

## Report to COUNCIL

# Oldham's COVID-19 Response - Update

### **Portfolio Holder:**

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

### **Officer Contact:**

Rebekah Sutcliffe, Strategic Director of Communities & Reform

**Report Author:** Jonathan Downs (Corporate Policy Lead)

**4<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

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### **Reason for Decision**

This report provides an update on how the Council and its partners continue to monitor and manage the impact of Covid-19 in Oldham.

### **Executive Summary**

COVID-19 is still circulating across the UK and we continue to see a rise in cases across Oldham every day. This report summarises our activity, 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 Over the past several months Covid-19 cases have risen in Oldham, across Greater Manchester and nationally. Following the rise in cases Government introduced the “rule of six” on September 14<sup>th</sup>, making gatherings of more than six people in England illegal, unless they meet one of the exemptions, for example, a wedding or a funeral.
- 1.2 As cases continued to rise across the UK, Central Government introduced three-tier coronavirus alert levels: Medium Level (Tier 1), High Alert (Tier 2) and Very High Alert (Tier 3). On Friday 23 October, following failed negotiations with Government, Oldham, along with the rest of Greater Manchester, was placed into local Covid alert level very high (tier 3) restrictions. Throughout the Council and its partners has maintained a focus on enforcement and compliance, testing, tracing, and communications and community engagement.
- 1.3 Under tier three, very high alert level rules, pubs and bars not serving substantial meals must close, while household mixing is banned indoors and outdoors in hospitality settings and private gardens. Betting shops, casinos, bingo halls, adult gaming centres and soft play areas also must close, and there is guidance against travelling in or out of the very high alert area to reduce the risk of virus transmission.
- 1.4 This report provides an update on how we are continuing to collectively manage and prevent the spread of COVID-19 across our communities following the implementation of the new restrictions.

## 2 COVID-19 in Oldham

- 2.1 As of the 26<sup>th</sup> October 2020 there has been **8,351** cases of COVID-19 identified in Oldham, **the weekly** infection rates are currently running at around **640** cases per 100,000 people.
- 2.2 Over the past 30 days (**up to 23<sup>rd</sup> October**), **36,770** people have been tested for COVID-19 in Oldham. This includes **10,396** in Pillar 1 (tests undertaken in hospitals, care homes and staff employed by the health and care sector) and **26,374** in Pillar 2 (commercial labs that process at-home and drive-through tests). Out of the **36,770** tests undertaken, **4,749** people tested positive (**552** in Pillar 1 and **4,197** in Pillar 2). There have been **288** deaths in Oldham (up to 16<sup>th</sup> October).

## 3.0 Oldham’s Covid-19 Response Updates

- 3.1 For the purposes of this report, Oldham’s response has been broken down into four key themes: Test, Trace, Enforcement and Compliance, and Community Engagement and Communications.

## 4.0 Test

- 4.1 **Local Testing** – The ongoing overall aim of Oldham’s local testing approach is to test at least 500 people/100,000 a day, and to have testing sites operating in all 5 districts of the borough each week. We continue testing at a higher daily rate than our Greater Manchester and national counterparts, with an average testing rate over the 7 days to 21<sup>st</sup> October of 528.7/100,000. We have undertaken a data and intelligence led mapping exercise to identify suitable local testing sites across the 5 districts and this is regularly

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reviewed by our Testing Bronze Group. This approach is based on outbreaks, demographics and geographical profiles.

- 4.2 **Door to Door Testing** – Our door to door testing offer launched on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> August. This offer is operating alongside community engagement work. To date we have held over 10,000 conversations with households and tested 2,300 people on the doorstep. Doorstep testing is being planned systematically based on need, trends and cases, using our hotspot mapping tool.
- 4.3 **Business Testing** – To support local businesses to increase the testing of staff, The Well Pharmacy in Saddleworth has agreed to be part of a pilot to distribute home testing kits for local businesses such as public houses and restaurants. We have also been engaging with high risk workplaces with the aim to complete 10% routine testing as a pilot programme, aiming to prevent outbreaks before they occur.
- 4.4 **School Testing** – We are currently working with schools to ensure they have access to testing kits, with systems being put in place to enable schools to order and replenish their stocks. Throughout the pandemic, we have been safeguarding vulnerable children through a partnership arrangement between education, health, social care and schools; supporting Early Years and school resilience through health advice, infection control and case management; building sector partnership through regular bulletins, virtual meetings and reference groups for stakeholders; and promoting attendance through the education welfare system and school, parental and community campaigns.
- 4.5 **Homelessness Testing** – Working closely with Oldham Street Angels, the 7-day homelessness service enables individuals to provide an address for test results, ensuring that homeless people can access testing facilities in Oldham.
- 4.6 **Care Homes** – In line with national hospital discharge requirements, all patients being discharged to care homes are tested for Covid-19 prior to discharge. We have developed a system-wide risk assessment and individual risk assessment regarding care home admissions. This has involved all parts of the system, including the hospital and forms the basis of our approach to care home admissions.
- 4.7 **Testing Results** – Turnaround time for tests have improved, with the average now 48 hours. As such, a request has been put through to the Department for Health and Social Care and Deloitte for walk up appointments to resume at Local Testing Sites. A similar request has been made to Greater Manchester for Mobile Testing Unit Sites to offer walk up provision to address digital exclusion issues and to have the ability to reserve slots for outbreak management e.g. schools with multiple cases.
- 5.0 **Trace**
- 5.1 We have recognised that Test and Trace is both a key part of our immediate response to COVID-19 and a feature of our locality system for the foreseeable future. The overall aim of our contact tracing approach is to increasing completion rates for cases to 90% and contacts to 85%.
- 5.2 Alongside other Greater Manchester authorities, we have invested in a Greater Manchester Contact Tracing Hub which handles complex cases and situations referred on from the national contact tracing service.
- 5.3 Locally Supported Contact Tracing has been in place in Oldham since mid-August, whereby local contact tracers follow up cases of individuals who have not been successfully contacted by the national team within 24 hours of a positive test. The average number of
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cases per day referred to the local team is between 30 – 50, after duplicates have been removed.

