

REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

COVID19 PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATE

1. On the 31 January 2020 the WHO declared the outbreak as a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC). At that stage, there were 9,847 confirmed cases 'globally' with 9,826 in China.
2. On the 11 March 2020 the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic indicating the new disease was spreading globally. While the outbreak initially occurred in China, it spread rapidly. By mid-March 2020 Europe became the epicentre for the disease.
3. The outbreak has spread globally with 213 countries/territories affected. As at 27 May 2020 there were 5,488,825 cases globally and 349,095 deaths.

The number of reported cases in the UK as of 9 June 2020 was 289,140 with 40,883 reported deaths.

North East reported cases were 10,390 with 1,400 reported deaths up to 8 June 2020.

Darlington cumulative confirmed cases were 399 as of 9 June, a rate of 374.4 per 100,000.

Cumulative COVID-19 hospital deaths for County Durham and Darlington Foundation NHS Trust is 243 as of 8 June 2020, a rate of 44.6 per 100,000.

4. International, national and local statistics are available from the following sites:

<https://covid19.who.int/>

<https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/>

<https://lqinform.local.gov.uk/reports/view>

https://lqa_research/covid-19-case-tracker

Response

National

5. In the UK the national response has been led by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) with Chief Medical Officers (4) providing public health advice to all agencies.
6. The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) is responsible for ensuring co-ordinated scientific advice is provided to decision makers in COBR (the Civil Contingencies Committee which convenes in the Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms).
7. In England the tripartite partnership of DHSC, Public Health England (PHE) and NHS England provides strategic oversight and direction for the health and adult social care response to a pandemic with Department for Education (DfE) leading on the Children's social care response.

8. In the initial stages of the outbreak, the NHS and PHE were proactive in contacting people who had been at risk of being infected, testing them, and where people tested positive tracing who they may have come into contact with and managing/treating the cases.
9. Public Health England, supported by staff at regional centres provides specialist technical expertise and advice. Darlington Borough Council has been in regular contact with these agencies.
10. DHSC launched a UK-wide public information campaign to advise the public on how to slow the spread of the virus and reduce the impact on NHS services. Information promoting important hygiene messages appeared in print, broadcast and social media.
11. DHSC worked across government to produce sector-specific guidance, to reflect the challenges across a number of settings, for example, transport, education, social care and hospitality. As the outbreak spread and more was learned about the disease guidance was revised.

Policy announcement milestones

(Note, this is not an exhaustive description the following are the key milestones mostly relating to public health related response)

12. On 3 March 2020 the government published its **Coronavirus (COVID-19) Action Plan** which set out a four-phase response:

<u>Contain:</u>	detect early cases and follow up.
<u>Delay:</u>	slow the spread, lower the peak impact, push away from Winter.
<u>Research:</u>	learn about the disease, innovate response, diagnostics, drugs and vaccines.
<u>Mitigate:</u>	care for people who are ill, support hospitals, maintain essential services.

13. On 12 March 2020 the government published “stay at home” guidance. The government recognised the virus was spreading generally throughout the country, no longer being contained therefore shifting the plan from ‘Contain’ to ‘Delay’.
14. A UK-wide lockdown was announced on 23 March 2020, the instruction was “Stay at home, Protect the NHS and Save Lives”. The government advised that police would enforce the rules re social distancing and closure regulations.
15. Emergency legislation was introduced, the Coronavirus Act 2020 received Royal Assent on 25 March 2020. The legislation gives further powers to government to slow the spread of the virus; reduce the cost and administrative burden on public bodies and limit the impact of potential staffing shortages on the delivery of public services.
16. Throughout March, April and May 2020 a number of announcements were made in relation to job retention, furloughing scheme, financial support, postponement of elections etc. Those areas although important, are not the focus of this report.

17. On 16 April it was confirmed that lockdown would be extended and set out “**five tests**” that must be met to allow easing of restrictions:
- (a) Evidence that the NHS can cope.
 - (b) A sustained fall in death rates (daily).
 - (c) Evidence that the Reproduction number (R) is decreasing.
 - (d) Confidence in testing arrangements, enough PPE to meet demand.
 - (e) No risk of a second peak.
18. “**Our Plan to Rebuild the UK (COVID-19 Recovery Strategy)**” was launched on 11 May 2020. This set out a five point scale to indicate the level of threat to society due to COVID-19 and included a phased approach to recovery, with incremental steps to relax control and public protection measures.

Response

Regional

19. In the North East, the initial emergency preparedness, resilience and response to COVID-19 was structured around the established North East Pandemic Influenza Framework, which had developed by NHS England (NHSE) and Public Health England (PHE) and adopted by all three Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) in the region.
20. Initially, the command and control arrangements in the framework operated on a precautionary shadow basis, before the regional Health Strategic Coordination Group was stood-up formally in early March 2020 when the outbreak began to escalate in the region.
21. Public Health England took the lead in issuing public information and guidance and advice to partners in the local health system, universities, local boarding schools, prisons, LRFs, airports and ports. Detection and contact tracing also took place in the early phase of the pandemic until early March when the national plan shifted from ‘contain’ to ‘delay’.

Response

Local

22. The council responded locally, working with PHE, ensuring that local stakeholders received the necessary guidance and that information and advice was shared with services within the council. The council worked very closely with PHE on detection and tracing of cases during the early phases of the outbreak providing advice to those affected. Links to the national coronavirus information and advice from government and PHE were provided via our website and we supported the national public information campaign via our social media channels.
23. In line with the framework, local response arrangements were led by the LRFs. On 25 March 2020, County Durham and Darlington LRF declared a major incident in response to the pandemic, and formally stood-up its response arrangements, with a strategic coordination group

led by the Deputy Chief Constable of Durham Constabulary.

