

NHS preparations for and response to winter in Kent 2015/16

1.0 Purpose

This report provides a briefing to the Kent Health and Wellbeing Board that describes the actions taken by the Health and Social Care system to prepare for and respond to winter.

2.0 Background

Historically, the effects of winter have been shown to place additional pressures on health and social care services across Kent. This is caused by a number of issues including an increase in respiratory illness, increased slips and falls and the impact of seasonal influenza.

The key vehicle for winter Preparedness and Response activities are the System Resilience Groups that were established in 2014. Kent has four System Resilience Groups covering the North, East, West and Medway and Swale. Kent County Council is a core member of each of these groups and is represented on them by an Executive Director.

3.0 System Resilience Group Assurance ahead of winter

NHS England set a clear expectation that all Systems Resilience Groups in Kent would have in place robust plans to deliver the urgent care standards and to ensure that plans are in place to effectively manage winter pressures. Therefore ahead of winter 2015/16 NHS England South (South East) facilitated a dual assurance process, via self-assessment and peer review, which required System Resilience Groups to provide assurance that they have put in place preparations for the winter period. This included a review of the key actions being taken to improve on last year's plan, delivery of the national eight high impact interventions, the flu programme for staff and patients and work on Delayed Transfers of Care.

4.0 Surge Management Plans and Exercises

NHS England circulated a South Region Surge Management Framework which was agreed by the South Region Tripartite of NHS England, Monitor and the NHS Trust

Development Agency. All Systems Resilience Groups have prepared Surge Management Plans that are aligned to this Framework.

NHS England South (South East) ensured that each System Resilience Group conducted a Surge Capacity exercise ahead of winter 2015-16. The System Resilience Groups' Surge Management plans were updated to ensure that these lessons were addressed.

5.0 Winter Communications

All SRGs have promoted the nationally led 'Stay Well This Winter' campaign, which is a joint initiative between NHS England and Public Health England.

<http://www.nhs.uk/staywell/>

This campaign drives home key messages to the public which will take the pressure off frontline services. The messages ask the public to protect themselves as the cold weather sets in by staying warm, stocking up on prescription medicines or checking in on friends and neighbours to make sure they are keeping well and taking up the offer of a seasonal flu vaccination where eligible.

6.0 Seasonal Flu Vaccination

Outbreaks of flu can occur in health and social care setting, and, because flu is so contagious, staff, patients and residents are at risk of infection. As a result front-line healthcare workers are offered a flu vaccination. System Resilience Groups have put in place measures to maximise and monitor updates by eligible Health and Social care staff.

The flu vaccination is also offered free of charge to people who are at risk, pregnant women, carers and some young children to ensure that they are protected against catching flu and developing serious complications. The continued support of KCC in promoting the uptake is recognized and welcomed.

7.0 Winter Response

NHS England South (South East) is operating a winter resilience room between 17 December 2015 and 29 January 2016. The winter resilience room provides a focal point for winter briefings, escalation discussions and communications through the winter. From here NHS England has provided oversight of the System Resilience

Groups response to winter, monitored daily situation reports prepared by hospitals and community services organisations, prepared daily situation reports and briefings and facilitated system-wide requests for support where required.

Whilst the pressures being faced by health and social care organisations are elevated, with high footfall into A&E, none of the System Resilience Groups in Kent have needed to move into black escalation. The escalation status of the Kent System Resilience Groups as of 12 January 2016 is provided below.

North Kent (Dartford Gravesham and Swanley / Swale)	Amber
East Kent	Amber
West Kent	Red
Medway / Swale	Amber

8.0 Industrial Action

The NHS put in place plans to prepare for the impact of the Industrial Action by Junior Doctors. This includes the cancelation of elective surgery and movement of other clinical staff to cover the roles filled by Junior Doctors.

The first period of industrial action by Junior Doctors ran for a day and ended on 13 January. The plans put in place were effective and none of the organisations affected in Kent had to increase their escalation levels as a result of this.

The next period of industrial action will be held on 26-27 January. The lessons of the first period of industrial action are currently being collected and will be used to inform and update the planning for this.

9.0 Summary

- Systems Resilience Groups, of which KCC is an integral part, have taken steps to prepare the health and social care system to manage winter pressures.
- Individual Health and Social Care organisations and System Resilience Groups have Surge Management plans.
- These Surge Management plans have been tested by exercise and were amended to take account of lessons identified ahead of the winter period.

- A strong national communications campaign is being supported and delivered locally. The NHS recognises and welcomes KCC's ongoing support to successfully deliver these important messages to the population of Kent.
- KCC and other partners' support in encouraging the uptake of seasonal flu vaccination is also welcomed.
- A robust system of winter reporting has been put in place to identify and respond any challenges as they arise via the Winter Resilience Room
- In addition to the Surge Management Plans, all the members of Systems Resilience Groups have robust, well-rehearsed plans in place to manage the impact of emergencies that can result from severe weather, infectious disease outbreaks or industrial action.
- These plans have been tested by the Industrial Action of 12 January. They are currently being reviewed to take account of lessons learned from 12 January ahead of the planned Industrial action of 26-27 January.