



**TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
EMERGENCY PLANNING UNIT**

Committee Report

Meeting : CIVIL CONTINGENCIES COMMITTEE : 25th OCTOBER 2010

**Subject : REPORT ON THE RESPONSE TO THE 2009 INFLUENZA
PANDEMIC - DAME DEIDRE HINES**

Report of the Chief Emergency Planning Officer

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise members of the results of Dame Deidre Hines' review of the UK's strategic response to the 2009 influenza pandemic.
- 1.2 Dame Hines has concluded in her report that she considered the UK response to the pandemic to be 'highly satisfactory' and 'proportionate and effective'.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The UK government and devolved administrations have been preparing for an influenza pandemic for many years. Some of the preparations included substantial stockpiles of drugs and plans to purchase up to 132 million doses of vaccine, sufficient to protect the entire population of the UK.
- 2.2 The H1N1 influenza pandemic which emerged in 2009 had relatively mild effects on the majority of people affected and was far less severe than the H5N1 'bird flu' virus upon which many planning assumptions had been based. Sadly, although the virus was milder than anticipated, 457 people are known to have died during the pandemic in the UK. This figure is based on the data available on 18 March 2010, which was the initial phase of the review.
- 2.3 In accordance with common practice, in March 2010, a review was established to learn lessons from the UK response to the 2009 influenza pandemic. Dame Deidre Hines was asked to Chair the independent review. The review took place between March and July 2010.

3 TIMELINE

- 3.1 The first cases of H1N1 influenza, or 'swine flu' as it was referred to in the media, were reported in Mexico and the USA on 23 April 2009. By the 27th April Mexican health officials were reporting that a total of 149 deaths

had occurred from 878 reported cases of influenza. It would later emerge that only 18 of those deaths were confirmed to be as a result of H1N1, but the initial statistics were worrying.

- 3.2 The World Health Organisation continued to monitor the global situation and raised the pandemic alert level to Phase 4 on 27th April 2009, which is characterised by verified human to human transmission of influenza able to cause 'community level outbreaks'.
- 3.3 The WHO raised the alert level again on 29th April 2009 to Phase 5 which is characterised by human to human spread of the virus into at least two countries in a region. This essentially sent the message that a pandemic was imminent. In response, the UK government launched the H1N1 /Swine flu information campaign.
- 3.4 On 1st May 2009, the first UK case of H1N1/Swine flu was reported. Following this, the period from May to June 2009 was designated the 'containment phase' in the UK. This phase included the issue of anti-viral medication to those with suspected cases, laboratory testing of swabs from suspected cases, the closure of some schools and self-isolation of cases in the community.
- 3.5 On 11th June 2009, the WHO raised the alert level to Phase 6, declaring that a global pandemic was under way. The peak of the first wave of pandemic occurred in July 2009.
- 3.6 From August to October 2009, plans were made to implement a vaccination strategy and a UK wide vaccination programme was launched on 21st October on a priority case basis.
- 3.7 The second pandemic peak occurred between October and November 2009 and the second phase of the vaccination programme was implemented.
- 3.8 December 2009 to April 2010 was considered to be the post pandemic period and saw the closure of the Swine Flu Information Line and anti viral collection points. Dame Hines began the review into the 2009 influenza pandemic in March 2010.

4 REVIEW CONTEXT

- 4.1 The purpose of the review was to review the appropriateness and effectiveness of the UK strategy for responding domestically to the H1N1 pandemic and to make recommendations to update and refine planning for any future influenza pandemic.
- 4.2 The review considered several key factors in determining the response to the pandemic. These were:
 - The central government response;
 - Scientific Advice;
 - The containment Phase;
 - Treatment;

- Vaccine; and
- Communications

4.3 Dame Hines and the review team reviewed over 700 documents and considered the reports and experiences of many of those involved, meeting almost 100 individuals.

5 THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

- 5.1 The review concluded that the government's central response mechanisms proved to be effective. The Cabinet Office played a key role in driving decision making, balancing views and ensuring strong coordination.
- 5.2 The review noted that the willingness of the devolved administrations and the Department of Health to work closely together was fundamental to the success of the overall UK response. The report also noted, however, that although the pandemic was a health emergency, there was much good work done across the range of government business and this practice should be built upon to further strengthen arrangements.
- 5.3 The review concluded that the management of additional deaths requires further preparatory work so that the UK is as prepared as it can be for a more severe pandemic.

