

Report to COUNCIL

Oldham's COVID-19 Response

Portfolio Holder:

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

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Reason for Decision

Following the July 2020 report on Oldham Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, this report provides an update on how we continue to monitor and manage the spread of the coronavirus pandemic locally.

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 the local restrictions that have been introduced; identifies any associated activity; and highlights the approach taken by the Council to tackle the increase in numbers.

Recommendations

To note the content of the report.

1 **Background**

- 1.1 On Monday 29th June, Matt Hancock, the health secretary, announced that the UK's first local lockdown would be applied in Leicester and parts of Leicestershire.
- 1.2 The UK government has since introduced local restrictions in Luton, Greater Manchester, parts of West Yorkshire, and parts of East Lancashire. The Scottish government has introduced local restrictions in Aberdeen. No additional local restrictions have yet been introduced in Wales or Northern Ireland.
- 1.3 This report provides an update on the level of Covid-19 cases in Oldham to date; summarises the local restrictions that have been introduced; identifies associated communications activity; and highlights the approach taken by the Council to tackle the increase in numbers.

2 **COVID-19 in Oldham**

- 2.1 Oldham recorded 35 new cases of Covid-19 (a rate of 14.8 cases per 100,000 population) between 12-18 July. Oldham saw a significant spike in the number of people testing positive with 136 cases (a rate of 57.4 cases per 100,000 population) reported between 19-25 July, which was mainly attributed to an increase in cases in the central district.
- 2.2 The number of individuals testing positive for Covid-19 continued to rise with particularly high numbers amongst our younger working age population and Asian/Asian British residents. For the week 2nd- 8 August 260 new cases were reported (a rate of 109.7 cases per 100,000 population).
- 2.3 There has since been a continuing decline in the number of weekly cases in August. As at 1 September 2020, there were 134 new cases reported for the week of 23-29th August (a rate of 56.5 cases per 100,00 population) This takes the total number of Covid-19 cases reported in Oldham to 2944 to date.
- 2.4 As at 1 September 2020, at least 64,686 tests have taken place for Covid-19 in Oldham. This includes 17,174 from pillar 1 data (tests undertaken in hospitals, care homes and staff employed by the health and care sector) and 47,512 from pillar 2 data (commercial labs that process at-home and drive-through tests).

3. **Introduction of Local Restrictions**

- 3.1 Since the last council meeting Oldham has been on a challenging and difficult journey in relation to its Covid-19 figures.
- 3.2 Due to a spike in our positive cases new guidance was issued for Oldham residents on Tuesday 28th July to help halt the spread of Covid-19 and avoid a local lockdown. The guidance was initially put in place for a period of two weeks.
- 3.3 Residents were asked to not have social visitors to their home outside of those in their support bubble and to keep two metres apart from friends and family when seeing them outside. People who were 'shielding' were asked to continue to shield for another two weeks from Friday 31st July. In addition, to protect older and

vulnerable people, the proposed relaxation of restrictions relating to care home visiting were paused.

- 3.4 At this point, a significant proportion of cases involved multiple individuals testing positive within a household, showing that household spread is a real issue – especially in households with large families.
- 3.5 We began communicating these new guidelines to our key audiences and were particularly keen to use the newly formed Equality Advisory Group to disseminate information through to those communities most affected. We began to look at ways we could translate some of our key material, including posters and videos, into different languages.
- 3.6 On Friday 31st July new Government guidance affecting all of Greater Manchester, as well as some other areas in the North was introduced due to a rise in the number of cases in some areas of the region. This superseded the local arrangements that were put in place in Oldham on Tuesday 28th July and meant that people living in affected areas, including Oldham, must not:
 - Meet people they do not live with inside a private home or garden, except where they have formed a support bubble (or for other limited exemptions).
 - Visit someone else’s home or garden, even if they live outside of the affected areas.
 - Socialise with people they do not live with in other indoor public venues – such as pubs, restaurants, cafes, shops, places of worship, community centres, leisure and entertainment venues, or visitor attractions.
 - These new city-region wide guidelines also formally ended shielding from 1 August for all those in Oldham as well as elsewhere in Greater Manchester.
- 3.7 In addition, the following businesses are unable to reopen or resume:
 - casinos
 - skating rinks
 - bowling alleys
 - indoor play areas, including soft play areas
 - exhibition centres and conference halls
 - indoor performances (even with a social distanced audience)
 - close contact services, which are any treatments on the face such as eyebrow threading or make-up application
- 3.8 Oldham joined forces with Greater Manchester and national agencies such as Public Health England and the Department of Health and Social care, to escalate the messaging to the public. This was particularly focused on three areas:
 - Reaffirming safety guidelines such as washing hands and social distancing.
 - Promoting testing and encouraging people to be tested.
 - Starting to encourage people to self-isolate if they had, or suspected they had, COVID-19.
- 3.9 Despite the additional restrictions, throughout August the rate of positive COVID-19 tests in Oldham continued to increase, with continuing high numbers across the borough, especially among younger working age people and Asian/Asian British residents.
- 3.10 Oldham leaders put forward a strong case to the Government to demonstrate how an economic lockdown leading to closure of many retail, hospitality and other

