

Joint Public Health Board

12 October 2023

Health Protection Briefing

Choose an item.

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Dorset Council

Cllr David Brown, Health and Wellbeing,
Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

This paper describes the responsibility for health protection within local authorities and provides an overview of the health protection work of Public Health Dorset. The paper is being brought to Joint Public Health Board to update Members on an important part of our work, and to note changes in the way that public health and the wider system are working now that the pandemic has ended.

Recommendation:

That members of the Joint Public Health Board note the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Public Health and the function of Health Protection within Public Health Dorset.

1. Background

- 1.1 Health protection seeks to prevent or reduce the harm caused by communicable diseases and minimise the health impact from environmental hazards such as chemicals and radiation. As well as major programmes such as national immunisation programmes and the provision of health services to diagnose and treat infectious diseases, health protection involves planning, surveillance, screening populations for diseases and responding to incidents and outbreaks.
- 1.2 Board members will have been aware that during the COVID-19 pandemic, local authority public health teams and the DPH led the local response to coronavirus, including establishing local surveillance, communications, testing, outbreak planning and response, infection prevention and control including working with high-risk settings such as care homes, healthcare and schools.
- 1.3 However, this was an exceptional global emergency, and public health teams would not normally pick up this level of responsibility for health protection. Now that the pandemic has finished, we are working with the wider system to restore the health protection functions and return to normal business. However, because there have been significant changes to the NHS system including the creation of new integrated care boards, it is helpful for Members to be briefed on roles and responsibilities going forwards.

2. Responsibilities

- 2.1 Local authorities have a critical role in protecting the health of their local population, both in terms of helping to prevent threats arising and in ensuring an appropriate response when an incident occurs. This includes the work of Public Health Dorset, Environmental Health, Port Health, Licensing, Food Safety & Standards, Emergency Planning, social care, and those working on the climate change agenda.

The Civil Contingencies Act (2004) classifies Local Authorities as Category 1 responders, with statutory responsibilities for actively planning for, and leading the response to, health protection incidents and emergencies¹.

It is expected that Local Authorities will work with other key local partners to ensure that threats to health are understood and properly addressed. These partners include other Category 1 responders, such as The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and their local health protection teams which is tasked with surveillance, leading investigations, responding to public health threats and

¹ [Preparation and planning for emergencies: responsibilities of responder agencies and others - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/364222/preparation_and_planning_for_emergencies_responsibilities_of_responder_agencies_and_others.pdf)

providing public health advice; NHS England (NHSE) which commissions immunisation and screening programmes; and Integrated Care Boards which commission NHS services required for a public health response. Partners also include local health providers and voluntary organisations.

- 2.2 Directors of Public Health (DsPH) and local authority Public Health teams also have roles in **supporting health protection work**, as defined by the Health and Social Care Act (2012)².

Despite commissioning no health protection services directly, the Act mandates DsPH maintain an '**oversight**' function to ensure that health protection arrangements are robust for their local population. DsPH also have a wider health protection role in supporting UKHSA with the management of outbreaks and incidents within their local authority area³.

- 2.3 These responsibilities can include the following routine activity:

- Reviewing health protection **surveillance** produced by UKHSA.
- **Monitoring** of service **performance** for key health protection services commissioned by partners (i.e. [section 7a immunisations](#) commissioned by NHS England).
- **Assurance** of local health protection response plans and test exercises.
- Reviewing the local response to health protection incidents and outbreaks and ensuring that **learning** is shared among local partners and acted upon.

- 2.4 The Department of Health's Health and Social Care Act 2012 guidance states that DsPH should:

- provide **strategic challenge** to health protection plans/arrangements produced by partner organisations
- scrutinise and as necessary challenge performance
- if necessary, **escalate concerns** to the local health resilience partnership (LHRP)
- **Receive information** on all local health protection incidents and outbreaks and **take any necessary action**, working in concert with UKHSA and the NHS.
- contribute to the work of the Local Health Resilience Partnership (LHRP), possibly as lead DPH for the area
- provide the public health **input into the local authority emergency plans** as required by The Civil Contingencies Act (2004)

- 2.5 There are no specific financial implications for Public Health Dorset in relation to Health protection functions, aside from staff capacity to provide

² [Health and Social Care Act 2012 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

³ [Health Protection in Local Authorities Final.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

assurance and support UKHSA where necessary. Public Health Dorset is not responsible for commissioning services for health protection.

