

Cambridgeshire County Council's Response to COVID-19

To: General Purposes Committee

Meeting Date: 23 March 2021

From: Chief Executive and Joint Management Team

Electoral division(s): All

Forward Plan ref: Not applicable

Key decision: No

Outcome: The Council's response to COVID-19 and our strategies for county-wide recovery will have a significant impact on outcomes for individuals and communities.

This report provides an update on the Council's ongoing response to the current Coronavirus pandemic.

Recommendation: GPC are asked to note the progress made to date in responding to the impact of the Coronavirus.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Today, the 23rd of March 2021, marks one year since the first national lockdown began and the Council would like to start this report by acknowledging and thanking Cambridgeshire residents and businesses for the sacrifices they have made during that year. We would also like to thank our staff, partners and communities for their extraordinary efforts over the last year and for the collaboration, resilience and hard work that has been key to Cambridgeshire's response to the pandemic.
- 1.2. The number of cases of COVID-19 in Cambridgeshire and across England has fallen during lockdown and is now stabilising, while the pressure on the NHS has continued to reduce. On 22 February the Prime Minister announced a roadmap out of the current lockdown arrangements in England, setting out the earliest dates at which some restrictions may be lifted subject to continued success with the COVID vaccination programme and the NHS able to cope with the number of cases and complications. It is important that everyone continues to play their part in controlling the spread of the virus and following the rules while we are on the roadmap set out by the Government.
- 1.3. The national vaccination programme is making good progress and, together with the overall reduction in case rates due to lockdown is proving effective at reducing the number of severe COVID cases among older age groups. However, there is clear advice from Government that we should expect that the virus will continue to circulate for some time. The Council is planning accordingly and working on a Local Outbreak Management Plan informed by the Government's new Contain Framework.
- 1.4. This report provides an overview of the Council's ongoing response to the pandemic. Further operational detail can be found in service committee reports:

[Adults Committee](#) Adults Social Care, Directors Report – 339

[Children and Young People Committee](#) Court hearings - 2.28, Dental treatment – 2.39

[Communities and Partnership Committee](#) COVID19 Recovery Fund enabler grants – 2.2.1v, Council funded capital projects – 2.2.1vii, Regulatory Services – 2.2.3iv-2.2.3v, COVID-19 Co-ordination Hub – 2.3

[General Purposes Committee](#) Integrated Finance Monitoring Report – 305

[Health Committee](#) Healthy Child Programme – 360, COVID-19 Issues Report – 361

2. Guidance

- 2.1. The Government's "[COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021](#)", published on the 22nd of February, sets out how the Government will continue to protect and support citizens across the UK and provides a roadmap out of the current lockdown in England.
- 2.2. From 8 March, people started to see restrictions lifting with all children and students returning to face to face education and meetings with one person from outside their household for exercise or recreation allowed. Some further limited changes will come into

effect on 29 March to allow families to meet outdoors as most schools break up for the Easter holidays.

2.3 This is the first of four steps for easing restrictions outlined in the roadmap and we will only move to the next stage when the government have agreed that four tests have been met:

- the vaccine deployment programme continues successfully
- evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths in those vaccinated
- infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS
- our assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new Variants of Concern

2.4 It takes around four weeks for the data to reflect the impact of the previous step and the Government will provide a further weeks' notice to individuals and businesses before making changes. The roadmap therefore sets out indicative, "no earlier than" dates for the steps which are five weeks apart. These dates are wholly contingent on national data and are subject to change if the four tests are not met.

3. Latest Data

3.1 [Coronavirus Data](#), extracted on 17 March 2021, shows that in Cambridgeshire there have been a total of 26,803 COVID-19 cases detected since the beginning of the pandemic, with a lower cumulative rate than England (4,101.2 cases per 100,000 compared to 6,646.4 cases per 100,000 for England).

