

Cambridgeshire County Council's Response to COVID-19

To: General Purposes Committee

Meeting Date: Tuesday 22 December 2020

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. Background

- 1.1. At the end of the second national lockdown, Cambridgeshire was placed in “Tier 2: High alert” and has remained there in this week’s review of tiers. The Council continues its efforts to prevent and control the spread of the virus and to do everything it can to reduce of the impact of COVID-19. This report provides an overview of the Council’s ongoing response to the pandemic and provides links to more detailed operational information wherever available.

2. Latest Data

- 2.1. [Coronavirus Data](#), extracted on 16 December 2020, indicates that in Cambridgeshire there have been a total of 8458 COVID-19 cases detected since the beginning of the pandemic, with a lower cumulative rate than England (1,294.2 cases per 100,000 compared to 2,875.8 cases per 100,000 for England). Similar to national patterns, cases of COVID-19 increased in late September, peaked in mid-November with a case rate of 149.8 per 100,000 before dropping to a low of 61.1 per 100,000 in late November.
- 2.2. The incidence rate in Cambridgeshire has increased since with a weekly case rate at the time of writing of 84.9 cases per 100,000 for the 7 days up to 10 December, though this remains below the England average of 184 cases per 100,000. Case rates at the time of writing are highest in Fenland, where the weekly case rate is 123.7 per 100,000, although rates in all areas are rising. There have been 443 deaths involving COVID-19 in Cambridgeshire up to 4 December 2020 where COVID-19 is on the death certificate.

3. Activity updates

- 3.1. The Council continues to manage incidents in a range of settings, including care providers, schools and workplaces. The **Local Outbreak Control Plan** (LOCP) is updated regularly to take account of reviews of the tier structure, Government guidance and rates of cases detected. More than 80% of actions in the original LOC Action Plan have already been completed with enhanced contact tracing rolled out across Cambridgeshire in mid-November alongside a new county-wide case management system. These are the links to the [LOCP](#) and [Roles and Responsibilities](#) documents.
- 3.2. The Council continues to work closely with health partners to manage and mitigate **pressures in the health system**. At this time of year our hospitals are always very busy due to the impact of winter on the frail and elderly. The pandemic has exacerbated these pressures and the NHS continues to face a significant challenge from the number of Covid-19 patients, staff shortages through sickness, anxiety and/or self-isolation and roll out of the COVID vaccine programme.
- 3.3. Due to necessary infection control measures - for example greater spacing between beds and in treatment areas - our hospitals across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have approximately 200 fewer beds than normal. In addition, hospital emergency services are seeing people coming into hospital with more acute and complex needs related to the detrimental impact that restrictions are having on physical and mental well-being and suppressed demand during the two lockdowns. Our community services (including adult social care and commissioning) have increased their community and residential bed based

capacity to ensure they can support timely discharges from hospital to ensure flow through the system.

- 3.4 The Council welcomed the news that the first vaccine has been approved by the regulator and **vaccination has started in Cambridgeshire**. The local NHS has had our first delivery of the Pfizer vaccine and this has been prioritised by Government the following way:
- 80% to over 80's who are mobile (although we only have enough vaccine for 1 in 10 at this time),
 - 10% to care home staff
 - 10% to health workers

Individuals are invited to vaccination through their GPs or employer either by letter or phone call.

