

Report to COUNCIL

Oldham's COVID-19 Response

Portfolio Holder:

Councillor Shah, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Covid-19 Recovery

Officer Contact:

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Reason for Decision

Following the June 2020 report on Oldham Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, this report provides an update on how we are continuing to monitor and manage the spread of the virus as lockdown restrictions are relaxed.

Executive Summary

COVID-19 is still circulating across the UK and we are still seeing new cases across Oldham every day. We have a clear plan in place in case of an outbreak locally. This report summarises those plans, demonstrating how we will collectively manage and prevent the spread of COVID-19 across our communities.

Recommendations

To note the content of the report.

1 Background

- 1.1 On 23 June 2020, Prime Minister Boris Johnson set out further changes to lockdown measures in England. From Saturday 4th July, the Prime Minister announced that pubs, restaurants and hairdressers could reopen, providing they adhere to COVID-19 safety guidelines.
- 1.2 It was also announced that some leisure facilities and tourist attractions may also reopen, if they can do so safely – this includes outdoor gyms and playgrounds, cinemas, museums, galleries, theme parks and arcades, as well as libraries, social clubs, places of worship and community centres.
- 1.3 “Close proximity” venues such as nightclubs, soft-play areas, indoor gyms, swimming pools, water parks, bowling alleys and spas will remain closed, reducing the risk of virus transmission.
- 1.4 Though lockdown measures are being relaxed across the UK, local lockdowns can be applied to any localised spikes in infections. On 29 June, Matt Hancock, the health secretary, announced that the first local lockdown would be applied in Leicester, and would include the closure of schools (except for the children of key workers), which partially reopened on 1 June, and non-essential retail, which was allowed to reopen across England on 15 June. In Leicester, infection rates are currently running at around 135 cases per 100,000 people
- 1.5 However, Coronavirus is still circulating across the UK and we are still seeing new cases across Oldham every day. We have a clear plan in place in case of an outbreak locally. This report summarises those plans, demonstrating how we will collectively manage and prevent the spread of COVID-19 across our communities. We are also working to address the wider impacts of COVID-19, for example the impact it’s having on Oldham’s economy, and this will be considered in future update reports.

2 COVID-19 in Oldham

- 2.1 As of the 5th July 2020 there has been 1,833 cases of COVID-19 identified in Oldham There has been speculation in the media about the possibility of local lockdowns affecting Oldham. However, the number of cases of coronavirus in Oldham is not at a level where local lockdown is an imminent risk. In Oldham, infection rates are currently running at around 20 cases per 100,000 people.¹
- 2.2 Over the past 30 days, 10,454 people have been tested for COVID-19 in Oldham. This includes 3,561 from Pillar 1 data (tests undertaken in hospitals, care homes and staff employed by the health and care sector) and 6,890 from Pillar 2 data (commercial labs that process at-home and drive-through tests). Out of the 10,454 tests undertaken, 481 people tested positive (101 in Pillar 1 and 380 in Pillar 2).
- 2.3 A total of 383 coronavirus related hospital admissions were recorded at Royal Oldham over the period March to April 2020, with 81.5% from White British & Irish background, 53.8% were males. Directly standardised rates (DSR) show that at population level there was no

¹ 19.9 cases per 100,000 population for the 7 days up to 3rd July, as reported up to 5th July.

significant difference in admissions based on ethnicity. As anticipated following national trends, admission rates followed an age gradient with those aged 70 years or older most likely to be admitted due to COVID-19 while those age 39 years or younger least likely.²

2.4 There have been 224 deaths in Oldham (up to 28th June) with the majority (94.1%) were White/White British. The death rate at population was 118.6/100,000 among White/White British compared with 21.8/100,000 among Asian/Asian British and 13.3/100,000 among Black/Black British.

2.5 It's important to note that the data on testing and confirmed cases is still being analysed. We have only recently received Pillar 2 data, so we are working quickly to identify any disproportionate impacts and potential virus hot-spots, allowing us to target our resources as detailed in Oldham's Outbreak Management Plan (section 4.0).

