

**Paper for: The LEP Board**

**Title: LEP Response to Coronavirus (Covid-19)**

**Date: 18th March 2019**

**Strategic Purpose: Business Resilience**

**Resource Implications:**

**Board: For Information**

**Introduction**

The developing outbreak of Covid-19 is being monitored constantly by Government and is the subject of regular updates on Health advice. It has two implications for the LEP; (i) the internal response to staff including any changes to operational requirements and (ii) supporting economic resilience in the business community of the sub region. This paper addresses the first of those items. A separate paper will be provided in respect of business resilience.

It is perhaps worth noting that as of 11th March there are no confirmed cases in Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester and one in Warrington, and that for most people the infection will result in a mild illness. However, the expectation is for the disease to spread and we are taking steps to minimise the risk and of spread to vulnerable groups.

**Operational responses**

General Approach

The LEP’s operational response is to follow Government advice which continues, as of the 11th March, to seek containment. No general cancellations of sporting events or similar large events are currently proposed. The second phase, which is expected, shall be to delay the spread of the virus. The current recommended measures are increased hand washing and / or use of sanitiser, using tissues when sneezing or coughing, and an individual self-isolating if they show any symptoms (fever or a dry cough), have been in contact with someone showing symptoms, or having returned from certain high risk destinations.

External Meetings and Events

Staff are being reminded of the opportunities to reduce the number of face-to-face and external meetings where this is practicable, such as using conference call facilities or MS Teams meetings.

For events organised by others, some are being cancelled or postponed, but for those which continue, we are allowing staff to use their discretion on whether they wish to attend.

There are few larger scale events (50 or more attendees) currently organised by the LEP and we are, for now, going ahead with these. However, we are asking staff not to arrange new large-scale meetings or events.

Internal Meetings

Most internal meetings involve few members of staff and we are highlighting the opportunity to conduct these remotely where appropriate, using telephone conference or MS Teams. We are registering several more Pow Wow numbers to cater for increased demand.

Perhaps of greater concern are Board and Committee Meetings. There is a requirement for openness and transparency and the opportunity for public attendance especially where spending decisions are being taken. As the Government is not yet advising that meetings should be cancelled, we will continue as planned. However, we will consider whether such decisions can be deferred, and, in any event, provide more opportunities that meetings can be done by conference call.

With March’s board meeting being held as a Full Board, we shall switch April’s Board meeting to a Discussion Forum, in part to address the above, but also in recognition that we will be in purdah.

Attendance at the Office and Measures being taken

Many staff have capability to work from home and unless there is a specific need for them to attend the office, we will remind them about working from home. For those staff attending the office we will provide a supply of hand sanitisers and desk wipes. We reserve the right to ask someone to leave the office and return home if showing symptoms.

Self-isolating

Anyone who feels a need to self-isolate, (or who is sent home) though they may not be showing symptoms themselves will, if they are able, be asked to work as effectively as possible from home. They will be asked to inform their line manager that they are self-isolating.

If someone self-isolates they will receive full pay for up to 14 days, after which time it shall be reviewed. Any extension of the isolation period, based on Government and Health advice, will also be paid.

Sickness and Sick pay

If a member of staff becomes sick, and is unable to work, then normal sickness absence procedures shall apply from the first day of symptoms. Staff should notify their line manager. Sick pay will follow the contractual guidelines, supplemented by any special measures provided by Government. So, Statutory Sick Pay, which normally is paid from the 4th day of sickness, will commence on the first day. This will not be relevant for most staff, for whom we make up the difference to full pay.

Communication to staff

Staff will be informed of any incident of another member of staff self-isolating or becoming sick. From the LEP perspective, we shall also inform our landlord Cheshire West but any decision to close the building will be for them to take. Likewise, if we hear from Cheshire West there has been a case of Covid-19 among any of the tenants, we shall communicate to staff.

We would request Board and Committee members to inform us if they are self-isolating or have become ill with Covid-19 symptoms.

Building Closure

If the building is closed, Senior Managers have contact details for all staff to cascade a message. Depending on the possible duration of closure, the LEP will consider implementing its Business Continuity Plan.

There are some functions, particularly Accounting, which cannot operate without attendance at Wyvern House. We will, however, be able to access the bank account to make payments even if the office is closed.

Marketing Cheshire

The University of Chester is providing advice to tenants of the RIC following the Government guidelines. Fewer MC staff have capability to work from home which may pose challenges during a lengthy closure of the RIC.

 **Ian Brooks**

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**March 2020**