

**COUNCIL
28 JANUARY 2021**

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL OVERVIEW

Council's Continued Response to COVID19

1. The Council was the first in the North East to set up community testing at the Dolphin Centre which opened on 14 December and operated for 10 days up to 23 December. The test centre was set up within a week and I would like to thank all staff for their incredible hard work and dedication to achieve this, and then for our staff to take on new roles at the test centre to deliver the testing programme is a mark of the great team we have here in Darlington.
2. The Dolphin testing centre re opened on the 2 January with a further five sites opening on the 11 January at:-
 - (a) Red Hall Community Centre
 - (b) Middleton St George Community Centre
 - (c) Firthmoor and District Community Centre
 - (d) Heighington Village Hall
 - (e) Head of Steam
3. Initially all sites were due to close on the 13 February however due to the lockdown the Government has extended the programme until the end of March 2021 which we have applied for. The testing is available to all residents and while we are in lockdown we are encouraging those people who are providing essential services and allowed to work at the moment to take a regular test to protect their family and colleagues. As at 17 January, a total of 8823 tests had been completed with 113 returning a positive result, giving a positivity rate of 1.3%.
4. The Primary Care Trust (PCN) is responsible for the roll out of vaccines in the initial stages to the two top priority groups. The first vaccines were received week beginning 4 January 2021. The vaccination of all Care Homes residents, over 80-year olds and health and care workers has commenced. The Council has worked closely with the PCN to ensure Feethams House is ready to receive residents for vaccination at the local vaccine hub. Darlington Cares has recruited volunteers to drive patients to and from the site and to act as stewards escorting people in and out of the building. Darlington Arena has been identified and agreed as a mass vaccination site. It is anticipated that this will open for vaccines in February.

Strategic Transport

5. As portfolio Member for Transport in the Tees Valley Combined Authority I chaired the Tees Valley Transport Committee.
6. As outlined in my previous report to Council there is a programme of investment being developed with significant investment planned across all modes of transport

to better connect the Tees Valley and support the economy and local jobs. The integrated transport programme set out in the TVCA Investment Plan is £256.7m between now and 2028/29. Furthermore, in the recent Spending Review Government announced a further £4.2 billion of investment for local transport split across eight city regions, one of which being the Tees Valley. This level of investment will enable ambitious projects and ambitions for transport to be taken forward.

7. As we have moved into lockdown there is a reduction in demand for public transport. Rail and bus providers are considering the levels of services required. However, transport for key workers at the right times will remain a priority. New Timetables have now been published.
8. Attended Rail North Committee on 12 January and Transport for the North Board meeting on 14 January.

Towns Fund

9. The delivery of the £1m Forward Funding element of the Town Fund has commenced. Several stakeholder events with businesses within the Yards area have been held. These meetings have been extremely positive with businesses sharing their views on the proposed improvements. Work will commence in early February.
10. The tender exercises for the improved lighting and the installation of free WIFI have been concluded and this work will also commence in February.
11. As part of our commitment to enhance our railway heritage good progress has been made in identifying and acquiring of historically important buildings along Northgate.
12. The business cases for the next phase of the Town Fund are being finalised which will be shared with Government for comment and agreement over the next few months. Heads of Terms have now been signed off by the Secretary of State.
13. Regretfully we did not receive funding for the High Street Fund, and we are seeking clarification on the decision.

Climate Change Working Group

14. A meeting of the Climate Change Working Group was held on 18 January 2021 when the Draft Action Plan was discussed. An update of the work was presented to Cabinet on 12 January 2021.

**Councillor Mrs Heather Scott OBE
Leader of the Council Portfolio**