3. Health Protection Focus for Public Health Dorset

3.1 Given the responsibilities of local authorities for health protection, Public Health Dorset focuses on the following:

- DPH assurance
- supporting system planning to mitigate against health protection risks
- providing public health advice, professional scrutiny and challenge to system plans and incident response.
- keeping a watching brief, reviewing data and reports from key stakeholders
- communicating health protection risks to stakeholders and the public as necessary.

Figure 1. *The Health Protection Function of Public Health Dorset*



3.2 The work of PHD is set out below.

DPH Assurance

- has a core team assigned to the health protection agenda
- set up a mechanism to gain assurance through quarterly Health Protection Network meetings, attended by key stakeholders such as UKHSA, NHSE Screening & Immunisation Team, environmental health, NHS Dorset, and others as necessary

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> attends the Local Health Resilience Partnership, chaired by NHS Dorset and tasked to ensure the health system is prepared to respond to a major incident.⁴
<p>Support System Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> supports system partners to plan for the response to health protection incidents
<p>Advice/Scrutiny/Challenge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> provides advice, scrutiny, and challenge to system health protection plans and incident management, escalating concerns where appropriate to the DPH.
<p>Review Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> maintains a watching brief on the epidemiology of infections and environmental hazards which could impact human health. reviews immunisation uptake data, seeking assurance from the commissioner NHS England that the population is protected from vaccine preventable disease with a focus on addressing inequalities. reviews screening uptake data, seeking assurance from NHSE that programmes to detect infection within our local population are well attended and the risk of transmissible infections across the population is greatly reduced. reviews & discusses the epidemiology of infections with colleagues at UKHSA, including reviewing monthly surveillance reports and stakeholder notifications relating to specific, live incidents.
<p>Communication of HP Risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> issues public health communications as necessary – to stakeholders or to the public often in collaboration with UKHSA

4. Examples of Health Protection Incidents

4.1 To give a sense of the scope and breadth of the work around this agenda, a list of some health protection incidents requiring a system response (often led by UKHSA) and input from Public Health Dorset is noted below.

Table 1. Notable Health Protection Incidents in Dorset, Bournemouth, Christchurch or Poole, (January – September 2023)

an outbreak of klebsiella infections at an end-of-life care home, including 4 deaths

⁴ [EPRR-Model-Concept-of-Operations-2.doc \(live.com\)](#)

a norovirus outbreak associated with a baby shower event in a hotel restaurant
chaired the health group linked to the oil spill into Poole harbour
local public concern plus national headlines around “dry spilling” of sewage by water companies
scabies in temporary (hotel) accommodation for migrants
Legionella detected in the water system of the Bibby Stockholm, temporary migrant accommodation, no human cases
an outbreak of pseudomonas infections in people who had ear cartilage piercings linked to a local business.
a number of zoonotic (animal) infections highlighted to Public Health Dorset for awareness by UKHSA because of the risk of transmission to people who have had close contact with infected animals e.g. lyssa virus in bats, Q-fever in livestock, brucella canis in dogs rescued from outside of the UK.

5. Other implications

- 5.1 The health protection system across the Dorset Integrated Care System is reliant on a number of key stakeholder organisations working effectively locally and with regional and national organisations including primarily the UK Health Security Agency.
- 5.2 It is important to recognise that whilst the DPH has a key role in seeking assurance that robust plans are in place to protect the health of our residents, it is reliant on partner agencies to commission and deliver the related services.

6. Public Health Dorset’s Health Protection Annual Report (2022)

For further information, please see the Health Protection annual report from 2022. [Health protection \(publichealthdorset.org.uk\)](https://publichealthdorset.org.uk)