



REPORT TO: CORPORATE COMMITTEE 12 OCTOBER 2021

SUBJECT: FLU VACCINATION PROGRAMME 2021

BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 The Committee is invited to note the content of the report and approve piloting a flu vaccination programme for identified groups of staff.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (B) (24) (c) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to the health, safety and welfare policies and practices of the Council.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- (a) approve the introduction of a flu vaccination programme for 2021 at an anticipated cost of £12,050 to be funded from free general reserves; and**
- (b) note that a further report will be brought back that reviews the impact of the pilot on sickness absence figures for the relevant periods with a view to considering the benefits of a longer term programme of flu vaccination.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Seasonal flu is a significant cause of short term illness. It is highly contagious and can affect a large number of working adults of all ages. Offering protection against flu can help to keep employees healthy and reduce sickness absence.
- 3.2 Colds and flu account for 5.46% of all Moray Council staff sickness absence and 17.65% of short term absence (indicative for period November 2019 to October 2020). This figure was lower by 25% compared to November 2018 to October 2019 and is thought to be largely due to more employees working from home and less physical or close interaction amongst the workforce due to the enforced lockdowns.

- 3.3 The cost of all cold and flu absence was £236,340 in 2019-20 which is 5.35% of all absence costs and equates to 2129 days lost over the above period. Scaling this to the 25% of the workforce who might be offered a flu vaccination, this cost equates to roughly £59,000. Colds and flu are currently recorded as one reason for sickness absence so it is not possible to accurately determine what proportion of £59,000 could potentially be saved with a reduction in seasonal flu, however indicative estimates of a quarter, half and three-quarters in Table 1 give an indication of the potential savings per proportion of seasonal flu. Recording colds and flu as separate reasons for absence will enable more comprehensive analysis.

Table 1

| 100% Flu | 75% Flu | 50% Flu | 25% Flu |
|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| £59,000 | £44,250 | £29,500 | £14,750 |

- 3.4 Traditionally, Education, Community Care and Environmental and Commercial Services have the highest proportion of people off work with colds and flu as short term absence. Some of these services are already experiencing significant staffing shortages due to a range of reasons, one of those being increased staff absence due to Covid related absence (illness or self-isolation requirements).
- 3.5 Notably, public health forecasting indicates the potential for increased levels of seasonal flu this winter due to lowered community immunity following the reduced mixing and contact between people during the lockdown periods.
- 3.6 To promote wellbeing and support a reduction in absence due to colds and flu, it is therefore proposed that a flu vaccination programme is introduced.
- 3.7 It is important to note that the NHS provides a free flu vaccine for persons over 50 years of age, social care workers who deliver direct personal care, pregnant women, social workers, some medical conditions, healthcare workers, teachers and support staff. The proportion of the workforce who do not currently meet the criteria for a free NHS flu vaccination equates to 25% (approximately 1271 individuals).
- 3.8 This will significantly reduce the cost for the council, however the NHS flu vaccination programme is not mandatory and it is recognised that not everyone who is currently eligible takes up their vaccination. It is therefore proposed that should it be agreed that the Council pays for flu vaccinations that this proportion of staff be referred to the free service and this would be promoted via a communications exercise to encourage and signpost eligible employees to take up their free NHS vaccination.
- 3.9 To support this decision, an options appraisal has been completed to assess the possible service provision and associated costs of providing a vaccination for employees. This assessment identified a cost effective provider where vouchers are ordered online and issued to employees via email or text message to use at an outlet at a variety of local locations. For those staff

who do not have access to a computer or smart phone and potentially for frontline services, it is possible to print vouchers through the online system.

- 3.10 At this stage in the year, due to the logistics and availability of supplies, the best option of being able to offer this service to our employees is to utilise a particular provider as the provider of flu vaccination vouchers.
- 3.11 There is no refund of unused vouchers with this option, however it would be possible to provide additional admin resource to operate a voucher request system which would inform the level of vouchers purchased to limit voucher wastage and value for money. The anticipated costs of the admin resource are included in the costs of the programme in section 4(c).
- 3.12 The last date for ordering vouchers is 3rd December 2021 with vaccinations being completed by 31st January 2022. Generally, flu vaccination programmes start in September at the start of the flu season.
- 3.13 Evaluation of sickness absence figures for the two winter quarters (Q3 and Q4) will be monitored for evidence of positive impact on reducing sickness absence rates due to flu. Should the anticipated positive impact be evidenced, a report will be brought to a future Corporate Committee with a proposal for longer term engagement with a flu vaccination programme and the range of options that might be available for this.
- 3.14 Given the short timescales involved, a request has been authorised by the Head of Financial Services to make a direct contract award to the identified provider for this year to enable this pilot programme of flu vaccination to be undertaken for the reasons noted in this report, with a view to using normal procurement procedures for any longer term provision should that be agreed.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

This report supports the Corporate Plan in terms of creating a sustainable Council by improving efficiency in reducing sickness absence rates.

(b) Policy and Legal

This report supports the Council's employer responsibilities and commitments with regard to the health, safety and wellbeing of the workforce.

(c) Financial implications

Corporate Management Team Additional Expenditure Warning

When the Council approved the budget for 2021/22 on 3 March 2021 (paragraph 3 of the Minute refers) it balanced only by using one-off financial flexibilities. The indicative 3 year budget showed a likely requirement to continue to make significant savings in future years. All financial decisions must be made in this context and only essential additional expenditure should be agreed in the course of the year. In making this determination the committee should consider whether the

financial risk to the Council of incurring additional expenditure outweighs the risk to the Council of not incurring that expenditure, as set out in the risk section below and whether a decision on funding could reasonably be deferred until the budget for future years is approved.

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Cost of flu vaccine for 25% of workforce | £11,500 |
| Cost of admin resource | £ 550 |
| TOTAL | <u>£12,050</u> |

(d) Risk Implications

The risks of not approving this additional unbudgeted expenditure are continued employee sickness absence due to colds and flu, at potentially higher levels than previously experienced due to the lower levels of immunity that the recent lockdowns have triggered. This would exacerbate an already challenging staffing situation in several areas across the Council, but particularly in critical front line services such as Adult Social Care and Teaching which have a direct cost in terms of securing cover for absence to ensure continued service delivery to vulnerable groups.

(e) Staffing Implications

There are no direct staffing implications other than those noted in the report.

(f) Property

There are no property implications.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

There are no anticipated equalities or socio-economic impacts.

(h) Consultations

The central and senior management teams and Head of Financial Services have been consulted on the report. The Scottish Joint Council trade unions have been consulted and are supportive and appreciative of the flu vaccination programme proposal.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The Council normally experiences a significant proportion of employee sickness absence due to seasonal flu. This year it is anticipated to be higher than because of a general lowered immunity within the community due to the reduced levels of people mixing during the last 18 months.

5.2 Piloting a flu vaccination programme will provide a way of reducing the levels of sickness absence due to seasonal flu which will help relieve the pressures noted above.

Author of Report: Frances Garrow
Background Papers: None
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