

Wiltshire Council

Corporate Swine flu Human Resources policy

This applies to: all staff employed at Wiltshire Council,

Policy Date: September 2009

Human Resources

Department of Resources

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Associated guidance

Swine flu – frequently asked questions for Wiltshire Council staff - team wire

<http://thewire.wiltshire.council/11-08-09-team-wire-special-final.doc>

<https://www.pandemicflu.direct.gov.uk/>

Policy

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Pandemic Influenza is a natural global phenomenon. It arises because a new strain of flu, to which few people are immune, spreads rapidly affecting large numbers of people in most countries and regions around the world. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimate that infection rates within organisations could reach between 40% and 60% in future waves of the pandemic. Each wave may last from three to eight weeks.

2 Purpose

- 2.1 The objective of this policy and procedures is to address human resources (HR) issues and to promote the health, safety and wellbeing of all staff while seeking to sustain Wiltshire Council's key functions and services during a period of swine flu, as far as is practicable and can currently be envisaged.

3 Scope

- 3.1 This policy and procedures apply to all staff employed by Wiltshire Council, regardless of the terms and conditions under which staff are employed.
- 3.2 **This policy only applies when it has been activated – see Section 4 below 'Activation of this policy'**

4 Activation of this policy

- 4.1 The activation of this policy and procedures is linked to the WHO International Phases for the development of pandemic flu and the UK alert levels that apply when a pandemic is declared.

The decision to invoke the planned response to swine flu locally will be taken by the Wiltshire Local Resilience Forum (LRF). The accepted trigger is at UK Alert Level 2/ WHO Phase 6 (see table on following page) It will stay in place until either the Department of Health has declared nationally that the pandemic is over or the LRF has decided this for our local area.

	International Phases	Significance for the UK
0	No cases worldwide	
Inter-pandemic Period		
1	No new influenza virus sub-types detected in humans	
2	Animal influenza sub-type poses substantial risk	
Pandemic Alert Period		
3	Human infection(s) with a new subtype, but no new human to human spread	UK not affected
4	Small clusters with limited human-to-human transmission but spread is highly localised, suggesting the virus is not well adapted to humans	UK has strong travel/trade connections with affected areas
5	Large clusters but human-to-human spread still localised, suggesting the virus is becoming increasingly better adapted to humans	UK affected
Pandemic Period		
6	Increased and sustained transmission in general population	UK Alert Level 1 Virus/cases outside UK 2 Virus isolated in UK 3 Outbreaks in the UK 4 Widespread activity across the UK
Post pandemic period		

5 Review

- 5.1 If the risk of swine flu were to increase and should one occur, the Government will issue additional public health information which Wiltshire Council will reflect in further information and advice to staff.

6 Communication

- 6.1 If the Wiltshire Local Resilience Forum (LRF) decides to invoke locally the planned response to swine flu, Wiltshire Council acknowledges that effective communication arrangements with staff and service users will be of paramount importance.
- 6.2 Advice for Wiltshire Council staff has been prepared that responds to some of the questions that staff are likely to ask :-
<http://thewire.wiltshire.council/11-08-09-team-wire-special-final.doc>

Procedures

7 Staff who remain at work during a period of pandemic flu

- 7.1 Throughout the period of swine flu Wiltshire Council will expect staff, if they are well, to continue to work as normal, as far as possible, while taking additional precautions e.g. to protect themselves from infection with regards to personal hygiene measures and to lessen the risk of spread to others. While managers will make every effort to support staff and take into account individual personal circumstances, any unexplained absences may be dealt with under the Council's disciplinary policy and procedure.

7.2 Temporary working arrangements

- 7.2.1 A number of temporary working arrangements will be identified and implemented, where appropriate and practicable. All staff may therefore need to review the way that they work as well as the duties and responsibilities that they undertake with a view to increasing flexibility across the organisation.

7.2.2 Social distancing measures

In order to reduce the spread of infection, a range of social distancing responses will be encouraged, where practicable for example the use of teleconferencing, videoconferencing and electronic means of communication to avoid face-to-face contact.

7.2.3 Temporary deployment elsewhere

There are roles and functions that are being identified within individual service business continuity plans as critical and every effort will be made to sustain these services during a pandemic flu outbreak. Other functions could be suspended for a period of time.

As such, Wiltshire Council reserves the right to temporarily deploy staff elsewhere as the need arises. Managers may therefore request staff to work in a different post (possibly within a different department), and/or at a different locality and/or work different hours, from those stated in individual statements of particulars.

All requests will be reasonable and will take into account individual skills and personal circumstances balanced against the needs of the organisation. Training will be provided; health and safety risk assessments completed and additional personal protective equipment (PPE) will also be provided, as appropriate.

