

Paper 5 - Update to the National Security Council (Threats, Hazards, Resilience and Contingencies) on Pandemic Influenza Preparedness

1. On 17 February 2017, a Prime Minister chaired National Security Council (Threats, Hazards, Resilience and Contingencies) meeting agreed a series of actions, informed by Exercise Cygnus, to further enhance pandemic influenza preparedness the top national risk.
2. One year on, officials from the Cabinet Office and the Department of Health and Social Care will shortly be putting advice to their Ministers to:
 - provide an update on the work that has been delivered in year 1 and its contribution to enhanced preparedness;
 - outline and seek agreement for a second phase of cross-government work (year 2) to maintain and further enhance preparedness, agree public facing outputs and formalise the timescales for delivery¹; and
 - seek agreement for a letter to be sent to NSC (THRC) ministerial colleagues on progress and next steps.
3. The letter to NSC (THRC), an indicative draft of which is at Annex A, is intended to:
 - update Committee members on the progress made across all year 1 workstreams;
 - set out the need for Departments to maintain preparedness; and
 - outline the year 2 work programme and expected input across Government.
4. Building on the paper that was considered at the Pandemic Flu Readiness Board (PFRB) in January the main elements of the year 2 work are to:
 - Undertake additional work by summer 2018 to finalise national arrangements including:
 - preparing a health surge and triage service-facing document;
 - updating plans for delivering community health care and adult social care;
 - finalising the internally held draft Pandemic Influenza Bill, relevant supporting documentation and agreeing a review mechanism;
 - finalising new guidance for local planners on managing excess deaths and creating additional mortuary storage; and
 - taking forward a two-phase approach to the development of the moral and ethical workstrand².
 - Prepare products to support the continued enhancement of local arrangements including:
 - reviewing and refreshing the 2011 UK Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Strategy by February 2019;
 - developing a Pandemic Influenza resilience standard by February 2019;

¹ The advice will confirm to Ministers that the PIPP Board in April will be considering the approach to the lessons learnt from Exercise Cygnus beyond the NSC(THRC) work programme.

² Phase 1 to be completed by summer 2018.

- reorganising the existing pandemic influenza guidance on gov.uk by the end of 2018, and on Resilience Direct by February 2019; and
 - refreshing the checklist for Business by the end of 2018.
5. To ensure a holistic approach to pandemic preparedness, it is vital that departments across Government continue to be closely involved in the completion of year 1 activities and the proposed programme for year 2 outlined above. A table outlining department-specific responsibilities can be found at Annex B.
 6. The Devolved Administrations will continue to be fully involved in the above work to ensure coherence in the approach to preparedness across the four nations, whilst recognising that decision-making and reporting on devolved matters is the responsibility of each of the Devolved Administrations.
 7. The intention, as noted in the draft terms of reference tabled at the December PFRB, is for a further update to be provided to NSC (THRC) in February 2019.

Questions for discussion

8. Is there consensus in approach across the PFRB members on the work for year 2? Is any further prioritisation required?
9. Do you have any feedback on the draft letter at Annex A to NSC (THRC)?
10. Are PFRB members content to commit to their department-specific responsibilities outlined in Annex B?

Annex A – Indicative Draft Letter to NSC (THRC)

Pandemic Influenza Preparedness

Pandemic influenza is the top risk on the National Risk Assessment. A year-long cross-Government work programme to further enhance preparedness has been undertaken following a major exercise in October 2016 and a subsequent Prime Minister chaired National Security Council (Threats, Hazards, Resilience and Contingencies) meeting in February 2017. DHSC is the lead Government department for the risk but given the likelihood and impact of pandemic influenza action and activity is required across government. While work over the last twelve months has improved preparedness, there is more to do. It is, therefore, vital that the concerted activity across Government continues in the next twelve months.

Background

When a pandemic occurs, large swathes of the population will become infected over a relatively short period of time. There will be little or no immunity to the virus in the population unlike seasonal influenza. Experts agree that there is a high probability of another influenza pandemic occurring. The last influenza pandemic (Swine Flu) was in 2009 which was mild. It is impossible to predict with any certainty the severity of a new virus strain or when this would occur, but pandemic influenza planning is based on a reasonable worst case scenario of:

- up to 50% of the population could experience symptoms of pandemic influenza, more would be expected to be infected;
- up to 4% of symptomatic patients could require hospital care if the virus results in severe illness and of these 25% may require level 3 critical care;
- up to 2.5% of those with symptoms could die as a result of the pandemic; and
- up to 35% of the national workforce could be absent at the peak of the pandemic.

Modelling suggests that the expected additional demand during the peak week of a reasonable worst case pandemic would equate to around 200,000 beds and nearly 65,000 critical care beds in England alone. For critical care beds, this equates to over 20 times the normal availability.