- 3.5 The supply chain and cold chain requirements of the Pfizer vaccine will initially limit the speed of the vaccination programme but further deliveries are expected and we anticipate that as greater volumes of this and other vaccines become available, the vaccination programme will gather pace in the New Year.
- 3.6 In the meantime we ask that people continue to follow the rules, remember the basis of **Hands, Face, Space**, and self isolate with their households and get tested if they have symptoms. This is the best chance we have of keeping the number of cases down, protecting vulnerable people and getting back more of the freedoms that we used to take for granted.
- 3.7 The £170m **Covid Winter Grant scheme** was announced in November to assist vulnerable people throughout the coming months. Cambridgeshire County Council has been allocated £1.4m to pass on to residents for the period December 2020 to the end of March 2021. 80% is to be spent on families with children under 19 and 80% of that figure is to be spent on food and household utilities costs.
- 3.8 The scheme we have put together sees food vouchers for the two week Christmas school holidays and February half term being automatically provided to all children entitled to free school meals, early years pupil premium and funded two year olds. (£15.00 per child per week).
- 3.9 In addition, families and individuals that are in receipt of income related benefits or are evidentially facing financial hardship, children with education care and health plan, care leavers and young carers can contact the County Hub for support with food, utility bills, white goods and boiler repairs. Advice on debt management is also available.
- 3.10 We have supported the district councils and other trusted community groups to extend their services to meet increased demand. After 4 days of communications being sent out, we had received over 2,200 calls for support.

4. Communications about Christmas

- 4.1 Updated communications assets have been developed for each week of December and shared with all public sector partners highlighting the things people can do under the

restrictions and still stay safe. Some examples of our campaigns can be seen at: [twitter](#)

- 4.2 From 17 December, messages about the five day Christmas ‘bubble’ arrangements were strengthened in line with national information to make it clear that while people can meet in up to three household groups between Dec 23 and 27, they need to consider the vulnerabilities of those they are meeting with and think if they should. Our advice remains that the safest way to celebrate with friends and family is online, the next safest is outside, and the least safe - and where most precautions must be taken - is with the bubble arrangement. The rules for Tier 2 (High Alert) still apply during this period and an overview of these rules can be found at this link: [Tier 2 High Alert rules](#)

5. Workforce

- 5.1 Since the start of the pandemic our workforce have reported that:

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

- 5.2 Fortnightly briefing meetings are continuing with the three recognised trade unions across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. 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. This has included key matters such as the risk assessment process for buildings and individuals and the guidance for staff on returning to work, as well as changes and updates in the advice we issue as the situation evolves.

- 5.3 We continue to focus heavily on health and wellbeing to support people as best we can during this period. The monthly wellbeing hours have been very well attended and feedback has been very good. The first one in September was a broad introduction to the wide range of support already in place and offered by HR, Health and Safety and Occupational Health. Since then we have held sessions focused on back care, a focus on mindfulness run by MIND and the most recent one in December was on alcohol awareness. The next Wellbeing Hour will take place in January and will be led by an external speaker discussing the effects of racial trauma, micro-aggressions, systemic racism and social media on mental health.

- 5.4 The first staff engagement pulse survey was carried out at the end of November. We had 1,037 responses across both CCC and PCC which provided some helpful insights into how people have been managing throughout the pandemic period, and more importantly, what might help going forward. Many said that they had felt challenged by having to manage a demanding workload alongside supporting colleagues and family members throughout a difficult period and gave some valuable suggestions about what might help going forward. The more detailed ‘free text’ responses enabled the creation on an action plan which can be found [here](#). The full results of the survey are [here](#). Next month the focus will be on equality, diversity and inclusion.

- 5.5 Online mental health awareness training continues to be rolled out, and this has been very well received by those who have attended. Five sessions run every month and, so far, 410

people have attended the training. Four additional sessions were commissioned during November and December in response to the second lockdown and the impact that had on some. Furthermore, three specific sessions were run for managers during December providing guidance on managing people and teams remotely, advice on approaching conversations around mental health and support resources to direct people to. The aim is equipping managers with the knowledge, tools and confidence to better support their people to cope with COVID-related anxiety and build their individual personal resilience, so that they can cope more effectively with modern day challenges, both at home and at work.

- 5.6 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 has been updated and now hosts all of this information in one place for ease of access: [Health and Wellbeing](#)

6. 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

7. Links to other reports containing COVID updates

[Financial Implications to 10 December 2020](#)

[Children and Young People Committee](#) 368 – 369, 371.

[Health Committee](#) 353 – 354.

[Highways and Transport Committee](#) 54, 58 - 59

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes
Name of Financial Officer: Tom Kelly

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

8. Source Documents

8.1 None.