3.0 **Equality and COVID-19**

3.1 The analysis and data are still developing, but there are increasing reports that some groups are being hit harder by the pandemic than others. For example, in addition to the nationally reported impact on BAME communities, it appears the pandemic exploits gender disparities too. While it appears men may be suffering more from the illness itself, women are in more precarious social situations and are likely to experience long-term impacts of the global crisis. The Women's Budget Group reports that there are over three million people in jobs at high risk of exposure to COVID-19 in the UK, and 77% of them are women.

3.2 Experts across groups, who campaign for better lives for minority groups have sought to highlight how the pandemic has revealed the existing inequalities and fragility in the health, housing and finances of many in society. People experiencing homelessness are particularly vulnerable due to prevalent health conditions and lack of appropriate housing. Trans communities, who were already experiencing a mental health crisis and issues accessing healthcare, will have long-awaited gender-affirming medical support and procedures postponed.

3.3 In Oldham we are committed to minimising the impact of COVID-19 across our communities. The steps we are taking to tackle the pandemic and the subsequent recovery planning, aim to support people, especially those groups with protected characteristics who are often most impacted. To support this approach, we have established an Equality Advisory Group which will provide insight and expertise, helping us capture the voice of lived community experience in our COVID-19 response and recovery planning.

3.4 The Equality Advisory Group is made up of key representatives from across Oldham's communities, representing: women, older people, younger people, people from ethnic groups, disabled people, groups with faiths or beliefs, LGBTQI, and people on low incomes or in poverty. This group provides a wealth of experience which will be used to find practical solutions to any barriers that may present themselves in Oldham's COVID-19 response and recovery planning. This group is meeting regularly to anticipate and identify any discriminatory or negative consequences of the pandemic, helping us positively respond to any disproportionate impact COVID-19 has on our communities.

4.0 **Contact Tracing and Outbreak Management Planning** (Information provided by Katrina Stephens – Director of Public Health)

² The data analysed was for admissions to the Royal Oldham and may have missed those admitted to other hospitals especially at the beginning of the pandemic.

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- 4.1 Contact tracing and outbreak management are essential tools in limiting the spread of infectious diseases. Effective tracing and isolation of people exposed to COVID-19 can reduce the spread of infection and may allow for greater relaxation of social distancing requirements than would otherwise be possible.
- 4.2 The Oldham COVID-19 Outbreak Control Plan has been developed to meet national requirements for local Outbreak Control Plans. The plan provides local direction and guidance to collectively manage and prevent the spread of COVID-19 across our communities. The plan supplements the existing Oldham Health Economy Outbreak Plan (2018) by providing specific management arrangements to effectively respond to the unique threats posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

National and Greater Manchester Context

- 4.3 The contact tracing system in England is made up of three operational tiers:
- Tier 3 consists of call handlers who speak to contacts of confirmed cases and advise them to isolate;
 - Tier 2 consists of case handlers who interview confirmed cases of COVID-19 to identify their contacts; and
 - Tier 1b is an integrated regional and local system to deal with contact tracing and outbreak management in complex settings.
 - Tier 1a provides strategic oversight of the whole system and sets guidance and policies.
- 4.4 Oldham forms part of the Greater Manchester (GM) Tier 1b system. Within Tier 1b, most contact tracing is expected to be done by the Greater Manchester Integrated Contact Tracing Hub (GM ICTH). Local authorities and systems will be involved where their support is needed in managing complex cases or outbreaks, and in providing support to individuals and settings that have been affected by COVID-19. This might include supporting people who have been told to isolate, or managing the consequences of closing a particular setting, such as a school or GP practice.
- 4.5 The GM Combined Authority and GM Health & Social Care Partnership have developed a COVID-19 Management Plan which follows the same principles as the outbreak control plans in each of the 10 GM local authorities. The GM plan supports our local plans with clear approaches across the city region to each of the seven key themes of the outbreak control plans including the overlapping systems of command and control required during outbreak response, which feed into the Local Resilience Forum.