For those staff at high risk of flu complications the latest government advice will be followed to minimise the risk of infection. These staff will include, for example, pregnant women, and those who have pre-existing respiratory disease or compromised immune systems e.g. those receiving chemotherapy. Staff who believe they fall into this category should inform their manager immediately who will take the necessary advice.

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Pandemic-flu/Pages/QA.aspx#mostvulnerable>

Wiltshire Council will carry out safeguarding checks (e.g. Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) disclosures where staff are temporarily deployed into roles working in an unsupervised capacity with children or vulnerable adults if they have not been previously checked to the level required for the type of role and nature of the client group that they will be working with, as set out in the Wiltshire Council policy and guidance on criminal record disclosure.

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/employee-handbook/eh-recruitment-and-selection/recruitment-policy-and-guidance-on-criminal-record-disclosure.htm>

Some members of staff may be requested to work from home, and to follow the appropriate guidance as set out in the Wiltshire Council ways of working policy (or where applicable District Council Homeworking Policy.)

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/employee-handbook/eh-flexible-working/flexible-working.htm>

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/employee-handbook/district-council-employee-handbooks.htm>

Management requests to make changes to working arrangements on a temporary basis will not be unreasonably refused by staff and they will be for the duration of the pandemic only. There will be no change to individual statements of particulars and normal terms and conditions of employment will resume at the end of the crisis.

7.2.4 Special swine flu Leave

If some functions and services are suspended for a period of time, it is likely that staff who normally work in these areas will be temporarily deployed or work remotely or from home, as set out in 7.2.3. Where there is no immediate deployment requirement, however, managers will have the authority to permit members of staff to stay away from work, i.e. have some time off, for a fixed period of time on normal pay (i.e. full pay plus allowances, not overtime and other one-off payments). Managers are responsible for decisions which will be made on an individual basis, and will be reviewed on a regular basis. Such absences will be categorised as 'special swine flu leave'.

Where this type of leave has been authorised, staff should be continually available for work (and so cannot arrange leave or be out of travelling distance from work without going through the normal request for leave process) and may be called into work at short notice i.e. same day. Managers and staff will be expected to keep in regular contact with each other, as far as is practicable, in order to keep abreast of the latest situation pre booked Annual Leave will stand and may not be cancelled in favour of Swine Flu Leave.

Staff on special swine flu leave wishing to take annual leave or who become unwell, should follow the normal reporting procedures.

7.2.5 Honorarium payments

Honorarium payment(s) will be made to staff who are required to carry out duties and responsibilities of a higher level in addition to their substantive post, as set out in the relevant policy.

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/employee-handbook/eh-pay-and-reward/pay-and-reward-payment-of-honoraria.htm>

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/employee-handbook/district-council-employee-handbooks.htm>

7.2.6 Travel claims

If staff are required to work at a different location to their normal place of work, they may claim travel expenses in respect of any additional expenses that they incur. Claims should be made using existing processes. Payments will be made in accordance with Wiltshire Council's agreed excess travel policy.

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/one-council-human-resources/key-policies/lgr-excess-travel-procedure.htm>

7.2.7 Additional and non-standard patterns of work

If staff are required to work additional hours beyond their normal contracted hours, and /or non standard patterns of work (e.g. evenings/weekends) they will be compensated through TOIL or overtime in accordance with their terms and conditions.

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/employee-handbook/eh-time-off/time-off-time-off-in-lieu.htm>

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/employee-handbook/eh-pay-and-reward/pay-and-reward-overtime.htm>

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/employee-handbook/district-council-employee-handbooks.htm>

7.2.8 Working time

Managers and staff should continue to refer to the guidance on HR Online and ensure that any additional hours are agreed in accordance with the working time regulations.

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/employee-handbook/eh-hours-and-holidays/hours-and-holidays-working-time-amendment-regulations/guide-to-working-time-regulations.htm>

7.2.9 Lone working

Staff should continue to refer to the lone working policy where they are required to work alone or unsupervised as part of their work.

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/hs-managers-guide-lone-working.pdf>

7.2.10 Annual leave arrangements

With regard to annual leave arrangements, staff should follow usual processes for booking annual leave. It may, however, be necessary to limit annual leave to sustain services. Managers will therefore consider requests for leave made by members of staff on their merits and on a case-by-case basis. Pre-booked leave should be allowed unless there are exceptional service delivery circumstances.

7.2.11 Flexitime arrangements

Managers continue to have the right to suspend flexitime arrangements subject to service requirements. Staff who normally work flexitime should follow the

guidance as set out in the Wiltshire Council flexitime scheme. As outlined in the ways of working policy amendments to flexitime may be agreed by managers.

8 Staff sickness absence during a period of swine flu

8.1 Staff with flu-like symptoms

As far as it can currently be known, the symptoms of swine flu will be the same as for seasonal flu, although sometimes more severe, as it is unlikely that people will have any resistance to it.