## 6.0 **Enforcement and Compliance**

- 6.1 **Tier 3 Restrictions** – Following the announcement of tier 3 restrictions, all 169 wet pubs (pubs providing just alcohol) in the borough have been written to and informed of the new regulations, including what is required if they decide to start serving a substantial meal. We are working with these premises to provide alternative support, such as signposting them to business grants and other forms of local / regional support as required. Betting shops, casinos, bingo halls, adult gaming centres and soft play areas have also been contacted to offer support. Most premises are complying with the new regulations. Where we have identified non-compliance, premises are being served with directions and in a small number of cases, being temporarily closed.
- 6.2 **Support to Businesses** (please note the information in this section is subject to change) – A new Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSG) will support approximately 210 businesses in Oldham which stand to lose under the tier 3 restrictions. It is applicable to those businesses that have been required to close for at least three weeks on or after 9<sup>th</sup> September due to lockdown restrictions. There will also be a discretionary fund to allow support for other businesses affected by closure, which may not be on the business rates list and which are deemed vital to their local economy. Please see section 9.0, *Finance Comments*, for full details of the support available.
- 6.3 **Takeaways** – Various premises are visited on a weekly basis through joint police/environmental health and NSL parking officer visits, ensuring compliance and providing information and support to these businesses to help keep staff and residents safe. Fixed penalty notices have been served for failure to provide / display QR codes (Pubs, restaurants, barbers and museums are required to display new QR codes in a bid to control coronavirus and save lives).
- 6.4 **Covid Cars** – There are 4 Greater Manchester Police Covid Cars on patrol every weekend. These vehicles are responsive and can be called upon to quickly respond to reports of breaches in the restrictions, including people holding parties or meeting in large groups.
- 6.5 **Metrolink** – We have been working with Transport for Greater Manchester (TFGM) on a joint deployment at Metrolink stops, including undertaking face covering compliance checks. This approach enables us to communicate with commuters, ensuring everyone understands the guidance to travelling on Metrolink and to ensure they feel safe while using public transport.
- 6.6 **Barbers and hairdressers** – Further communications activity is planned to remind these establishments about their responsibility for QR codes, as well as Covid safe working practices.
- 6.7 **Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles** – 2500 face coverings have been made available for use across the borough and are issued to taxi drivers as well as other at-risk groups. Work continues to secure the budget to further install safety screens in taxi's and private hire vehicles.
- 6.8 **Furlough** – The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (also known as furlough) was launched at the end of April 2020, providing 80% of the salary costs up to a top limit of £2,500. This scheme ends on 31<sup>st</sup> October. On 9<sup>th</sup> October, the Chancellor launched the Job Support Scheme and expanded it so that firms whose premises are legally required to close due to Covid restrictions will receive grants to pay the wages of staff who cannot work. Support will be capped at 67% of their salary level up to a maximum of £2,100 a month.
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## 7.0 **Community Engagement and Communications**

