

BusinessFocus

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Businesses are warned to take flu threat seriously

JERSEY businesses are being urged to take the threat of swine flu more seriously.

The potential impact could be significant if large numbers of employees are absent from work through illness. And the risk of infection could be greater if employees travel regularly to the UK or further afield.

Chris Clark, a director of C5 Alliance, which carries out IT consultancy work, said that although some firms were taking the risk seriously – even stocking up on Tamiflu for their staff – others were taking a ‘lackadaisical approach’ even though they had a business continuity plan.

Mr Clark said that financial services firms registered with the Jersey Financial Services Commission were required to ensure that ‘adequate’ business resumption, disaster recovery and continuity arrangements were in place and tested at appropriate intervals. ‘They have ticked all the right boxes from the regulatory point of view and a lot have invested in business continuity suites. But if staff are ill with swine flu there is little point in providing these facilities,’ he said.

A more sensible approach, he said, would be to make provision for staff to work from home if necessary – known as ‘remote working’ – so that they were more flexible if an office was out of action for any length of time.

‘Traditionally, this is a quiet time for IT departments because of the summer holiday period so there is no better time to prepare,’ said Mr Clark.

Referring to on-line guidelines from the UK Cabinet Office and

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the Business Continuity Institute, he said there was good introductory advice and pragmatic information to draw on in the public arena.

‘There is a lot of talk about a second wave of swine flu and that the first wave will be the minor one. The UK government has forecast a 12% increase in absence, but some estimates are now saying that one in eight will be affected from the first wave,’ he said. ‘Things are changing so rapidly that news reports issued two weeks ago are completely out of date.’

As a father of two young children, Mr Clark said that realistically there could be significant numbers of school children needing care at home, requiring one parent to take time off work if both were employed. In this instance being able to continue working remotely would be a cost-effective solution, he suggested.

Video

In addition, firms might consider using video conferencing, rather than send people to meetings in other locations.

Jersey Finance last month sent members information from the Health Department with fact sheets and posters advising staff to use tissues when sneezing, wash hands and clean key touch points.

Head of marketing Dara Lutes said that swine flu was being taken seriously and firms were being diligent about promoting hand washing and other measures, but otherwise the issue was ‘low key’.



Chris Clark: Stressing the benefits of working from home

John Harris, the director general of the Jersey Financial Services Commission, said it was a regulatory requirement to have contingency plans and encouraged all finance businesses to review the adequacy of their arrangements.

A report issued last week by Oxford Economics expects 30% of the world’s population to become infected, with the potential to wipe five per cent off UK GDP in the next six months and tip domestic and global economies into severe deflation.

The think tank anticipates fear of infection hitting travel, tourism and discretionary spending and public spaces such as airports, restaurants, cinemas and shopping centres made no-go areas, at a time when the economy is still reeling from the economic crisis.

• A free breakfast briefing about planning a business response to swine flu is being held on Thursday, 30 July, at the Hotel de France. The speakers are Huw Thomas from Law at Work, Medical Officer of Health Dr Rosemary Geller and emergency planning officer Michael Long.

Response

The speakers will discuss the possible effects on the Island, the States response and the employment and human resources and legal and practical issues involved.

The event starts from 8 am and reservations can be booked by e-mailing ayley.haigh@lawatworkci.com or by calling 887088.

Search for new JT chief

THIRTY-six years ago 16-year-old Bob Lawrence joined States Telecoms as an apprentice.

Next spring he will leave the business, having spent 20 years as the senior manager in what is now the Jersey Telecom Group.

Staff heard last week that he is to step down next spring from his post.

He told the JEP that he would not be leaving with any extra payments or bonuses. However, he is one of a group of senior managers who will share in a £340,000 loyalty bonus scheme.

JT is still a publicly owned group but now competes for business around the world and head-to-head in Guernsey with the operator there.

Whether Mr Lawrence dreamt when he left school in the mid-1970s that he was going to be so successful is difficult to assess. What the business looked like in 1976 few will recall, but these days it employs well over 400 and last year turned over £91 million, making profits of £11 million.

Mr Lawrence said: ‘Jersey Telecom has been a massive part of my life but my wife Pat and I have decided that it’s time to move on.’

He is a keen runner and intends to tackle the Jersey Marathon in September.

‘There is quite a period of time before I leave and my commitment remains as strong as it ever has been. So far as I am concerned, it’s business as usual,’ he said.

The recruitment process for Mr Lawrence’s successor will begin in September.

Newly appointed chairman John Boothman said: ‘We will all be very sorry to see Bob go as he has contributed enormously to the success of JT over many years. However, we respect his decision and are grateful that he has given us sufficient time to plan and organise the recruitment of his successor.’



Bob Lawrence, who will retire next year

JEC reports 13% increase in revenue

JERSEY Electricity has reported a 13% increase in revenue from electricity sales in the nine months to 30 June.

According to an interim management statement issued yesterday, the revenue increase is due mainly to the 24% tariff increase imposed from January. The number of units sold during the nine months was up by only one per cent.

Economic Development Minister Alan Maclean has commissioned a review of the 24% tariff increase under Article 22 of the Electricity (Jersey) Law which allows the States to decide the tariffs that the company should charge.

Yesterday’s statement says that the JEC board is confident that the review ‘will confirm the appropriateness of the current level of the company’s tariffs’.

The JEC is listed on the main market of the London Stock Exchange and is therefore required by stock exchange rules to issue regular updates for investors.

The latest statement reveals that in the past three months to the end of June unit sales of energy were one per

cent lower than in the same period in 2008. For the month of July to date unit sales were similar to last year.

The company’s other business units – including the building services division and the electrical goods and Imagination toy and crafts shop at the Queen’s Road site – were trading behind previous levels during the three months to June and also this month. Retail business in particular has been affected by the economic slowdown.

Euro

JEC chief executive Chris Ambler said the company had hedged its power purchase and foreign exchange requirements for the remainder of the financial year and that imported power requirements for next year were ‘substantially hedged’, although at levels well below those underpinning this year’s tariffs.

However, the weakness of sterling against the euro had wiped out much of the benefit, he said.

The company has a cash balance of £15 million which it says will be spent on planned infrastructure in the short to medium term.



JEC chief executive Chris Ambler

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