3.2 Similar to national patterns, cases of COVID-19 in Cambridgeshire increased rapidly in late December, peaking in early January at 549 cases per 100,000 for the week ending 4 January, and with the impact of national lockdown, have now dropped to 51.3 cases per 100,000 for the week ending 12th March 2021. This is below the England average of 58.7 per 100,000 but above the East of England average of 43.9 per 100,000.

3.3 In Cambridgeshire, case rates are highest in Fenland, where the weekly case rate is 106.0 per 100,000 for the week ending 12 March 2021.

3.4 There have been 926 deaths involving COVID-19 in Cambridgeshire up to 5 March 2021, where COVID-19 is on the person's death certificate. The weekly number of deaths in people whose death certificate mention COVID-19 in Cambridgeshire has reduced from a peak of 75 deaths for the week ending 29 January 2021 to 24 deaths for the week ending 5 March 2021.

4. Coronavirus dashboard

4.1 The UK Government Coronavirus dashboard is available at <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/>. The dashboard presents progress of the coronavirus pandemic as an up to date and authoritative summary of key information. This includes levels of infections, the impact on health in the UK and measures taken to respond. It presents a dynamic contemporary picture and is updated daily.

- 4.2 It meets a strongly expressed need from the public for timely updates at national and local level to ensure good understanding of the day to day progress of the pandemic. This is achieved through interactive maps and trends over time of key measures relating to testing capacity and activity, newly confirmed cases, hospital admissions and deaths.
- 4.3 The dashboard is as up to date as possible and local authorities do not have access to any more up to date data in the areas covered by the dashboard. Data is available at upper and lower tier local authority level across a range of metrics and is published at Middle Layer Super Output Area (MSOA) level at a more granular level. Local authorities do have access to more granular data than this, including individual cases, to support outbreak management locally.

5. Visit from Cabinet Office

- 5.1 From the 24 to 26 February, we welcomed a team from the Cabinet Office Covid-19 Field Team. The Field Team was established last year to visit areas of the country where the rates of Covid-19 are higher than, or not falling as quickly as, similar areas.
- 5.2 The geographical focus of the visit to Cambridgeshire was Fenland, and particularly Wisbech, as well as Peterborough, where infection rates had become relatively stable whilst in other parts of our county the rates were falling.
- 5.3 The 3-day visit combined discussions with senior leaders, public health officers, public sector colleagues, community representative, employers and voluntary sector partners. The team also spent a half day in Wisbech, visiting the town and some of the projects and services that were focussed on tackling the pandemic.
- 5.4 The Cabinet Office were impressed with our collective and system wide response to date, recognising that in fact both Wisbech and Peterborough were areas with enduring transmission. They recognised that a combination of factors were leading to stubborn infection rates, including levels of deprivation, housing conditions, working conditions, low wages, and low levels of take up of self-isolation support in relation to need.
- 5.5 Whilst we await the final report, the visit has enabled us to consider additional interventions and to ensure we are maximising every opportunity available to us to support residents and to ensure compliance amongst both the community and business.

6. Communications in response to the roadmap out of lockdown

- 6.1 As a result of the announcement of the roadmap out of the current lockdown arrangement in England, our communications strategy has been adapted to highlight the impact that people can have by taking personal responsibility – but still live safely - under the strapline 'This Depends on Us'.
- 6.2 Key messages that we are promoting are:
- There is now a planned way towards a more normal life.
 - England is proceeding cautiously, and we may experience some hold ups along the way.

- The dates set out aren't a done deal – and depend on us to do the right things to reach the next step.
- We must all continue to do the right things, e.g. driving down infections, increasing vaccine uptake and getting rapid tests so that more freedoms can happen.
- Everyone has their part to play.

6.3 The strategy is being used to produce messages linked to events linked to the roadmap - the opening of schools on 8 March, Mother's Day, Easter holiday etc. - which give people positive and achievable alternatives to living with continuing restrictions. Traditional and social media materials are produced each week in addition to outdoor promoting, and radio and video campaigns focus on key activities. We are continuing to work with community and faith leaders to translate and promote these messages via their own personal advocacy and are stepping up work with the business community particularly for promoting lateral flow (rapid) testing.