venues, would not be in the borough's best interests. Instead a different approach was proposed - to increase testing, to take more control of track and trace processes locally, greater use of powers to drive compliance and enforcement among those not currently following guidelines, and intensive door to door engagement in areas with higher cases.

- 3.11 On Friday 21st August the Government announced that Oldham would not face business closures. Instead, a small number of additional measures introduced from midnight on Saturday 22nd August were agreed to help reduce the spread of the virus, namely:
- Tighter restrictions on household mixing, i.e. no socialising with anyone outside of household in any setting.
 - Avoid using public transport, except for essential travel.
 - Weddings, civil partnerships and funerals limited to household members and close family - 20 people maximum.
 - Restaurants encouraged to only seat people who make reservations in advance, up to a maximum of six people per table.
 - Pubs, restaurants, cafes, shops, places of worship, community centres, leisure and entertainment venues, or visitor attractions, should ensure people maintain social distancing and avoid physical contact.
 - Advising residents who have recently shielded to continue taking extra care now that the shielding process has formally ended in Oldham.
- 3.12 Key public health messaging, including updated messaging on the new guidelines in Oldham, has been communicated through a wide range of engagement channels, including print and broadcast media; social media; digital media and printed material, including leaflets and posters.
- 3.13 This messaging has been adapted for targeted groups, such as BAME communities and young people, in a number of ways. This has included direct engagement with community leaders and mosques to share communication assets in a range of languages and hand out leaflets and ensuring social media content is targeted to specific audiences through organic and paid-for channels.
- 3.14 In line with our agreed plan Oldham has increased the number of testing sites in the borough. Testing is now taking place at a higher rate than national average, with positivity falling. Three Mobile Testing Units are deployed every day in different sites across the borough. In addition, three local testing sites are in place with a fourth in development. A door-to-door testing offer was launched on 14th August 2020 targeted at areas with high numbers of cases and/or high positivity.
- 3.15 Locally supported contact tracing has been in place since 13th August 2020. 80% of cases passed to the local team are now successfully completed. We are in discussion with GM and national colleagues about taking on further responsibility for contact tracing from the national system.
- 3.16 Joint compliance visits are being undertaken daily by GMP and Council Environmental Health teams to ensure compliance with covid secure guidelines. These visits have led to the closure of some premises and to the issuing of a number of Fixed Penalty Notices. We have also written to all supermarkets reiterating responsibilities with regards to mask wearing. It is also hoped that the recent introduction of payments to support self-isolation will remove barriers for individuals not able to afford to self-isolate.

- 3.17 Our intensive door to door engagement activity has been underway for three weeks with support from partners, the voluntary sector and community volunteers. We have been focusing efforts on wards with the highest rates with an average of 150 households reached a day, with additional visits to local shops to provide advice, posters and further information also taking place. Where possible, door to door engagement activity has been enhanced with the offer of doorstep testing or with the placement of a local mobile testing unit.
- 3.14 Wigan was taken out of the wider restrictions on socialising put in place across Greater Manchester on Wednesday 26th August due to its low numbers of cases.
- 3.15 The government confirmed on Friday 28th August that the measures in Oldham would remain in place for a further week before review. At the same time, the government confirmed that Stockport, Bolton and Trafford will be removed from the lockdown measures preventing different households socialising inside on Wednesday 2nd September.
- 3.16 A ban on two households mixing indoors will continue in Manchester, Salford, Rochdale, Bury, and Tameside.

