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To: Communities Cabinet Committee

Date: 14 March 2013

Subject: **Ash Dieback (*Chalara fraxinea*) outbreak response**

Classification: Unrestricted

<p>Summary: To brief the Customer and Communities Cabinet Committee on the Ash Dieback (<i>Chalara fraxinea</i>) outbreak in Kent and the significant risk the disease presents and our ongoing response to manage the situation, with a particular focus on the response by services within the Customer and Communities Directorate. Members are asked to note, endorse and contribute through debate to this approach.</p>
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1. Background

- 1.1 Following discussion of the potential environmental and financial impacts arising from the *Chalara* outbreak at Corporate Management Team on 4 December 2012 (and its proposed inclusion on the KCC Corporate Risk Register), it was agreed that Emergency Planning would present reports to meetings of the Environment, Highways and Waste (10 January 2013) and Customer and Communities (14 March 2013) Cabinet Committees.

2. Current Situation

- 2.1 Experience within the county of dealing with animal and plant health outbreaks, such as Foot & Mouth Disease and, more recently, Asian Longhorn Beetle, shows that robust and timely interventions can contain, slow and even prevent further spread of threats to plant and animal health. With this in mind, since the first cases were confirmed in Kent, KCC Emergency Planning has provided a direct link between the national response (led by Defra / Fera¹ and Forestry Commission) and a range of local partners, to ensure a consistent approach and single source of information.
- 2.2 This approach and, in particular, timely interventions to prevent the movement of potentially infected fallen leaves, has been endorsed by Martin Ward (UK Chief Plant Health Officer), who is leading the national response to the outbreak:

'Your approach and bio-security precautions look sensible. One of the key messages is that bio-security is actually rather simpler for Chalara than for some other diseases because there are no 'resting spores' in the soil. So as long as dead leaves aren't moved from site to site that pathway is dealt with. Unlike aerial spread, which is much harder to stop'.

¹ Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs / Food & Environment Research Agency

- 2.3 To date, more than 30 infection sites have been confirmed across the county, with the east of Kent hardest hit². Given this knowledge, our growing understanding of the threat and the publication by Defra of its 'Interim *Chalara* Control Plan' in December 2012, relevant KCC managers agreed that a Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) should be convened to build upon the good work already undertaken, to ensure that Kent is well-prepared.
- 2.4 Routinely, SCG meetings are chaired by Kent Police, but given the nature of this unfolding situation, it was agreed that KCC would be best-placed to take the strategic lead, with Emergency Planning and Planning & Environment acting as co-chairs.
- 2.5 The inaugural meeting was very well-attended (with >25 local partners and national agencies involved) and productive. The SCG agreed a multi-agency strategy (see *Appendix 1*) for managing the response in Kent, a command & control structure (managed from the County Emergency Centre), high-level risk assessment and the basis for a Local Action Plan to deliver the agreed strategy. A subsequent meeting (held on 14th December) was, again, very well-attended and focused upon implementation of the Local Action Plan. A further meeting is scheduled for 15th March where progress against agreed targets will be assessed.
- 2.6 On the 18th December the Forestry Commission and KCC staged a high profile regional Tree Health Summit in Kent, where Defra's 'Interim *Chalara* Control Plan' was launched. The event was attended by Mr. Jeremy Kite, Deputy Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities, providing opening remarks, and Mr. David Brazier, Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste, providing closing remarks. This is a testimony to the prominent role taken by KCC in relation to the response to the *Chalara* outbreak.
- 2.7 Emergency Planning have printed and distributed Forestry Commission *Chalara* public information notices to relevant KCC teams, including KCC Country Parks and Countryside Partnerships, and a range of other partners for installation at public open spaces across Kent. In addition, stocks have been supplied to parish clerks for display on notice boards.
- 2.8 Public Rights of Way (PROW), working closely with Emergency Planning, produced bio-security guidance in the Autumn which has informed a similar approach from Kent Fire & Rescue Service, as well as local personnel and contractors from the Environment Agency, Highways Agency and utilities companies who may be working in affected areas.
- 2.9 Emergency Planning has worked closely with colleagues in Property and Infrastructure and Education, Learning & Skills to develop innovative Ash dieback guidance for schools³. This approach is being rolled-out to cover other parts of the KCC estate. The guidance for schools has been cited as best practice by Department of Communities and Local Government and will be featured within their national 'REDistribute' newsletter.
- 2.10 The potential for rogue trading using Ash Die Back has been proved with one report received of a claim that a tree was diseased and therefore needed to be removed. A 'Trading Standards Alert' has been issued advising of the potential scam, the legal situation in relation to diseased trees and general doorstep shopping advice. This has also resulted in a radio interview with BBC Kent for the gardening programme. Listeners are likely to include our target audience for this advice, the vulnerable and

² [www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/UK_outbreak_map-13-02-25_Map2b.pdf/\\$FILE/UK_outbreak_map-13-02-25_Map2b.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/UK_outbreak_map-13-02-25_Map2b.pdf/$FILE/UK_outbreak_map-13-02-25_Map2b.pdf)

³ [www.kenttrustweb.org.uk/userfiles/CW/file/Policy/School_Emergency_Guidance/\(Rev3\)%20Ash%20Dieback%20leaflet.pdf](http://www.kenttrustweb.org.uk/userfiles/CW/file/Policy/School_Emergency_Guidance/(Rev3)%20Ash%20Dieback%20leaflet.pdf)

elderly, the usual victims of such rogue traders. This has also been reported on Kent Online⁴.

- 2.11 More broadly, information, advice and guidance has been shared with colleagues in Trading Standards and Community Wardens (as well the other service previously listed) so they may, in turn, share this with through their links with the farming / rural communities. Emergency Planning is working with colleagues in Communications & Engagement and other partner agencies to put in place a joined-up 'Media & Communications Strategy' to bring together under one banner, our various communications activities.

3. Next Steps

- 3.1 Much of our activity has been informed by the national arrangements outlined in Defra's 'Interim *Chalara* Control Plan'. However, the scale of the problem in Kent, the influence of specific local factors and our acknowledged pioneering position in dealing with the outbreak dictates that an effect local response be sustained.
- 3.2 Moreover, Defra will be launching its final '*Chalara* Control Plan' at the end of March, to coincide with the onset of Spring. This is likely to generate more media and public interest; in part because of the publication of this document, but also because, following the Autumn leaf-fall and the growth of new leaves in the Spring, the signs of *Chalara* infection will be more apparent to identify and new *Chalara* spores will be generated and potentially transmitted.
- 3.3 With this in mind, we need to be mindful that this is an ongoing and developing situation. We will therefore continue to co-ordinate activities of the SCG to implement our Strategy and Local Action Plan and to monitor the situation and effectiveness of these measures.
- 3.4 Additionally, we will, of course, continue to keep Members and Officers apprised of the situation as part of these arrangements.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 Members are asked to :
- Note the potential serious consequences that the *Chalara* outbreak poses to the environment and economy of Kent;
 - Endorse the KCC approach outlined within this report; and
 - Contribute any related topics for further research and advice arising from debate by the Committee.

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Background Documents : N/A

⁴ www.kentonline.co.uk/kentonline/home/2013/february/22/rogue_traders_in_scam.aspx