During a pandemic Wiltshire Council will positively encourage staff who feel ill to stay at home until they are fully recovered. Indeed, it is of paramount importance that staff with any flu-like symptoms stay at home until the symptoms disappear, both for their own wellbeing and to reduce the risk of spread to other members of staff.

Managers will be responsible for ensuring that staff with flu-like symptoms, as far as they are aware, do not remain at work. Staff who feel that they are developing flu-like symptoms at work are also required to go home straight away and check their symptoms via the NHS.

<https://www.pandemicflu.direct.gov.uk/>

8.2 Staff who have been in recent close contact with a probable or confirmed case of flu and do not have flu-like symptoms themselves

Staff who have been in recent close contact with a probable or confirmed case of flu and do not have flu-like symptoms themselves are not required to stay at home initially and should report to work as usual.

For staff who come into close contact with others who have flu symptoms through the course of their work where direct care is provided additional health and safety measures will be considered.

[Add link](#) from Paul Collyer – Head of Occupational Health and Safety – advice prepared and currently awaiting approval

8.3 How sickness absence will be managed during a pandemic and how this links to the sickness absence policy

- 8.3.1 As far as possible, staff who are absent as a result of illness (whether it is directly related to swine flu or not) should follow the procedures as set out in the sickness reporting procedure.

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/employee-handbook/eh-sickness/sickness-sickness-reporting-procedure.htm>

However, the following further guidance has been prepared to accommodate the unique circumstances that a pandemic may present, as far as it can currently be envisaged.

8.3.2 **Additional sickness absence arrangements.**

Managers will handle sickness absence with care and sensitivity, and any concerns will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis and take into account the difficulties that staff may encounter with regards to complying with procedures during the period of a pandemic.

During any absences, staff will be expected to continue to seek NHS advice as appropriate and follow it. Managers and staff will also be expected to keep in regular contact, as far as is practicable.

Throughout the period of the pandemic, departments should keep a record of all absences.

8.3.3 **Certification**

This paragraph will only be activated with special approval by Corporate Leadership Team. Until this happens usual procedures will apply.

In order to reduce the pressure on GP and other medical services, Wiltshire Council will extend the self-certification period from 7 to 14 consecutive days. A self-certification for the entire period of sickness absence should be completed in the normal manner using self certification form from HR Online.

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/sickness-absence-self-certification-and-return-to-work-form-0309.doc>

For absences over 14 consecutive days, if an individual member of staff encounter difficulties in obtaining a doctor's certificate, for instance, in light of the high demand for GP and other medical services, they should refer the matter to their line manager who will decide if it will be possible for him/her not to submit a medical certificate for the respective period of sickness absence. If it is agreed that a medical certificate does not need to be submitted, a self-certification for the entire period of sickness absence should be completed in the normal manner using self certification form - see above link.

Under normal circumstances, where an end date is not specified on a medical certificate for an absence exceeding 14 consecutive days, a certificate of fitness to resume work must be obtained from a GP and given to the manager on the first day back at work. To avoid adding to the high demand for GP and other medical services during a pandemic, this requirement may be suspended. However, if a manager has concerns about a member of staff's fitness for work, the member of staff should be asked to provide a medical certificate of fitness for work and the manager should follow the guidance as set out in the absence management policy. If an individual member of staff encounters difficulties in obtaining a doctor's certificate, they will remain on normal pay (i.e. full pay plus allowances, not overtime and other one-off payments), not sick pay, until the manager can arrange an appointment with occupational health to review the case.

Throughout the period of a pandemic, staff will be required to complete a self certificate form for each period of sickness absence, as set out in the absence management policy.

8.3.4 Keeping in contact

Managers and staff should keep in contact during periods of sickness absence, as far as is practicable.

8.3.5 Return to work meetings

By the time a member of staff is no longer showing symptoms and starts to feel better they are no longer likely to be infectious and can return to work.

Throughout the period of a pandemic, return to work meetings should be held as set out in the absence management policy.

8.3.7 Monitoring levels of absence/ formal sickness absence review procedure

When managers review the sickness absence history of an individual member of staff, the unusual circumstances of absences directly related to a pandemic will be taken into account.

8.3.8 Sick pay entitlements

Throughout the period of a pandemic, there will be no changes to the period during which sick pay shall be paid, and the rate of sick pay, in respect of any period of absence due to personal illness, as set out in the Wiltshire Council sickness pay scheme.

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/employee-handbook/eh-sickness/sickness-sickness-scheme.htm>

Entitlement to sick pay during a pandemic will however take into account that, in some instances, staff may need to follow the guidance as set out in this policy rather than the procedures that would normally apply as set out in the absence management policy, for example, in respect of the conditions for certifying sickness absence.

