

## Management Board

### Swine Flu Update

*Note from the Serjeant at Arms, Chair of the Pandemic Planning Group*

#### **Purpose**

To update the Board on the preparations for the impact of an outbreak of swine flu upon the House services.

#### **Action for the Board**

The Board is asked to take note.

#### **Business Continuity Planning**

1. Plan owners were asked to use the Cabinet Office's original estimate of a 50% absence rate for planning purposes, although current advice is that the swine flu pandemic is more likely to result in an absence rate in the region of 12%.
2. The Department for Children, School and Families has announced that all schools will reopen as planned at the beginning of the school term. All plan owners identified school closures as a serious issue.
3. A representative from the Pandemic Planning Group (PPG) is attending the Business Advisory Network for Flu, organized by the Cabinet Office (Civil Contingencies Secretariat). We continue to ensure that our plans and communications are in line with government departments and the wider public and private sector.
4. The Pandemic Planning Group will meet in early Autumn and review the situation. We continue to review the information provided by the Health Protection Agency, the NHS and the CCS to ensure that our plans and communications are appropriate for any second or subsequent waves of influenza.

#### **Medical Advice**

5. The Medical Panel have agreed to keep under review the option of offering vaccination against swine flu to staff, but noted that this is likely to be expensive and, at least at first, made available only to the emergency services and key personnel.
6. The Medical Panel also supported the information produced by the Safety, Health and Wellbeing Service, and noted the strong emphasis on the importance of good hygiene and hand washing in minimising the spread of the swine flu virus. The cleaning contractor reports that there has been a significant increase

in the use of soap and disposable hand towels and has increased supplies accordingly.

7. The provision of hand gel is also being monitored. One litre dispensers are located at key points across the estate. Peripatetic staff who do not have ready and frequent access to hand washing facilities have been issued with individual bottles of handgel (90ml)
8. Following some confusing press reports, the Safety, Health and Wellbeing Service clarified the situation for people at work on the parliamentary estate who have close contacts with swine flu. Staff should continue to go about their normal routine – including coming to work, as long as they remain symptom free.

### **Impact on absence**

9. The swine flu virus is relatively mild, with the majority of patients recovering within 10 days. We have been closely monitoring the spread and severity of swine flu in Commons staff; there was a distinct increase in recorded sickness absence during July for cold/flu in comparison to the previous month, and against year on year.
  - Sickness days relating to cold/flu in July 2009 were 171 days compared with 68 days in July 2008 (13.7% of total sickness in July '09 vs. 5.7% in July '08).
  - Sickness days relating to cold/flu in June 2009 were 77 days compared with 82 days in June 2008 (6.9% of total sickness in June '09 vs. 7.1% in June '08).

The figures do not take into account any absences arising amongst those caring for ill dependent relatives.

### **Conclusion**

10. The House Service appears to have sufficient resilience to ensure that services can be maintained in priority order, during the anticipated swine flu pandemic.
11. Our absence rate during July was in line with the revised predictions by the Cabinet Office. Although this resulted in minimal impact on services, this may not be the case when the House returns in the Autumn. The PPG will continue to monitor the situation.