

SPECIAL HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 JULY 2020

COVID UPDATE

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Scrutiny with an overview of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Council's response with a focus on health protection and outbreak management by implementing government policy.
2. To update Members on decisions taken with regard to the services relevant to this Committee.

Background

Virus and disease

3. Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause respiratory illness. A novel coronavirus (nCoV) is a new strain that has not previously been identified in humans.
4. On 31 December 2019 a cluster of pneumonia cases of unknown cause was reported in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. The World Health Organisation (WHO) named the novel coronavirus as "severe acute respiratory syndrome Coronavirus 2" (SARS – COV -) while the coronavirus disease associated with it is referred to as COVID-19.
5. As with other respiratory illnesses, symptoms of COVID-19 can include a new cough, fever, runny nose and other symptoms, including loss of smell or taste. Most people experience mild to moderate illness and recover without needing specialist treatment. It can be more severe for some people.
6. Older people and people with pre-existing medical conditions (e.g. heart disease, diabetes) appear to be more vulnerable to becoming seriously ill.

MAIN REPORT

Spread

7. 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.
8. 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.

9. 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.

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

<https://covid19.who.int/>
<https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/>
<https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/view>
https://lga_research/covid-19-case-tracker

Response

National

11. 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.
12. 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).
13. 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.
14. 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.
15. 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.
16. 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.

17. 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)

18. 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.

19. 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’.
20. 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.
21. 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.
22. 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.
23. 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.
24. “**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

25. 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.
26. 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.
27. 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

28. 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.
29. In line with the framework, local response arrangement 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.
30. 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.
31. In doing so, we have worked very closely with our LRF local authority partner, Durham County Council.
32. 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.
33. 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.
34. 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.
35. 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.

36. 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.
37. 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.
38. 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.)
39. 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.
40. 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.
41. Local Authority commissioned public health services including – stop smoking, sexual health, 0-19 years and substance misuse services have maintained service delivery.
42. 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

43. 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.
44. 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.
45. 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.
46. 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

47. 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:

- Ensure people who develop symptoms of COVID-19 can be quickly tested to find out if they are infected.
- Trace contacts of people who test positive for coronavirus and, if necessary, advise them to self-isolate.

48. 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

49. The DHSC requires every Upper Tier Local Authority to develop a Local Outbreak Control Plan (LOCP) by the end of June 2020.

The plan will centre on 7 themes:

- Care homes and schools.
- High risk places, locations and communities.
- Local testing capacity.
- Contact tracing in complex settings.
- Data integration.
- Vulnerable people.
- Local Boards including a new member-led Board to communicate with the general public.

The government has allocated additional resources to councils to support Test and Trace and the implementation of plans.

Recovery

50. The council has established recovery related planning groups for adaptation to a society post COVID-19. A recovery workstream was incorporated into the LRF Recovery Cell to co-ordinate recovery planning across the LRF area.

51. Working with colleagues from Durham County Council, the LRF Recovery Cell established a number of sub-groups:

- Business and economy.
- Buildings, infrastructure and environment.
- Health, welfare and communities.
- Local authority services.

52. The council focus is on restoring services and supporting the community in recovery. With partners the council is reviewing plans to prevent or mitigate

secondary outbreaks of COVID-19. Work is underway to understand the impact of COVID-19 locally and will inform council planning for the future.

Housing Services

Housing Income

53. Despite the financial challenges the lockdown has brought, tenants have continued to be fully supported to pay their rent and sustain tenancies. Rent arrears in May were 3.3% of the annual debit which is an increase from the year-end figure of 2.8% but the increase is lower than other social housing providers nationally. Since April over £3.7 million has been collected towards rent and arrears with weekly collection rates over 94%. Numbers of Universal Credit claims have significantly increased as of this time last year by 66.5%, with over 1285 council tenants claiming Universal Credit. The team continue to provide specialist support to those people who have lost employment and claimed Universal Credit. This support and guidance continues to help ensure that residents are supported in maintaining payment plans and maintaining tenancies.

