



General Purposes Committee
25 February 2015

**Report from the Director of
Human Resources**

For Action/Information

Wards affected:
ALL

HR Pandemic Policy

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides details of the proposed new Pandemic Policy. When developing the new policy, the opportunity has been taken to clarify its remit and give clearer guidance to staff on how HR policies may be affected during a pandemic.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 General Purposes Committee is asked to approve the new Pandemic Policy.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 The council's current Pandemic Policy is overly lengthy and no longer fit for purpose. It does not make clear that the HR policy's remit is to focus on internal staff management and business continuity in the event of a pandemic, nor does it acknowledge or explain the wider context within which the HR policy operates.
- 3.2 The new policy briefly outlines the wider context of response structures and chains of command which would be established in the event of a pandemic. The Emergency Planning team and the Director of Public Health were consulted during the drafting of this policy and support the various changes which are being proposed.
- 3.3 It is made clear that during a pandemic, employees may be asked to take on tasks which go beyond their normal roles and responsibilities in order to ensure critical services are maintained. Staff may also be asked to undertake temporary transfers to other roles, and are expected to respond flexibly to these requests where possible. These are no longer referred to as 'secondments', in order to remove any confusion about the status of an employee who takes on additional duties during a pandemic.

- 3.4 The importance of planning for a loss of up to 50% of staff via departmental- or service-level business continuity plans is emphasised in the new policy. Managers are made aware that the Emergency Planning team should be contacted if they have any queries related to completing a business continuity plan.
- 3.5 The new policy states that during a pandemic, normal self-certification rules may not apply. With approval from HR and in line with local and national guidance, self-certification of a pandemic illness may be extended to up to 14 days. This is in recognition of the fact that health services may be too stretched to provide doctor's notes during a pandemic, and is supported by the Director of Public Health.
- 3.6 The new policy confirms that the usual flexible working limits may also be relaxed to allow staff to work up to five days a week from home. This is subject to HR advice, managerial approval and local and national guidelines on minimising spread of infection.
- 3.7 The policy also acknowledges that in the event of a pandemic staff may require additional emotional support or experience higher than usual levels of stress and/or anxiety. It directs managers to the council's Stress Policy and encourages staff to make use of the council's telephone-based Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) if support is required.
- 3.8 HR Improvement Group and Trade Union representatives were consulted on the policy, and CMT have recommended the policy be approved.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 A pandemic is an extreme event which could cause a loss of staffing levels of up to 50% and affect the delivery of critical services. The measures outlined in this policy are designed to mitigate the effects of a pandemic where possible, but the financial implications of doing so are not possible to predict due to the unique nature of a pandemic.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 During a pandemic, all local and national guidelines from the NHS, Public Health England and the LLACC would be followed in order to ensure compliance with legal and legislative requirements.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 This policy is applicable to all staff and provides a consistent approach to managing staffing and business continuity needs during a pandemic. With the exception of any pandemic-specific implications which cannot be predicted, no one group of staff with protected characteristics should be disproportionately affected by this policy.

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications

- 7.1 Staff numbers may be reduced by up to 50% during pandemic. Departments are asked to plan for this eventuality in their business continuity plans.

- 7.2 Staff may be expected to work more flexibly during a pandemic to minimise the spread of infection. This could include working from home instead of in their usual place of work or altering their hours to better suit their needs. HR will advise on best practice in the event of any pandemic.

Background Papers

Brent Pandemic Framework

Contact Officers

Cara Davani
HR Director