Oldham's Approach to Preventing and Managing the Spread of COVID-19

- 4.6 The following seven key themes have been identified nationally as key priorities on which to focus our local work to manage and control COVID-19. These are based on the priority areas and actions based on experience of the pandemic to date, and highlighting the key mechanisms through which to deliver on these priorities and associated actions:

Theme	Actions required	Local activity
Care homes and schools	Planning for local outbreaks in care homes and schools (e.g. defining monitoring arrangements, identifying potential scenarios and planning the required response).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Resource packs developed for care homes and schools, including actions to take and templates to use. ● Advice provided on Infection prevention & control and action to take in response to cases. ● Scenario planning undertaken to inform development of standard operating procedures.
High risk places, locations and vulnerable communities	Identifying and planning how to manage other high-risk places, locations and communities of interest including sheltered housing, dormitories for migrant workers, transport access points (e.g., ports, airports), detained settings, rough sleepers etc (e.g. defining preventative measures and outbreak management strategies).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Key settings identified and relevant services involved in scenario planning to inform development of standard operating procedures. ● Letters sent to high risk businesses to communicate local arrangements and measures to prevent outbreaks.
Local testing capacity	Identifying methods for local testing to ensure a swift response that is accessible to the entire population. This could include delivering tests to isolated individuals, establishing local pop-up sites or hosting mobile testing units at high-risk locations (e.g. defining how to prioritise and manage deployment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Local testing available through satellite site, mobile testing unit and local pop up testing. ● Working with Department of Health & Social Care to improve access to local testing for vulnerable groups. ● Additional testing capacity available through GM Mass Testing Strategy to respond to outbreaks.
Contact tracing in complex settings	Assessing local and regional contact tracing and infection control capability in complex settings (e.g., Tier 1b) and the need for mutual aid (e.g. identifying specific local complex communities of interest and settings, developing assumptions to estimate demand, developing options to scale capacity if needed).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Local Single Point of Contact (staffed by public health) in place to receive referrals from the GM Integrated Contact Tracing Hub. ● Environmental Health Officers identified to undertake local contact tracing. ● Protocols developed with place-based teams to support response to cases and outbreaks. ● Additional Infection Prevention & Control Nurse posts established.
Data integration	Integrating national and local data and scenario planning through the Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC) (e.g., data management planning including data security, data requirements including NHS linkages). The JBC will collect data about the prevalence of the disease, analyse that data to understand infection rates across the country, and provide expert advice on responding to spikes in infection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Available data subjected to daily review by public health intelligence leads and DPH. ● Dashboard developed to allow Boards to monitor and track local position. ● Data sharing agreement with PHE being put in place to provide access to postcode level data on testing and contact tracing.

Theme	Actions required	Local activity
Vulnerable people	Supporting vulnerable local people to get help to self-isolate (e.g. encouraging neighbours to offer support, identifying relevant community groups, planning how to co-ordinate and deploy) and ensuring services meet the needs of diverse communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Support available via Helpline & Place-based Hubs.
Local Boards	Establishing governance structures led by existing Covid-19 Health Protection Boards and supported by existing Gold command forums and a member-led Board to communicate with the general public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Test and trace bronze group will become the COVID-19 Prevention & Control Board responsible for technical health protection function and delivery of the COVID-19 management plan. •Health Protection Sub-Committee of Health and Wellbeing Board will be responsible for oversight of the plan and building public trust and engagement in testing and contact tracing, and other prevention and control measures.