Year 1 Outcomes

Within the last twelve months substantial work has been undertaken in five main areas. This work has been underpinned by engagement with the local-tier to strengthen the alignment of plans and activities. The following key pieces of work have been delivered by each workstream:

- Health Care - developed options to inform the potential ministerial decision to move to a state of population triage across the country, in response to severe and sustained pressures across the NHS.
- Community Care and Adult Social Care - extensively engaged with local government and front line services, including community healthcare and adult social care providers, and developed plans to prioritise and augment adult social care and community health care during a pandemic response.

- Excess Deaths – extensively engaged with a range of key stakeholders and practitioners involved in the deaths management process in order to inform new guidance for local planners and determine required national support.
- Sector Resilience – updated the planning assumptions for staff absence during a pandemic, worked across government with key sectors to stress-test preparedness for both the peak and duration of staff absence and embed this more comprehensive assessment of preparedness into the annual Sector Security and Resilience Plans.
- Cross Cutting Enablers:
 - Draft Pandemic Influenza Bill - scoped a cross-Government draft Bill to be held internally and taken through Parliament, if required, to support the response to a severe pandemic and are working closely with colleagues in the Devolved Administrations to take a one UK approach; and
 - Communications - developed a comprehensive four nations pandemic influenza health focused communications strategy to reflect updated policy, including behavioural considerations.

Next Steps

Consideration of this risk holistically and collaborating across Government has been vital, as a severe pandemic will require a whole of Government response. While a lot has been achieved, there is more to do to both maintain and enhance preparedness. In the next 12 months, the intention is to:

- finalise national arrangements; and
- prepare products to support the continued enhancement of local arrangements, including:
 - reviewing and refreshing the 2011 four nation UK Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Strategy; and
 - developing a pandemic influenza resilience standard, against which local capabilities and readiness can be assessed.

It is vital that this work continues to be prioritised and resourced by all Departments which have responsibilities, given the significance and scale of the risk. This work will continue to be overseen by the Pandemic Influenza Readiness Board and report to both Cabinet Office and DHSC Ministers. The Devolved Administrations are fully involved in this work to ensure the approach to pandemic preparedness is a collaborative one. The key actions for Departments are summarised in the attached table. A further update on progress in year two of the programme will be provided to NSC (THRC) colleagues in early 2019.

Annex B – Department-Specific Responsibilities in Year 2

Workstream	Output	Lead Department	Supporting Department(s)	Indicative Timescales
Finalisation of National Arrangements				
1- Healthcare	Service-facing surge and triage guidance.	DHSC	NHS England PHE Devolved Administrations	Summer 2018
2- Community Care	Service-facing guidance and updated plans for delivering adult social and community care during a pandemic.	DHSC	NHS England MHCLG CCS CQC Devolved Administrations	Summer 2018
3 – Sector Resilience	Focused actions arising from year 1 work to further assure the resilience of key sectors.	CCS	DfE Home Office HMPPS DHSC PHE Health and Safety Executive MHCLG MoD Cabinet Office Devolved Administrations <i>All departments are responsible for maintaining and further enhancing the resilience of key sectors to pandemic influenza.</i>	Summer 2018
4 - Excess Deaths	Revised guidance for planners on managing excess deaths and creating additional mortuary storage.	CCS	MoJ Home Office MoD DHSC MHCLG Health and Safety Executive Human Tissue Authority Devolved Administrations	Summer 2018
5 - Legislation	Draft clauses, supporting documentation and an agreed review mechanism for a UK wide draft Pandemic Influenza Bill.	DHSC	CCS DfE HMT MoJ GRO DfE Home Office Devolved Administrations	Summer 2018
5 - Communications	Approved four nations health communications strategy.	DHSC	Devolved Administrations PHE Cabinet Office	April 2018
5 – Moral and Ethical	Moral and ethical advice for an influenza pandemic.	CCS/DHSC	MHCLG PHE NHS England Go Science Devolved Administrations	Part 1 complete by Summer 2018

Prepare products to support the continued enhancement of local arrangements				
Year 2 programme	Revised 2011 Pandemic Flu Strategy	DHSC	All OGDs Devolved Administrations	February 2019
	Pandemic Influenza Resilience Standard for local responders	CCS/DHSC	MHCLG PHE Devolved Administrations	February 2019
	Restructure of pandemic influenza information / guidance on gov.uk and Resilience Direct	DHSC/CCS	MHCLG NHS England PHE <i>Some input may be required from other Departments that own current public facing pandemic influenza guidance.</i>	February 2019
	Refreshed checklist for business	CCS	DWP Health and Safety Executive BEIS DHSC MHCLG	End of 2018