Customer Services

54. During the lockdown period, over 6570 vulnerable customers have been contacted by Housing and Lifeline staff where residents were offered help and assistance as appropriate. This proactive work has helped to reduce the immediate effects and allayed some of the concerns of these residents and prompted more than 300 referrals being made to Darlington Community Support Hub for emergency food, medication and advice and to Darlington Support for help with shopping, befriending and dog walking. Housing staff are involved within the Darlington Community Support Hub where they were able to answer emergency calls on a wide variety of topics to assist residents during these exceptional times.

Housing Options/Homelessness

55. This has been a very demanding time for our Housing Options team with a significant increase in the number of presentations for homelessness, rough sleeping or at risk of being homeless. This situation has been reflected across the country
56. To meet this increased demand, additional temporary accommodation has been sourced through procuring hotel accommodation and ensuring our Tenancy Management Team increase the number of temporary Council accommodation units. The work done by this team has been guided by the information from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government ensuring that all vulnerable homeless applicants were placed in accommodation regardless of their need and status.
57. To ensure that all applicants could self-isolate additional items were purchased such as fridges and microwaves for their rooms in the hotel as well as furniture packages and carpets for the temporary accommodation. Each presentation has been assessed by a Housing Options Officer and they have all been given a personalised housing plan which will support them with in their longer-term housing solutions.

58. Over the period of April and May 2020 Housing Options have worked with over 300 clients who have approached us for support around their homeless situation. We currently have 57 households placed in temporary accommodation. The additional presentations represent some of the hidden homeless and sofa surfers and will ensure we take this opportunity to further work, engage and support them.

Allocations Team

59. The housing waiting list has been maintained over this period and at present have 1665 active housing applications. The team have continued to work from home and in April and May have ensured that 242 applications were checked and activated. Appointments have been carried out over the phone and they will continue to do this as we look at the Council's overall recovery plan and future demands on the service.

New Build

60. Two stalled construction sites at Fenby Avenue and Allington Way 3, providing 70 much needed new homes are to be recommenced. Neasham Road, East Haven and Skinnergate are continuing to be progressed through the planning application process, providing potentially an additional 206 dwellings. One scheme at Harris Street has been withdrawn due to concerns about loss of green space. Other potential sites have been identified and will come forward in due course.

Lifeline Team

61. The Lifeline Officers have ensured that all essential services have been delivered over this difficult period. All our sheltered, extra care and good neighbour schemes have had a staff presence throughout

62. Government guidance has been followed making key decisions around

- (a) Extra Care – closing of the dining area and delivering meals to tenant's flats
- (b) Closing of communal areas to discourage gatherings
- (c) Encourage and support each tenant to self-isolate within their own flats
- (d) Correct use and guidance of PPE, ensuring the safety of staff
- (e) Use of vehicles – one person per vehicle
- (f) Correspondence and verbal updates have been given to our tenants throughout to ensure we have met the guidelines and that these are understood by all

63. To ensure our tenants were not socially isolated we delivered a few virtual activities within the schemes to look after their mental health and wellbeing. This has included bingo, quizzes, virtual coffee mornings, and a wide range of celebratory activities on VE Day.

64. Throughout April and May the Lifeline team have carried out,

- (a) 7550 welfare calls by telephone
- (b) 171 physical welfare checks
- (c) 1335 call outs where a person has activated the emergency call
- (d) 1849 lifts for clients who have fallen

- (e) Facilitated 26 hospital discharges by installing essential equipment.

Repairs and Maintenance for Council Tenants

65. Whilst we were required to put all our routine and general repairs on hold during the lockdown period 642 urgent and emergency repairs were completed for Council tenants. Overall, we saw a 33.5% increase in these types of repair with the biggest increase relating to blocked drains. Some routine repairs also became more urgent as time went on. From 18th May 2020 routine repairs recommenced in accordance with government guidelines, starting with clearing the backlog before accepting new repair requests from early June 2020. Essential gas servicing and other regular safety checks have continued during this time with appropriate measures in place to ensure staff and tenants have been kept safe throughout this process.

Neighbour Nuisance

66. Whilst reports of neighbour nuisance and ASB have remained similar to previous years, there has been an additional 18 Covid related breaches which have been dealt with in partnership with Darlington Police. These were mainly large gatherings inside Council tenanted properties and the surrounding areas. There has also been an increase in those who are suffering with mental health issues during the lockdown period and those individuals have received appropriate advice support and signposting.