6.4 In addition, Cambridgeshire County Council has worked in partnership with Cambridge City and Peterborough City Councils and the Cambridge and Peterborough youth forums to produce films and teaching resources to go into all local schools for discussion, from week beginning 8 March, encouraging young people to see themselves as being 'Part of the Solution'.

6.5 A joint campaign localising the messages about vaccine confidence – working with our local CCG and National Health Service England – is being prepared to launch from early April, targeting areas and demographic groups where uptake is lowest.

6.6 The communications team continues to send a weekly briefing update on the current infection rates in each area of the county, which includes an update on communications activities to all Members as well as circulating any CCG updates relating to new information linked to the vaccination programme roll out. Members are also sent links to all the social message tool kits so that they are able to share them on their own sites or with village and community groups in areas that they represent.

7. Workforce

7.1 Since the start of the pandemic our workforce have reported that:

- 247 have had COVID tests carried out.
- 280 have had an Anti-body test carried out.
- 82 have been diagnosed with the virus.

7.2 Fortnightly briefing meetings continue to take place with our recognised trade unions. The meetings provide an opportunity for answering questions and engaging trade union colleagues on all aspects of the Council's response to the COVID crisis that have a people related connection, as well as changes and updates in the advice we issue as the situation evolves, and responding to specific questions or concerns that they may have.

7.3 The focus on staff wellbeing continues with twice weekly wellbeing updates, guidance and tips issued in the staff bulletins as well as monthly Wellbeing Hours on a wide range of subjects to support staff.

- 7.4 Monthly pulse surveys continue to be delivered with the latest one focused on the ‘Way We Work’ and a range of questions around agile working and the impact of the enforced changes in working arrangements due to COVID. Action plans are drawn up and published each month to set out the response and the commitment to address matters raised, with a focus on continual improvement and learning.
- 7.5 Our Health & Safety team continues to work with HR and Property colleagues to evaluate and clarify the processes staff and managers need to undertake if someone experiences COVID symptoms or is tested positive. In addition, they have been engaged in supporting the regular response to changes in government advice in relation to safe working in offices including the tightening up of our advice around the use of face coverings in shared workspaces. The team continues to provide regular advice to managers on risk assessments and individual cases to put appropriate safeguards in place.
- 7.6 Monthly wellbeing hours continue and have been very well attended. The session in January was led by an external speaker discussing the effects of racial trauma, micro-aggressions, systemic racism and social media on mental health. In February the focus was on sleep, which many people have said they are struggling with and welcomed some practical advice.
- 7.7 Hints and tips on a variety of wellbeing subjects continue to be included in the twice weekly staff bulletin. These cover topics ranging from how to set up a workstation at home to where to find support for financial matters and dealing with anxiety. The Council’s Health and Wellbeing Portal hosts all of this information in one place for ease of access: [Health and Wellbeing](#)
- 7.8 The weekly ‘Covid Conversations’ are continuing with a good number of staff joining each week and many taking the opportunity to ask questions. Over the past few weeks discussion have included lateral flow testing for people who can’t work from home, the roll out of the vaccination programme, issues around schools returning and why we are seeing ‘enduring transmission’ in parts of the county. These sessions are recorded so that they can be watched at any time by those unable to attend.

8. Significant Implications

The current Coronavirus pandemic will have both an immediate and a longer term effect on all of the Council’s priorities. The impacts will be monitored and managed through our risk logs and recovery plans and will feed into the annual review of Council strategy

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Not applicable

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the LGSS Head of Procurement? Not applicable

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council’s Monitoring Officer or LGSS Law? Yes

Name of Legal Officer: Fiona McMillan

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes

Name of Officer: Amanda Askham

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?
Yes

Name of Officer: Christine Birchall

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service
Contact? Yes

Name of Officer: Amanda Askham

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health? Yes

Name of Officer: Liz Robin

9. Source documents

9.1 Links included in the report.