24. The council is a major LRF partner and has played a significant role at all levels of response – participating in the strategic coordinating groups (SCG) and tactical coordinating groups (TCG) and chairing and resourcing all of the multi-agency support cells established to manage the county's response:

- **Community Support** – developing and coordinating support mechanisms for vulnerable people and those shielding from COVID-19, including facilitating and supporting volunteering and local community action;
- **Excess Deaths** – working with GPs, hospitals, mortuaries, registrars, crematoria, funeral directors, town and parish councils and faith groups, to manage the increased number of deaths while supporting the bereaved;
- **Intelligence and Data** – collecting, processing, analysing and interpreting local, regional and national data to inform LRF (and council) planning and decision-making;
- **Media** – developing and coordinating the communication of consistent messages and public information across LRF agencies as well as monitoring broadcast, print and social media and responding to media enquiries;
- **Multi-agency Information** – providing a one-stop-shop for agency information, producing daily situation reports, threat assessments and feedback reports for and on behalf of the SCG;
- **PPE** – establishing a distribution hub for emergency supplies of PPE, receiving government PPE drops, securing our own more reliable supply lines of PPE and processing and responding to requests for PPE from the social care sector and organisations in difficulty;
- **Recovery** – planning for recovery and restoration, undertaking impact assessments and coordinating multi-agency programmes to support individual, communities and businesses.

25. In doing so, we have worked very closely with our LRF local authority partner, Durham County Council.

26. The council has worked with partners nationally and regionally to respond to the pandemic. When the emerging threat was recognised COVID-19 Reponse Planning arrangements were established, staff communications put in place and briefings reported to Members. Throughout February 2020 advice from PHE was communicated to schools, local communities and businesses.

27. Chief Officers established governance arrangements meeting daily as a COVID-19 Response Executive to monitor the spread and impact of the pandemic, receive regular reports from service areas and review emerging national guidance.
28. Cabinet members and the leaders of the council's political groups have continued to meet to be briefed on key issues. In addition, regular email briefings have been provided to all elected Members.
29. The council's Public Health team led the initial planning and response to the outbreak, liaising with NHSE and PHE on the regional command and infection control arrangements, in line with the North East Influenza Pandemic Framework.
30. The team has been proactive in assessing government guidance on the virus, providing public health advice in relation to the guidance to council services and partner organisations.
31. Through our collaborative approach to public health, County Durham and Darlington Councils have in place a dedicated, public-health commissioned community infection prevention and control team, which has been at forefront of our efforts to contain and mitigate the pandemic, not exclusively but largely supporting care homes.
32. On the 20 March 2020 each Local Authority was instructed to establish a 'Hub' to support those at risk in the area who had no access to a support network. The Darlington Community Support Hub became operational on 24 March 2020 including a Help Line offering a seven-day service. (Note: At the time of writing this report a full report on the Darlington Community Support Hub is in development.)
33. COVID-19 presents a challenge for social care. The council built on its local knowledge of the sector when developing a mandated "**COVID-19 Local Care Home Support Plan**". This is published on the Council website.
34. The government has worked to provide LRFs with emergency PPE drops to address local shortages. Issues with PPE supply and distribution have caused the council to work with other local authorities in the region to secure more reliable supply and in some instances, prioritise its own PPE use in order to direct supplies to support frontline social care services.
35. Local Authority commissioned public health services including – stop smoking, sexual health, 0-19 years and substance misuse services have maintained service delivery.
36. The Education service has been proactive in providing advice and guidance to schools and parents through all stages of the pandemic. Schools received relevant public health advice during the initial weeks of the pandemic before the national decision to close schools for the majority of pupils. They continue to be supported as they plan for future delivery.

Testing

37. A key element of the national response has been the introduction of testing to monitor and enable containment of the spread of the virus and to develop intelligence which can support the development of treatments and vaccines.
38. The Director of Public Health has worked with regional colleagues from NHSE, Public Health England and local NHS foundation trusts to develop and coordinate local testing programmes for NHS workers, social care staff and key workers from LRF responding organisations including the council.
39. As part of this, through our Occupational Health service, COVID-19 testing is available for all council employees who have coronavirus symptoms, with tests and results provided quickly through local hospitals.
40. Since the end of April 2020, the council has worked with the LRF on the use of Mobile Testing Units (MTUs) under the National Testing Programme.

NHS Test and Trace Service

41. The NHS Test and Trace Service was introduced on 28 May 2020. The purpose is to trace the spread of the virus, isolate new infections and interrupt the further spread of COVID-19. In order to do this the Test and Trace service will:-
 - (a) Ensure people who develop symptoms of COVID-19 can be quickly tested to find out if they are infected.
 - (b) Trace contacts of people who test positive for coronavirus and, if necessary, advise them to self-isolate.
42. Contact is expected to be the responsibility of Public Health of England, North East Health Protection Team while the Council is responsible for the management of the impact of cases or contacts in a range of settings.

Local Outbreak Control Plan

43. The DHSC requires every Upper Tier Local Authority to develop a Local Outbreak Control Plan (LOCP) by the end of June 2020.
44. The plan will centre on 7 themes:
 - (a) Care homes and schools.
 - (b) High risk places, locations and communities.
 - (c) Local testing capacity.
 - (d) Contact tracing in complex settings.
 - (e) Data integration.
 - (f) Vulnerable people.
 - (g) Local Boards including a new member-led Board to communicate with the general public.
45. The government has allocated additional resources to councils to support Test and Trace and the implementation of plans.