

From: Charlie Stewart
Sent: 13 March 2020 18:07
Subject: Update on Coronavirus

Dear Councillors

Hopefully, you will have heard that officers are working hard to ensure critical services can be maintained during the likely worst effects of Coronavirus. A Coronavirus Response Group of senior officers has been set up to steer the review of our business continuity plans and ensure the Council is ready. We have different groups looking at 5 specific aspects:

- Business continuity of critical services
- Looking after our vulnerable residents who are most susceptible to Coronavirus.
- Support to residents who may face severe hardship by the possible financial shocks (ie loss of wage) caused by Coronavirus.
- Welfare of our staff
- Communications

The Chief Executive has declared to all officers that this preparation work is to be our highest priority. You will appreciate that it is taking up a lot of many officers' time (and causing lots of late-night working ...).

I have outlined below some of the work that officers are currently undertaking. Councillors can help by:

- Being understanding about officer responsiveness to non-urgent casework, about the cancellation of meetings, and about the postponement of previously planned activity
- Being understanding that the situation changes every day. So information given out one day, may have changed by the next.
- Communicating with residents and community groups in their wards to reinforce Government Advice (see below)
- Sharing any practical ideas for what the Council can further do by contacting the Communications Team (communications@harrow.gov.uk)
- But please be understanding if officers don't have time to get back with a full response to your ideas and suggestions.

Planning

So far we have completed our planning to ensure we can maintain our most critical services (life and limb) when 35% of staff are off for 2 weeks. This was the first, most likely scenario proposed by our Director of Public Health. We are now extending that planning, noting the latest situation, for 50% of staff off ill or working if possible at home. We aim to complete this planning by early next week. We will then look at a longer term scenario (probably 20% of staff off over 2 or 3 months).

By planning to focus our services on critical support and moving staff between teams, we believe we will be able to maintain critical services. However, we have challenges especially around our 'old' technology.

We have also agreed with our Unions a set of temporary policies which will ensure our staff are not disadvantaged if they need to self-isolate or are taken ill with the virus.

You will also see regular and varied posters and communications going out to staff to keep them informed, and we have increased our cleaning regimes in buildings to combat the virus.

But the best communication you can share is:

Wash Your Hands!

You will hopefully have seen the latest advice from Public Health England, following the government's decision yesterday to move to the Delay phase. The aim of this move is to slow the spread of coronavirus and to protect and care for the people who are most at risk due to existing health conditions.

The new advice from PHE is for anyone showing the most common symptoms of coronavirus – a new continuous cough and/or a high temperature – to self-isolate for 7 days as soon as the symptoms start. People do not need to call NHS 111 to go into self-isolation. Due to the expected spread of the virus, people with a mild infection who are self-isolating at home will not be tested. After 7 days most people are unlikely to transmit the virus.

Following this advice, we expect the number of people not in work to rise quickly. Next week we will be planning for, and putting in, various emergency measures to ensure that we can respond rapidly should such a situation arise.

Community

As Coronavirus is a health issue, it is critical that the response is NHS-led. We are therefore supporting their messages into the community. Additionally, we are looking at ways of getting key messages out to hard-to-reach groups, including translating the messages into community languages.

If any Councillors feel there are any community groups on whom we should focus, in order to support greater understanding in the community, please would you let Alex Dewsnap know.

Schools

After an initial flurry of activity and a great deal of support, Harrow schools are now generally quiet. There is an indication of a fall-off in attendance, and we are continuing to provide clear advice on how to manage through this difficult time. We have also supported a lot of sharing of information with all sectors from childminders to groups which support post-16s.

There have been no confirmed new cases in Harrow schools. However, some school events have been cancelled, so as to assure parents rather than on PHE advice.

You will appreciate that we are specifically concerned about special schools and our more vulnerable children. A meeting has been arranged next week for the special schools to speak with our Director of Public Health.

Government advice to schools can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19/covid-19-travel-guidance-for-the-education-sector>

Links to External Agencies

We are linking closely to national, regional and local agencies and colleagues:

- Our Director of Public Health is closely linked into Public Health England and is providing us with expert professional advice on which we are basing our decisions.
- We are currently planning with West London and Borough health colleagues the strategic and operational response across the Borough.
- We are linked into London-wide colleagues via several professional groups, including that of the Chief Executives'.
- We are also linking to the local third sector and volunteer groups.

And Finally.....

Please find attached useful links re Coronavirus.

I hope this information is useful. We will be providing regular updates to you starting next week and we hope to get along to Group meetings to discuss further. In the meantime, if you would like any more specific information, please let me know.

Best Regards

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