

Pandemic Flu Readiness Board – Action and Activity in Wales

Background

Following the postponement of the original Exercise Cygnus in October 2014 as a consequence of the UK Government response to EBOLA, Wales decided to proceed to run the Exercise at the local level with table-top exercises being held in all 4 Local Resilience Forum areas. The learning from that exercise was taken forward by a Wales Pandemic Flu Task and Finish Group chaired by Welsh Government and comprising the Chairs of the LRF Pandemic Flu Groups.

Subsequent to the UK wide Exercise Cygnus held in October 2016, the Welsh Government has continued to work with the LRFs to implement the Cygnus report recommendations and address local and all-Wales planning. The Welsh Government's own senior level Civil Contingencies Group has also co-ordinated work across Departments to further enhance pandemic flu planning. This work was ongoing at the time the Pandemic Flu Readiness Board was established.

Activity

All 4 LRFs in Wales have multi-agency pandemic flu plans that comply with current Cabinet Office Pandemic Flu Guidance. These plans are validated against a checklist prepared by Welsh Government which has been circulated to LRFs to inform their planning, which was also shared with DHCLG to inform their review of the LRF Guidance.

Elements of the Wales LRF multi-agency plans were again tested in the re-instated Exercise Cygnus in 2016. This time, Wales also examined arrangements for distribution of Wales's health countermeasures and the National Pandemic Flu Service.

Welsh Government (Health & Social Service Group) maintain a range of medical countermeasures and consumables to meet the current pandemic influenza planning assumptions and deliver a defence-in-depth pandemic preparedness and response capability. These arrangements meet requirements of the 2011 UK Pandemic Influenza Strategy, which was agreed and signed off by the 4 UK Health Ministers. Welsh Government Officials continue to be part of a UK Stockpile and Deployment Structure aimed at maintaining these countermeasures in a state of readiness.

To assist in delivering outcomes of the UK Review, the Welsh Government has established a Wales Pandemic Flu Preparedness Group involving representation from Welsh Government Health, Social Services, Communications, Resilience officials, Public Health Wales and the Chairs of the four Wales LRF Pandemic Flu Groups. The Group's focus is primarily on areas subject to the review including healthcare demand, adult social care demand, sector resilience and excess deaths as well as communications and legislation. The Group last met in November 2018 but further meetings were paused due to Brexit priorities. There is a commitment to reconvene this Group and also strengthen the Wales structure for oversight of our health countermeasures.

these countermeasures available to front line social care staff through the local government structures.

Next steps: The associated social care Guidance will be reviewed against any further developments at the UK level so as to take account of the approach being taken in England.

Moral and Ethical

Policy Lead: Heather Payne

The Welsh Government has nominated a Senior Medical Officer to be a member of the Moral and Ethics Group that has been established as part of the Brexit work. This Group is also expected to provide generic guidance to inform pandemic flu planning and also any Clinical Advisory Group (CAG) that may be established, involving the 4 CMOs. The expectation is that we will be fully involved and able to participate in discussions regarding moral and ethical issues to be considered in a pandemic, when making decisions on treatments and managing severe surge in health and social care. This Group has had a first meeting and we were represented.

Sector Resilience

Policy Lead: NR

Welsh Government was engaged in the Sector Resilience Sub-Group and work has been undertaken to look at the resilience of devolved sectors to a flu pandemic. Consideration was given to the impact on staffing resources and the delivery of services that a pandemic outbreak could entail so as to provide Ministerial assurance

Welsh Government Departments were asked to provide information on the work being undertaken specifically in the Education, Transport, Water, fire, health, and central and local government sectors and responses have been considered

In terms of health engagement, all 10 NHS Wales organisations were consulted on their business continuity arrangements. These arrangements build on a range of UK wide health measures that support NHS resilience, including NHS clinical networks and mutual aid, health counter measures that help protect NHS staff and the National Pandemic Flu Service, which is a contingency that would protect front line primary care services.

In terms of local government engagement, Welsh Government attended a Welsh Local Authorities Civil Contingencies Manager's Group meeting to discuss pandemic flu preparedness in all 22 local authority areas.

Wales has introduced a Sector Security and Resilience Planning process in order to provide Welsh Ministers with assurance and a submission was submitted to the First Minister on the general resilience of devolved sectors. Further work is planned to seek assurance through the Sector Security and Resilience Plans (SSRPs) process for a more intrusive system of scrutiny