Dolphin Centre and Eastbourne Sports Complex

67. The Dolphin Centre and Eastbourne Sports Complex were closed to public on Tuesday 17 March 2020 when the country went into lockdown. The Leisure teams have been redeployed to various essential roles including Darlington's Community Hub. The team have supported a number of functions within the Hub including the call centre, control room, outreach driving and deliveries and food packing, all of which have been essential to facilitate this emergency service for residents shielding. In addition, the team have also supported Lifeline services, CCTV, the Food Bank and more recently Street Scene.
68. Eastbourne pre-school, which is based at the Sports Complex reopened on 20 April 2020 for vulnerable children and children of key workers.
69. The Dolphin Centre is currently open for town centre toilet use and Eastbourne Sports Complex opened from Tuesday 9 June 2020 for limited track usage. A staggered programme of outdoor activity has been introduced in a phased approach to re-engage athletes and footballers onto the site, which has been welcomed by Eastbourne clubs and customers.
70. A new shop front canopy was installed at 16 Horsemarket to provide alternative pavement café options and to highlight the presence of 16 in the market square when reopened. A takeaway service has been available since 15 June 2020 and has included new features such as a range of homemade waffles and afternoon tea, which have been popular. Following the government announcement that cafes, bars and restaurants can open, both the Bistro and pavement café welcomed public back on Monday 6 July 2020 celebrating a new menu. The menu includes our "Chefs promise" a commitment to healthy options. We will:

- (a) provide SMART SWAP options where possible.
- (b) use lower fat spreads and lower sugar preserves.
- (c) use leaner cuts of meat and trim visible fat on meat where possible.
- (d) work with suppliers to source menu items that are lower in saturated fat.
- (e) use light mayonnaise and light coleslaw. • wherever possible use healthier cooking techniques such as grilling, poaching and oven-baking.
- (f) use herbs and spices to flavour rather than piling on the salt.
- (g) use olive oil rather than butter in cooking.
- (h) support customers and families by carefully designing meal options that contain contributions to their 5-a-day.
- (i) provide healthy options full of flavour.

71. Although gyms have remained closed, the team have been working hard to keep in contact with customers and members. The Dolphin Centre app has been updated with ongoing advice on exercise that can be done from home to keep people active during lockdown. There has also been a series a workout videos posted on social media delivered by gym team members called Workout Wednesdays. There will soon be the opportunity for customers and Members to book onto home coaching or small digital classes delivered by the team via Microsoft Teams which will form part of our long-term digital offer.
72. Pools remain closed and are following strict guidance from the Pool Water Treatment Advisory Group (PWTAG). Various methods of testing have been completed including die testing to check flows and water circulation, and pool temperatures have been reduced throughout. Water safety messages will continue to be regular in the lead up to the summer holidays and in preparation for further easing of lockdown.
73. Connect Health who deliver the muscular skeletal contract on behalf of the NHS have agreed Heads of Terms during this period to become a tenant in the vacant registrar's area at the Dolphin Centre from November 2020.

School Meals and Community Catering Service

74. The school meals and community catering service has continued during this period with care homes receiving a varied menu, which has included themed days such as afternoon tea to animate the experience. School meals have been greatly reduced but have continued to support schools in accommodating vulnerable children attending school and children of key workers.

Recommendations

75. Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note the contents of the report.

Suzanne Joyner
Director of Children and Adults Services
Ian Williams
Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services

Background Papers

None

Miriam Davidson
 Director of Public Health: Darlington.
 Pauline Mitchell
 Assistant Director Housing and Building Services
 Ian Thompson
 Assistant Director Community Services

S17 Crime and Disorder	N/A
Health and Well Being	Major impact on wellbeing of residents.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	Impact to be determined in the future.
Diversity	N/A
Wards Affected	All wards affected.
Groups Affected	All groups affected.
Budget and Policy Framework	N/A
Key Decision	N/A
Urgent Decision	N/A
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Impact on communities to be determined in the future.
Efficiency	N/A
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers