



Belfast City Council

Report to: Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Subject: **Swine Flu Pandemic - Management and Reporting of Absence**

Date: 21st August, 2009

Reporting Officer: Trevor Salmon, Director of Corporate Services

Contact Officer : Jill Minne - Head of Human Resources, extension 3220

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to agree arrangements for the reporting and management of absence related to pandemic flu.

Relevant Background Information

The Council's Pandemic Plan Working Group has been working with departments to ensure that essential council services have robust plans in place to ensure business continuity in the event of a flu pandemic. Mechanisms are in place for ongoing consultation and communication in relation to these issues with all relevant stakeholders, including staff and trade unions.

The main impact of the pandemic on the Council will be the absence of staff. It is therefore vital to ensure that absence is managed appropriately and that its impact on the provision of vital services is minimised. Business continuity plans have been developed for essential services and the council now needs to consider the way in which absence related to the swine flu pandemic is managed and reported.

Key issues

Following consultation with other local councils through the Local Government Emergency Management Group and research with the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the following is proposed:

Reporting of Absence

Swine flu related absence will be reported and categorised separately to all other reasons for absence.

Management of Absence

It is proposed that an absence of up to 7 calendar days due to Swine Flu or Swine Flu like symptoms will not be taken into account for the issuing of warnings under the council's absence policy.

It is also likely that there will be a demand for leave from staff to look after sick dependants and relatives. Council policy makes provision for special unpaid leave to enable caring responsibilities to be discharged if employees are unable to meet these responsibilities using their annual and/or flexi-time leave. It is proposed that this policy is used in relation to staff that need to look after dependents as a result of the pandemic. In addition line managers, in conjunction with HR staff may give consideration to measures that might assist by, for example: adjustments to flexi-time or to annual leave provision to enable staff to draw leave from another period and exploring ways to mitigate the impact of financial loss.

Recommendations

Members are asked to agree the proposed arrangements for the reporting and management of absence related to pandemic flu in order that the Head of Human Resources can advise the Council's trade unions and issue guidance to staff and managers in this regard.