

Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum - stakeholder update

Friday 27 March 2020

**A message from Darryl Keen
Director of Community Protection and Chief Fire Officer**

Dear stakeholder,

I am writing to you in my capacity as chair of the strategic coordination group of Hertfordshire's Local Resilience Forum.

Our local resilience forum (LRF) is a multi-agency partnership, made up of representatives from local public services, including the emergency services, local authorities, the NHS, the Environment Agency and the Highways Agency as well as other partners in the military and voluntary sector who provide a valuable contribution to LRF work in emergency preparedness.

Through the LRF, we plan and prepare together to deal with localised incidents and national emergencies. We identify potential risks and produce emergency plans to either prevent or mitigate the impact of any incident on their local communities.

Working together to tackle Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The strategic coordination group has been providing a multi-agency response to COVID-19 for a number of weeks. As its impact grows, we are working together to manage, and as much as possible, minimise its effect on our population.

Key partners are meeting three times a week, working together to tackle challenges in a way that is coordinated and mutually supportive.

NHS update

Hertfordshire's NHS organisations, including hospitals, community services, GP practices, mental health services and clinical commissioning groups (CCGs), are working together with Public Health England (PHE), NHS England, Public Health Hertfordshire and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to coordinate their response to COVID-19. Significant steps have been taken to prepare the Hertfordshire health system to cope with the expected surge of patients who are affected by the virus and who may need specialist treatment.



Both Watford General and the Lister Hospital in Stevenage are working with community health providers, nursing and care homes to ensure that anyone who can be cared for out of hospital is discharged as soon as they have been declared medically fit to leave. This is really helping to free up beds, as is the greater focus on finding safe alternatives in the community to being admitted to hospital. A great deal of work is taking place to increase critical care capacity and make sure that more staff have the right training to care for patients who need support with breathing. In addition, both hospitals are exploring opportunities to use the facilities and resources available in the private healthcare sector.

Other measures being introduced include cancelling or postponing all but the most urgent health-screening appointments and freeing-up hospital resources by cancelling planned, non-urgent surgery. Unfortunately this means that some patients will wait longer for their operation or procedure than is ideal. However, by taking these steps, clinical staff, operating theatres and recovery suites will be available for patients with COVID-19.

Your assistance in helping residents to understand the need for these extraordinary measures would be greatly appreciated. However if you do hear of concerns which you want to bring to the attention of health service commissioners, please continue to use your existing networks to do so.

GP practices are minimising risks by offering appointments via a telephone call or online where clinically appropriate. Face-to-face appointments are still available when needed. Patients are also being supported to order repeat prescriptions remotely and to collect them from pharmacies, which are playing a key role; meeting increased demands for prescription services and everyday minor illness advice.

It may take a week or two to turn prescriptions around from request to supplies at the moment, but it is very important that people don't order supplies for a longer period than usual. GPs and community pharmacists have been advised not to provide greater quantities than in normal circumstances, in order to ensure that there are enough essential medicines and supplies to meet everybody's needs.

The free telephone and online service, NHS 111, has seen a huge increase in queries since the outbreak of the virus. Call advisors and clinicians are helping people to get the expert advice they need at home, relieving the pressure on GPs and hospitals. A number of clinical and non-clinical staff have volunteered to support NHS 111 to deal with the unprecedented numbers of calls and contacts they are experiencing. These volunteers will take up their posts as soon as essential training and familiarisation is completed. Please encourage your own local community and contacts to use NHS 111 online wherever possible, to help the service to manage demand as effectively as possible.

Health staff are working under hugely challenging circumstances and we are doing all we can to support them, along with our county's other key workers.

Local authority update

Hertfordshire County Council is promoting the use of [TeamHertsVolunteering](https://www.thvolunteering.org.uk) as the official volunteering network for the county, coordinating efforts to support those affected by coronavirus and creating a pool of trusted volunteers. If you know of, or are part of a community group offering support in your area we'd be grateful if you could make #TeamHerts aware directly by visiting www.thvolunteering.org.uk and completing the online form. Military planners are working with the council to assist with this work.

Schools are open to the children of key workers and vulnerable youngsters and teachers are rising to the challenge of supporting young people to continue to learn and stay healthy and well at home. The council is issuing information and guidance to schools on a regular basis through a web-based resource and has brought together useful information for residents at this address: <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/about-the-council/news/news-archive/coronavirus-frequently-asked-questions> .

Police update

Hertfordshire Constabulary continues to work with partners to deliver policing services across the county. Whilst current abstraction levels remain within tolerance, the force has plans to maintain core functions should resource levels drop suddenly. The use of technology is being promoted across the force to maintain public contact with instances of webchat into our control room and online crime reporting seeing significant increases. New police powers came into effect on Thursday 26 March to combat the spread of COVID-19, which will help protect essential NHS services and save lives. Primarily this will involve engaging with and encouraging the public to observe the new 'stay at home' regulations. If people do not comply with the regulations, they will be enforced. Enforcement measures will include dispersing groups of more than two people, with those refusing to comply facing a fine.

Business and community update

We are forming a 'recovery' subgroup to prepare for our county's recovery from the COVID-19 outbreak. This group will coordinate responses from our local communities and report back on Hertfordshire's economic resilience, feeding back critical and timely intelligence to central government on a weekly basis.

And finally... we need you

As a local stakeholder with your own community networks and influence, we need your help to get across the lifesaving 'Stay Home, Save Lives, Protect the NHS' message to the public in your area. Please follow @NHSuk and @GOV.UK on twitter and share their hard-hitting and informative public messages.