Responding to Cases and Managing Outbreaks

- 4.7 The Oldham COVID-19 Prevention & Control Board, under the leadership of the Director of Public Health, will have the responsibility for declaring and managing local outbreaks in consultation with PHE North West and GM Integrated Contact Tracing Hub (GMICTH).
- 4.8 Notifications of cases and/or outbreaks will come either via local reporting direct to the Oldham Single Point of Contact (SPOC), or via the GM ICTH to the Oldham SPOC.
- 4.9 The Director of Public Health (or designated deputy) will convene the Outbreak Control Team (OCT) including members of the COVID-19 Prevention & Control Board, plus representatives related to the particular setting and/or community where the outbreak has occurred.
- 4.10 Following the declaration of an outbreak, the Director of Public Health (DPH) will lead the local response to an outbreak within Oldham, which will include the following elements:

Contacting an affected setting (e.g. head of school; manager of care home) to get details of the situation, which would include numbers of possible and confirmed cases (and whether any are at high risk of severe COVID-19 disease), dates of onset of symptoms, numbers of people potentially affected (including numbers at high risk of severe COVID-19 disease), any wider risks, and potential impacts that would need support from the system.

Contact tracing: Much of the contact tracing will be done by the NHS Test and Trace service and GM Integrated Contact Tracing Hub. Local contact tracing will be carried out by the Council's Environmental Health Team following referral to the Single Point of Contact, and local settings/services leads appropriate to the outbreak.

Providing initial infection prevention and control advice. This may include signposting to existing guidance and sources of support, advice on isolation and exclusion and other infection prevention and control advice. This will be led by community infection prevention & control nurses/Health Protection Team.

Ensuring that any symptomatic people who have not yet been tested are tested promptly. This will ensure actions are based as much as possible on confirmed cases, as well as helping to rule out situations that are not linked to COVID-19. In care homes all

residents and staff will be tested regardless of their symptom status. This will be coordinated by the Test and Trace Manager, in collaboration with the commissioned testing service.

Identifying any urgent support needs. This would include meeting health needs among cases and contacts to prevent detrimental effects on any underlying medical conditions (e.g. access to medication) as well as wider social impacts on individuals and communities and impact on services. The response to meet these needs will be coordinated through the Helpline and Place-Based Hubs.

Notifying the wider system and communication. Early notification to the lead(s) for the wider system for that setting will ensure timely support for consequence management is available as early as possible and impacts on the wider system can be managed. It will also allow wider information and intelligence about the situation to be included in the risk assessment. Early warning to the communications lead can make sure that proactive and reactive communications messages are in place early.

Communications and engagement: At every stage in this process communications will be important both to make sure that all parties are operating on the same information, to ensure transparency of actions taken, and to build trust across the system and with the public. Accurate recording of actions and decisions will also be important, both for management of the situation and to provide an audit trail of situation management.

Enforcement of control measures: Oldham will rely mainly on proactive engagement with communities to facilitate adherence to control measures. Legal enforcement under schedule 21 of Coronavirus Act 2020 will be an act of last resort and would be approved through the local SCG/Gold structure. Schedule 21 confers powers relating to potentially infectious persons and makes related provision.

5.0 Reopening Safely

Reopening Businesses

- 5.1 As Greater Manchester recovers from the coronavirus pandemic, more people are returning to work and using shops and services. The latest relaxation of COVID-19 lockdown measures includes a reduction in the two-metre social distancing rule to one-metre (with appropriate precautions, for example, face coverings) enabling thousands of additional businesses to reopen.
- 5.2 From the 4 July, food and drink businesses including pubs, restaurants and cafes can reopen, as well as hairdressers, barbers, cinemas and theatres. To reopen, businesses must demonstrate they are COVID-secure and have implemented detailed sector-specific Government guidance. So, we are working closely with our partners to help businesses reopen safely. Neighbourhood police officers are also visiting venues to liaise with landlords and managers.
- 5.3 We are working with our town centre retailers to ensure they have the assistance they need in controlling queuing outside their stores, particularly in terms of barriers, signage and floor markings; the intention being to create safe queuing zones and pedestrian flows in these areas
- 5.4 Updated advice for those businesses allowed to reopen from July 4 is now being signposted via Safely Reopening GM - #SafeGM, a coordinated campaign across Greater Manchester which was launched to coincide with reopening of non-essential retail on June 15.

