

Update on Enhanced Response Area Status

To: Adults and Health Committee

Meeting Date: 9 December 2021

From: Jyoti Atri, Director of Public Health

Electoral division(s): Countywide

Key decision: No

Forward Plan ref: N/A

Outcome: Update on the Enhanced Response Area Status and early assessment of impact

Recommendation: Adults and Health Committee is asked to:
provide support for measures in place as an Enhanced Response Area

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1. Background

- 1.1 Enhanced Response Area status was granted to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough on 1st November 2021 just after half-term.
- 1.2 Covid-19 incidence rates in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough had been increasing since mid September, with all areas except Cambridge City being above the England average. Fenland was ranked in the top 20 areas in England for 60+ incidence. Peterborough was ranked in the top 20 for all age incidence and had been increasing exponentially with Covid-19 cases doubling every 20 days since mid-September till mid-October.
- 1.3 Incidence rates in secondary school age children were considerably above the England and East of England average in all areas except for Cambridge, where after a lag, rates were also increasing. Rates had also started to increase in primary school ages with both Peterborough and Cambridgeshire rates in 5-10 year olds being approximately 1000/100,000. There was considerable impact to children's education with student attendance below 90% across schools in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Teacher and teaching assistant absences were also increasing and a lack of safe staffing levels resulted in multiple classes being sent home. This was compounded by a shortage of supply staff. Covid-19 incidence rates were rising across all age groups with the 40-49 year olds notably high and increases being seen in both the younger and older age groups. Workforces across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough were being impacted by the need to isolate
- 1.4 Health services were under considerable pressure, with Covid-19 hospitalisations being high or increasing in North West Anglia Foundation Trust Hospitals (Peterborough City Hospital and Hinchingsbrooke Hospital). This was in combination with levels of A&E attendance, ambulance arrivals and emergency admissions in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough that were rising and nearly at pre-covid levels but with reduced capacity to deal with these due to Covid-19 measures. Hospital staffing capacity was under considerable pressure due to workers (or their family members) having to isolate, especially with the full isolation requirements for health workers that work in high-risk settings. There were significant health concerns regarding the potential projected Covid-19 hospitalisations over November and December.
- 1.5 Vaccination uptake was variable across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough with rates significantly lower than England in all age groups in Peterborough and pockets of low uptake in Cambridge City, Fenland, East Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire. Uptake of 12-15 vaccination was low in Peterborough, Fenland and South Cambridgeshire.
- 1.6 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough economies and workers are closely linked, with frequent travel across districts to critical infrastructure such as food production, packaging and manufacturing especially in Peterborough, Huntingdonshire, Fenland and East Cambridgeshire. Health, Police and the Combined Authority also work across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough as a whole. The whole local health economy was under extreme pressure and involves workforce drawn from the broader Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area affected by the high rates.
- 1.7 For these reasons, the Health Protection Board, Strategic Coordinating Group, local health partners and lead politicians supported the Director of Public Health in requesting Enhanced Response Area Status for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Enhance

Response Area Status was granted by the Government for 5 weeks starting on 1st November.

2. Main Issues

2.1 **Enhanced Response Area Status measures**

There was initial agreement on Enhance Response Area status measures, with additional measures agreed after negotiation with NHS England and Department for Education. The measures are a way of providing additional support to prevent transmission, reduce the spread of Covid-19 and protect the NHS.

These support areas included:

- **Reducing the transmission risks in schools** with an agreement to keep the measures in schools introduced in October including face coverings in communal areas and by visitors and increased use of use of virtual meetings for staff, parents and visitors where possible. In addition, for schools with confirmed outbreaks additional measures were agreed including the setting-based identification of close contacts and household contacts, daily LFD testing for close/household contacts while awaiting PCR results including in primary schools at parent/guardian discretion. In addition it was agreed that onsite regular school testing could be supported to encourage regular twice weekly testing in areas with poor testing uptake.
- **Contributing to local vaccination efforts** through commitment of additional national community outreach resource (surge rapid response team). The ERA has enabled Cambridgeshire and Peterborough target low vaccine uptake areas with support from the Surge Rapid Response Team (SRRT). The SRRT request was approved with a program of support agreed across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough from 22nd November to 23rd December. NHSE and partners also agreed to support the prioritisation of 12-15 vaccination uptake in low vaccination uptake areas and/or high incidence areas.
- **Enhanced communications and coordinated guidance** to support the reduction of high-risk social mixing, which included Enhanced Response Area communications, paid for media slots and locally drafted recommendations to events organisers, hospitality venues, workplaces and employers.

2.2 **Preliminary assessment of impact of Enhance Response Areas status measures**

At this early stage it is difficult to quantitatively assess the impact of the ERA measures. Covid-19 case rates dropped over half-term and for the first week of November, most likely due to the reduction in testing over half-term and changes in behaviours over half-term that affect transmission. Case rates started to increase across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough from about 8th November, with rates currently highest in primary school age groups and young people.

