

Exercise Cygnus

Background

As a result of the ongoing high risk of an influenza pandemic, it was agreed that a Tier 1 UK exercise would be held in 2014 to assess preparedness at both a national and local level (Exercise Cygnus).

The exercise was scheduled to be held in 3 phases:

Phase 1 – A workshop on health planning and response on 14th May 2014.

Phase 2 – The main exercise held 13-16th October.

Phase 3 – A recovery exercise on a date to be agreed.

There were initially 11 Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) scheduled to participate at the local level in England whilst in Wales, all 4 LRFs agreed to take part.

Strategic Objectives

The Wales strategic objectives for the exercise were:

1. *To implement the Pan-Wales Response Plan* against a pandemic influenza scenario in order to exercise the strategic decision-making processes at both the local and national levels in Wales.
2. *To activate the operation of the Emergency Co-ordination Centre* (Wales) and exercise the linkages and interdependencies required with the local level in Wales and with the UK response protocols.
3. *To test the four LRF pandemic influenza plans* to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

Exercise Play

Phase 1 of the exercise in May focused on the assessment and detection phase of a pandemic and involved principally Welsh Government health officials, Public Health Wales and the NHS. A multi-agency workshop was also held in Wales in early June to explore issues and raise awareness of what would be happening in these phases.

The main cross-government element of Exercise Cygnus scheduled for week commencing 13th October was postponed following a request from the Prime Minister that the Department of Health urgently run a live exercise to ensure

robust processes were in place to manage any case of the Ebola virus disease in the UK.

Although the UK level exercise was postponed, we proceeded with the local level play in Wales with meetings of the 4 Strategic Co-ordinating Groups and the Wales Civil Contingencies Committee. These meetings also took the opportunity to consider the response in Wales to Ebola with Public Health Wales attending to provide a briefing on the risk and to give public health advice.

Exercise Outcomes

The following points emerged from the Strategic Co-ordinating Groups and the Wales Civil Contingencies Committee:

Issues Raised

- *Dealing with excess deaths* – There is a need for more central guidance on body storage and the collection and transportation of bodies. In particular, the lack of suitable vehicles for this purpose presents a problem. There also needs to be a clear understanding on when mass burials would be an option and the permissibility of undertaking adapted burial methods. There needs to be clarity on how the funeral industry can be supported.
- *Communication* - Information demands and situation reporting needs to be centralised as much as possible, to reduce duplication and sent to and from a single point of contact within each organisation. There needs to be consistency of public messaging across the board, centralised through Welsh Government; including the use of social media.
- *Regulation* – Further guidance is required on regulation and inspection issues during pandemic influenza, for example, whether the need for 2 signatures for the death certificate and CRB checks can be relaxed. There is also the issue of the legal position to enable staff to work across organisations.
- *School closures* – Further up-to-date guidance is needed for schools including the need to keep schools open wherever possible.
- *Demands for data collection* – There is a need for one central repository of data and the use of a single point of contact in each organisation.
- *National Pandemic Flu Service* – There is a need to ensure that all the local arrangements are in place to support the activation of the National Pandemic Flu Service before it is launched; including arrangements for antiviral collection points.
- *Vulnerable People* - Concerns were expressed about LRF planning for vulnerable people and services. In particular, the requirement of care

homes to have contingency plans and whether these are exercised or effective.

Next Steps

The Wales Resilience Partnership Team, in conjunction with the Wales Pandemic Flu Group, will take forward consideration of the issues raised during the Exercise.