Town Centre Signage

- 5.5 The Government has allocated £50m of additional funding to support the safe reopening of high streets and other commercial areas. The Council has been allocated £0.210m. This money will allow additional measures to establish a safe trading environment for businesses and customers, particularly in high streets, through measures that extend to the end of March 2021.
- 5.6 The safety of those who live, work and shop in our town centres is the Council's number one priority. People visiting our town centre will see a number of physical changes, including signage reminding people to follow social distancing guidelines. The Council has also been helping businesses/market traders reopen, ensuring they are trading safely.

Oldham Library Service

- 5.7 From Monday, July 6, Oldham Central Library will be reopening, but offering a reduced service. Residents will be able to access a limited range of facilities, such as checking out books and using the computers. Due to social distancing rules visitors won't be able to browse the bookshelves.
- 5.8 The Lifelong Learning Centre and Gallery Oldham are not currently open to the public while they are being prepared to open safely. Services are continuing to be delivered online.

6.0 Financial Impact on Oldham Council (Information provided by Anne Ryans – Director of Finance)

- 6.1 The finances of the Council have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The financial pressures have been experienced since the middle of March but especially since the lockdown was announced on 23 March 2020. This has required the Council to incur additional expenditure to support the residents of Oldham during these extraordinary times. The Council has also lost income from fees and charges including commercial income from its investments and trading activities.
- 6.2 There has been a requirement to report to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and provide financial returns to inform the Government of costs being incurred/income lost as a result of the pandemic and to enable an assessment of the additional level of grant needed by Councils to support the continued provision of services. The first return was completed on 15 April, the second on 15 May and the third on 17 June 2020. Each of the returns has been completed in response to revised guidance as the MHCLG has refined its information gathering processes. It is expected that monthly reporting to the MHCLG will continue for the immediate future.
- 6.3 The completion of the returns and forecasting of the likely impact of the pandemic on the Councils budget relies on a series of assumptions, particularly about how long the effects are likely to last and what the new normal will look like. The base assumption is that all other spending remains the same and that the reporting relates to the extra burdens associated with COVID-19. The in-year position will, however, become clearer as more detailed financial monitoring takes place on non-COVID related activities and this will be incorporated in financial monitoring reports presented to Cabinet during the financial year.
- 6.4 The June 2020 MHCLG Return showed an overall impact of £56.4m with increased expenditure pressures of £30.7m and reduced income of £25.7m (including £9.3m in relation to lost Council Tax and Business Rates). As the impact of lost Council Tax and Business Rates will occur in 2021/22, the adjusted potential shortfall is £43.5m. After offsetting £12.1m of ringfenced grant for specific purposes (Hardship Fund Grant of £3.0m,

Infection Control Grant of £2.3m and Test, Track and Trace Grant of £1.6m) together with funds that can be recharged to the NHS for Adult Social Care related costs and the £14.2m of un-ringfenced Government grant, it left a potential in year shortfall of £20.8m. This is of course subject to change, as outlined at paragraph 6.5

6.5 On 2 July the Government announced a further package of support for Local Government. This was comprised of:

- A further £500m of un-ringfenced funding to cover Local Authority spending pressures
- A co-payment mechanism for irrecoverable Sales, Fees and Charges income, with the Government covering 75% of losses beyond 5% of planned income
- Phased repayment of Collection Fund deficits over the next 3 years
- A commitment to determine the support needed to help Councils meet the pressures of irrecoverable tax income at the Spending Review.

