel. 0191 643 2104

Colin MacDonald, Head of Technical and Regulatory Services, Tel. 0191 643 6620

1.8 Background information:

The following background papers/information have been used in the compilation of this report and are available at the office of the author:

- 1) [National Risk Register 2023, HM Government](#)
- 2) [Variants, volunteers and vaccines: North Tyneside's journey through the COVID-19 pandemic, Director of Public Health Annual Report 2020-2022](#)
- 3) [North Tyneside Covid-19 Recovery Programme, End of Programme Report, Sept 2021](#)
- 4) [North Tyneside COVID-19 Outbreak Control Plan, March 2021](#)
- 5) [Preparing for Pandemic Influenza Guidance for Local Planners, Cabinet Office, July 2013](#)
- 6) [UK Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Strategy 2011, Department of Health](#)
- 7) [The 2009 Influenza Pandemic: An independent review of the UK response to the 2009 influenza pandemic, Cabinet Office July 2010](#)

PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

2.1 Finance and other resources

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

2.2 Legal

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report. The Authority is required to comply with the statutory duties allocated to Category 1 Responders in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and the associated Regulations.

2.3 Consultation/community engagement

There are no consultation / community engagement implications arising directly from this report.

2.4 Human rights

There are no human rights implications directly arising from this report.

2.5 Equalities and diversity

There are no equality and diversity implications arising directly from this report.

2.6 Crime and disorder

There are no crime and disorder implications directly arising from this report.

2.7 Environment and sustainability

There are no environmental or sustainability implications directly arising from this report.