9 Staff requests to make temporary changes to their working arrangements and other types of absences during a period of swine flu

9.1 During a pandemic, in addition to staff being absent from work due to personal illness, there are a number of other reasons why individual members of staff may not be able to attend work such as family member sickness, and possible disruption to nurseries and schools.

9.2 Managers will handle all absences and temporary working arrangements requests made by staff with care and sensitivity, and any concerns will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. They will make every effort to support staff.

9.3 Staff requests to make temporary working arrangements during a period of swine flu.

As already stated in this policy (section 7.2.1), while seeking to sustain Wiltshire Council's key functions and services, and, in order to reduce the risk of spread of infection throughout the period of a pandemic, a number of temporary working arrangements (e.g. temporary deployment including homeworking) will be identified and implemented, where appropriate and practicable.

At the same time, it is acknowledged that Wiltshire Council's duty to sustain key functions and services will need to be balanced with the pressures that will fall on members of staff that have caring responsibilities and their work commitments. In light of this, an individual member of staff may make a request for a temporary change to their place of work/location, and/or, their hours of work/ working pattern, providing that their request is made in order that they can fulfil a caring role.

In addition, if an individual member of staff wishes to take their annual leave in order to fulfil a caring role, managers will take this into account when they consider their leave request (see section 7.2.10).

For staff who normally work flexitime, the same principles will apply if an individual member of staff requests an adjustment to their usual flexitime arrangements so that they can fulfil a caring role (see Section 7.2.11).

All requests should be made by individual members of staff to their manager and decisions will be made on their merits and on a case-by-case basis.

Requests to make these temporary working arrangements will be for the duration of the pandemic only, there will be no change to individual statements of particulars and normal terms and conditions of employment will resume at the end of the pandemic period.

9.4 Other types of absence - Existing emergency time off for dependents, compassionate leave provisions, and, additional paid leave and unpaid leave arrangements

In addition to the special provisions that will apply during a pandemic outlined in the above section (section 9.3), Wiltshire Council has existing provisions to support staff with caring responsibilities with regard to managing their caring role alongside their work commitments, as well as those who have been bereaved. These provisions will apply as normal during a pandemic and are outlined on HR Online as follows:-

- Emergency time off for dependents policy

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/guides-and-checklists/managers-guidelines-family-friendly-policies.htm>

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/employee-handbook/district-council-employee-handbooks.htm>

- Compassionate leave policy

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/employee-handbook/eh-time-off/time-off-family-emergencies.htm>

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/employee-handbook/district-council-employee-handbooks.htm>

- In addition, the unpaid leave policy

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/employee-handbook/eh-hours-and-holidays/hours-and-holidays-unpaid-leave.htm>

<http://hr.wiltshire.gov.uk/employee-handbook/district-council-employee-handbooks.htm>

9.6 Recording absences

Managers are to record sickness absence due to pandemic swine flu on SAP via MSS. A new swine flu sickness absence reason will be available.

9.7 Unexplained absences

All members of staff will be expected to attend work throughout the period of a pandemic unless their absence is authorised by their manager or they are sick and they have complied with the procedures as set out in the absence management policy and/or the guidelines set out in this pandemic flu policy.

Managers will handle unexplained absences with care and sensitivity, and any concerns will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis and take into account the individual personal circumstances as well as any difficulties that staff may encounter with regards to complying with procedures during the period of a pandemic. However, any absence from work that is not in accordance with the above, may be dealt with under the disciplinary policy and procedure and result in loss of pay.

10 Wellbeing

- 10.1 Pandemic flu is first and foremost a public health matter. There are, however, clear health and safety requirements to protect staff and clients who come into contact with infectious micro-organisms such as the influenza virus.
- 10.2 To support managers and employees, all services and establishments should follow the guidance provided on general infection control.

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Swineflu/DG_177831

[Add link](#) to advice from Head of Occupational Health and Safety. Advice prepared and currently awaiting approval.

- 10.3 Throughout the period of a pandemic, occupational health will continue to provide normal services to all staff including access to professional counselling via the employee wellbeing helpline. 01225 713147.

11 Equality

11.1 Wiltshire Council is committed to equality in its policy.

11.2 No employee will be unlawfully disadvantaged on the grounds of age, race or ethnicity, disability, gender and marital status, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion or belief under the operation of this policy.

12. **HR Contacts** - if you have any further queries please contact your HR Adviser – see link below:-

<http://thewire.wiltshire.council/index/departments/dor-homepage/human-resources/hr-contacts/hr-contacts-advisory.htm>

Other useful links;-

www.nhs.uk

<https://www.pandemicflu.direct.gov.uk/>

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Swineflu/DG_177831

This document will be updated as circumstances change

[illegible]