6.6 It is important to note that given the lack of detail that has been issued, it is impossible, at the time of preparing this report, to be confident about the level of financial benefit that the Council will receive as:

- The methodology for the distribution of the £500m of un-ringfenced funding has not been announced, but the Government has advised it will be different from the way in which the two previous funding allocations have been made (totalling £14.2m as referred to above)
- The operating arrangement for the co-payment scheme for compensating for income losses has not been announced. Of particular concern is that this does not include compensation for commercial income losses and the payment of grant compensation may be based on actual losses which it may not be possible to calculate for some time.
- By deferring to the Comprehensive Spending Review (the timing of which has not been announced) the detail as to how Councils will be compensated for Business Rates and Council Tax losses, the uncertainty is heightened.
- The spreading of Collection Fund deficits (losses arising from the inability to collect Council Tax and Business Rates as planned) is welcomed but until there is clarification of the detail of the compensation referred to at the point above, the financial implications cannot be determined.

6.7 Despite the comments outlined at 6.6, the Council will be in a much better financial position for 2020/21 than when the June MHCLG return was submitted, although it is disappointing that Government is expecting Local Government to “share the burden” as clearly at this stage, there is no intention to provide funding for all income losses. A major challenge still remains in relation to 2021/22 and future years. It is inevitable that COVID-19 will have an impact on the financial position for 2021/22. This is on top of the already challenging budget reduction target that had already been established and was presented within the reports approved at Budget Council on 26 February 2020. The Council and the Local Government sector urgently needs the Government to announce its funding intentions for 2021/22 and future years, in addition to the clarity for 2020/21. Once there is more detailed information upon which to base estimates, the projected budget shortfall for 2020/21 will be recalculated and revised estimates will be prepared for 2021/22 and future years.

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- 7 **Consultation**
- 7.1 N/A
- 8 **Financial Implications**
- 8.1 The financial implications for the Council arising from its response to the COVID-19 emergency are as outlined in Section 6 and are subject to constant revision. (Anne Ryans, Director of Finance (S151 Officer))
- 9 **Legal Services Comments**
- 9.1 There are no direct legal issues arising from the report, however, Central Government has issued emergency legislation and guidance in relation to many functions affected by the pandemic and it is important that such functions comply with or have regard to such provisions or guidance to ensure that the Council is acting lawfully. Further, the Council is required to maintain its decision-making processes, ensure good governance and that appropriate health and safety risk assessments are in place and operational to avoid legal challenge. (Colin Brittain)
10. **Co-operative Agenda**
- 10.1 As a Co-operative Council, Oldham is committed to tackling the impact of COVID-19, protecting our most vulnerable residents and communities. We are putting the voice of the resident at the heart of our response, ensuring the voice of lives experience and the people impacted by COVID-19 shapes our approach to mitigation and recover. (Jonathan Downs – Corporate Policy Lead)
- 11 **Human Resources Comments**
- 11.1 N/A
- 12 **Risk Assessments**
- 12.1 N/A
- 13 **IT Implications**
- 13.1 N/A
- 14 **Property Implications**
- 14.1 N/A
- 15 **Procurement Implications**
- 15.1 N/A
- 16 **Environmental and Health & Safety Implications**
- 16.1 N/A
- 17 **Equality, community cohesion and crime implications**
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- 17.1 The response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, and the emergency legislation powers introduced to tackle it, has had a significant impact on Oldham’s communities.
- 17.2 In Oldham we are committed to minimising the impact of COVID-19 across our communities. The steps we are taking to tackle the pandemic and the subsequent recovery planning, aim to support people, especially those groups with protected characteristics who are often most impacted.
- 17.3 To support this approach we have established an Advisory Group, made up of council, community and partnership representatives, to support Oldham Council and the wider partnership with its commitment to integrate Equality and Diversity throughout its Covid-19 response and subsequent recovery planning.
- 18 **Equality Impact Assessment Completed?**
- 18.1 Yes
- 19 **Key Decision**
- 19.1 No
- 20 **Key Decision Reference**
- 20.1 N/A
- 21 **Background Papers**
- 21.1 Council Report – COVID-19 Response – June 2020
- 22 **Appendices**
- 22.1 N/A

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Signed _____ Cabinet Member (specify whom)	Dated _____
Signed _____ Strategic Director/Deputy Chief Executive	Dated _____