6 SCIENTIFIC ADVICE

- 6.1 During the pandemic, a Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) was established to bring together scientific and technical experts whose role was to provide coordinated and consistent advice to central government. Their expertise was largely used to determine patterns in epidemiology and formed the basis of planning assumptions, policy and strategy at national level.
- 6.2 The review team praised the efforts of all those involved in the scientific response, of which SAGE formed a key part. There were several recommendations made including some clarification of SAGE's remit and procedures, reporting lines and terminology.
- 6.3 The review also found that the transparency of scientific advice could be maximised to further build confidence and trust within the public domain.

7 THE CONTAINMENT PHASE

- 7.1 The containment phase of the pandemic involved the implementation of measures that were intended to slow the spread of the virus and also to gather data to build a clearer understanding of the virus. The review specifically looked at the pre-pandemic planning and the initial phases of the response.

- 7.2 The strategic pre-pandemic planning was largely facilitated by the document 'Pandemic Flu: A national framework for responding to a pandemic', which was published in November 2007. The review found that the framework shaped the response to the 2009 pandemic and was effective. The framework ensured that many decisions had been made in principle prior to the outbreak and key personnel had been given the opportunity to work together.
- 7.3 Key lessons were around the practical difficulties of dealing with the unexpected pattern of spread when tailoring countermeasures to fit local circumstances. The review made several recommendations which aims to inform future planning and ensure a good balance is struck between central planning and local flexibility.

8 TREATMENT

- 8.1 The review focussed on the treatment phase of the pandemic in terms of the antiviral treatment strategy, the distribution of antivirals and provision of critical care.
- 8.2 The review found that the UK was well prepared to provide antiviral treatment for an influenza pandemic adequately and rapidly. The stocks of antiviral supplies were sufficient and adequate distribution plans were in place.

9 VACCINE

- 9.1 The 2009 pandemic was the first for which the UK had a specific vaccine available for use while the virus was still spreading. This is widely acknowledged to be a significant achievement for manufacturers, regulators and policy makers. Dame Hines reported that this reflects in no small part the exceptional level of preparedness the UK has attained.
- 9.2 Dame Hines also praised the way in which vaccine was procured, distributed and administered to the population. Some recommendations were made which are designed to build on these achievements.

10 COMMUNICATIONS

- 10.1 Clear, consistent and co-ordinated messaging across the full range of communication channels, tailored to the needs of specific audiences, is crucial to maintaining the public trust, compliance and support essential to the effective management of a pandemic. Adoption of hand and respiratory hygiene advice, social distancing measures, effective and responsible use of antivirals, and uptake of vaccination, are all predicated on successful communication.
- 10.2 The review found that there was ample evidence to suggest that the government's communications strategy was successful in building awareness of pandemic influenza and in supporting critical elements of the response.

- 10.3 The central media briefings succeeded in keeping the media informed and engaged. The openness between authorities and journalists was also praised. The report suggests that they provide a model for future communications in long-running crises. The report also suggests that the future development of initiatives around the use of digital media and social networking should be encouraged.

11 CONCLUSION

- 11.1 The review led by Dame Hines concluded that the strategic response in the UK was 'highly satisfactory'. Specifically, the key successes highlighted in the report were:

- planning for a pandemic was well developed;
- the personnel involved were fully prepared;
- the scientific advice provided was expert;
- communication was excellent;
- The NHS and public health services right across the UK and their suppliers responded splendidly; and
- The public response was calm and collaborative.

- 11.2 The strategic central response provided local responders with up to date information which needed to be translated into planning and activity at local level. The LRF Pandemic Influenza Working Group, Chaired by Newcastle City Council and supported by the TW EPU, was able to adapt to changing planning assumptions and clinical data and was reactive and dynamic in its approach.

12 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 Members are asked to:

- a) Note the contents of this report
- b) receive updates and related reports as necessary

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Working papers relating to the above are held in the offices of TWEPU. The document 'The 2009 Influenza Pandemic – An independent review of the UK Response to the 2009 influenza pandemic' report by Dame Deirdre Hines can be accessed at:

<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/416533/the2009influenzapandemic-review.pdf>