- **Reducing the transmission risks in schools:** Over 50 schools implemented have implemented ERA measures and are continuing to do so. Schools have welcomed the ability to use the ERA measures and feedback from the education cell is that one of the strongest measures is the setting identification of close and household contacts to enable daily LFD testing till a negative PCR. ERA status has also informed the covid-safe measures for school-organised events.

- **Contributing to local vaccination efforts:** the SRRT plan has been agreed and is the national team are being deployed from 22nd November -23rd December with the local support and communication. The national team will undertake door-door engagement, leaflet drops and provide signposting to local vaccination sites. Where possible there is also local deployment of local pop-up vaccination sites, which were being planned prior to ERA status. Geographical areas of activity and uptake of vaccination in those areas as well as feedback from the SRRT will be assessed going forward to understand where this approach has most impact. A request for additional vaccinator capacity is still being discussed.

In 12-15s, there have been considerable improvements in Covid-19 vaccine uptake over the last month with most districts now above the England and East of England average. There has been considerable engagement with the school immunisation service to support prioritisation and with schools and parents to improve consent rates. However, whilst 12-15 vaccine uptake in Peterborough has shown improvement from 13.4% on the 1 November to 28%, this is still some way below the national average and requires improvement. Prioritisation of this group is key through the remaining school term and going forward.

- **Enhanced communications and coordinated guidance** ERA status has enabled creation of toolkits, and greater dissemination of messaging through Ad vans. There has also been feedback that stronger and more flexible prevention messaging with the ERA brand would be advantageous to slow the return to pre-pandemic behaviours.

A range of additional DPH letters for businesses, education settings, event organisers and hospitality venues have been sent out to highlight ERA status and re-iterate the strong public health recommendations around measures to reduce Covid-19 transmission. These have enabled more detailed discussion with settings and event organisers, however as there has been no legislative change there are no additional enforcement measures.

2.3 Conclusions

The ERA status has allowed for significant additional national resource to be drawn down to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to improve vaccination uptake and for the prioritisation of high risk schools in the school vaccine programme. It has also enabled several measures to be taken in schools to better address Covid-19 transmission and minimising interruption to education.

Whilst it is some areas identified for action have not been realised, such as vaccinator capacity, overall there has been a positive impact on the area of being an ERA, most notably the infection control measures in schools and the focus on the vaccination of 12-15 year olds. Whilst there have been some positive benefits to ERA status there has not been sufficient time to maximise the benefits, especially as the package of interventions being used in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have taken two weeks to negotiate, develop and implement.

We are now seeing case rates increase, the NHS remains under pressure and we are heading towards a difficult winter so effective implementation of the ERA remains critical.

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

- 3.1 Communities at the heart of everything we do
The report above sets out the implications for this priority in Section 2
- 3.2 A good quality of life for everyone
The report above sets out the implications for this priority in Section 2
- 3.3 Helping our children learn, develop and live life to the full
The report above sets out the implications for this priority in Section 2
- 3.4 Cambridgeshire: a well-connected, safe, clean, green environment
Not applicable
- 3.5 Protecting and caring for those who need us
The report above sets out the implications for this priority in [ref paragraph]

4. Significant Implications

- 4.1 Resource Implications
There are no significant implications within this category.
or
The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:
or
The report above sets out details of significant implications in [ref paragraph]
- 4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications
There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications
There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications
This approach should reduce inequalities in covid-19 transmission and vaccine uptake across Cambridgeshire.
- 4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications
The decision to request Enhanced Response Area status was discussed at Health Protection Board (which includes Councils, Health, Voluntary sector and UKSHA representatives), the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Covid-19 Strategic Coordinating Group, with local health leaders and with all local council leaders and politicians
- 4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement
The DPH engaged with local politicians about the application to national around ERA status
- 4.7 Public Health Implications
The report above sets out details of significant implications in Section 2

4.8 Environment and Climate Change Implications on Priority Areas
There are no significant implications within this category.

4.8.1 Implication 1: Energy efficient, low carbon buildings.
Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral
Explanation:

4.8.2 Implication 2: Low carbon transport.
Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral
Explanation:

4.8.3 Implication 3: Green spaces, peatland, afforestation, habitats and land management.
Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral
Explanation:

4.8.4 Implication 4: Waste Management and Tackling Plastic Pollution.
Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral
Explanation:

4.8.5 Implication 5: Water use, availability and management:
Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral
Explanation:

4.8.6 Implication 6: Air Pollution.
Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral
Explanation:

4.8.7 Implication 7: Resilience of our services and infrastructure, and supporting vulnerable people to cope with climate change.
Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral
Explanation:

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance?
Name of Financial Officer: N/A

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Head of Procurement?
Name of Officer: N/A

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer?
Name of Legal Officer: N/A

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact?
Name of Officer: N/A

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?
Name of Officer: N/A

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

Name of Officer: N/A

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health?

Name of Officer: N/A

If a Key decision, have any Environment and Climate Change implications been cleared by the Climate Change Officer?

Name of Officer: N/A

5. Source documents guidance

5.1 None