- 7.1 **Community Engagement Teams** – Five community engagement teams are been recruited (one per district). These will provide a more sustainable staffing resource to undertake engagement work over the coming months, supporting our ongoing door-to-door information and testing campaign.
- 7.2 **Public Health Messaging** – Key public health messaging, including updated messaging on the tier 3 guidelines has been communicated through a wide range of engagement channels, including social media, press and billboards. These messages have also been shared in several relevant languages to help achieve as wide an audience as possible.
- 7.3 **We are Oldham Campaign** – The We Are Oldham Campaign aims to show how the borough is coming together to help tackle Coronavirus. It includes stories of residents and community groups who have gone the extra mile, as well as information on how we can all keep safe.
- 7.4 **Mental Health Support** – We know that the Covid-19 pandemic has put a huge strain on people’s mental health with some people feeling socially isolated, anxious and stressed. Through our website, communication channels and partners we have been promoting a wide range of support that’s available, including MIND (the leading mental health charity) and mental health crisis support services. There is also a dedicated helpline for NHS staff, providing confidential listening from trained professionals and specialist advisors, including coaching, bereavement care, mental health and financial help.
- 7.5 **Self-isolation Payments** – Promoting self-isolation payments to support people self-isolating. On 20<sup>th</sup> September, the Government announced a new national Test and Trace Support scheme. Under the new scheme, payments of £500 are now available for residents who have received notification from NHS Test and Trace to self-isolate, providing that their period of self-isolation started on or after 28<sup>th</sup> September 2020.
- 7.6 **Social Media** – Social media messaging has continued, showing examples of businesses that are adhering to social distancing rules to keep their customers and staff safe. This includes paid for advertising targeted at “hotspot” areas, particularly sports clubs, pubs and restaurants.
- 7.7 **Test and Trace** – Council departments and local businesses have been worked with to both promote and encourage take up of the NHS test and trace app.
- 7.8 **Reopening the High Street Safely Fund** – Oldham has been granted £210k from the European Regional Development Fund to support safe trading in public places. To date we have used the funding to create radio advertising, billboards, targeted social media posts and face covering reminder stickers for taxi doors. Also, in the pipeline is lamppost signage, sanitising stations and tram and bus advertising to support the Christmas period.

## 8 **Consultation**

8.1 N/A

## 9 **Financial Implications**

- 9.1 The Government continues to allocate a range of ringfenced and unringfenced grants to support the Local Government response to COVID-19. The Council has received £16.638m of unringfenced funding and been notified of a further £6.058m. These are grants that are
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available to every Local Authority and the impact of these grants on the overall financial position of the Council is included in Financial Monitoring reports presented to Cabinet.

9.2 However, specific funding in relation to the COVID response is as follows:

a) Local Authority Test and Trace Service Support Grant - £1.560m

This grant is being used to support all aspects of the Council's response to the test, track and trace initiative and on activities to control the spread of the infection

b) Infection Control Grant – Tranche 1 £2.017m and Tranche 2 £2.276m

Essentially, the Infection Control Grant is paid to Local Authorities who must then passport this to care providers to support measures to control the spread of COVID-19. The first allocation of £2.017m has been utilized in full. Tranche 2 funding is split into two funding streams, the first of which was received on 1<sup>st</sup> October and this will be utilized in line with Government guidance. The second funding stream will be paid to Councils in December 2020.

c) COVID-19 Enhanced Response Grant - £0.300m

This grant was received to support on-going initiatives the Council was funding in July/August when Oldham was one of the very few Local Authorities in the country with significant infection levels.

d) Hardship Grant - £3.015m

A report agreed by Cabinet on 23<sup>rd</sup> April outlined the way in which the Council would use the Government Hardship Grant of £3.015m to provide help with Council Tax payments for working age claimants of Council Tax Reduction (CTR) up to a maximum of £150 and other residents facing financial hardship.

e) Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies - £0.361m

This grant has been allocated to enable the Council to meet the immediate need and help those who are struggling to afford food and essentials due to COVID-19.

f) Next Steps Accommodation Programme - £0.147m

The grant funding must be used to achieve move-on for those rough sleepers accommodated during the pandemic and support a sustained reduction in rough sleeping and the Council is working on a range of initiatives in support of this aim.

g) Local Authority Compliance and Enforcement Grant - £0.155m

This funding is supporting initiatives being undertaken by the Council to enhance compliance and enforcement of measures to control the spread of COVID-19 amongst individuals, businesses and in the community.

h) Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme - £0.245m

The national Test and Trace Support payments scheme of 28<sup>th</sup> September 2020 will operate until 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021. Support is available for those told to self-isolate by

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Test and Trace because they have tested positive for coronavirus or have been in contact with someone who has tested positive.

Payments of £500 are available to those employed, or self-employed earners also in receipt of means-tested benefits. Payments are also subject to tax, and only available to those who will lose earned income as a result of self-isolating e.g. where statutory sick pay cannot be claimed.

Oldham has been allocated £0.129m for the main scheme and £0.077m for a discretionary scheme (enough to support 154 applications), as well as £0.039m for administrative costs. If more is spent on the main scheme it will be topped up by Government

The guidance allows awards of discretionary payments of £500 to those who satisfy most of the eligibility for the main scheme but are not in receipt of the qualifying benefits. The funding for this scheme is limited and will not be topped up by the Government - so managing the impact of the demand for discretionary payments may be an issue. Common criteria have been agreed across Greater Manchester for the discretionary scheme.

### **Specific Tier 3 Support**

9.3 The movement into tier 3 restrictions has resulted in some additional grants being made available to the Council and the Oldham area. These are as follows:

#### a) Support for Business

As a result of the movement into Tier 3 restrictions, as advised above, certain businesses will be required to close. The Council will manage payments to eligible businesses via the Local Restrictions Support Grant and will be fully recompensed by Government. Payments are linked to the rateable value of a property and will be paid as follows:

- Businesses with properties with a rateable value of £15,000 or under will receive grants of £667 per two weeks of closure (£1,334 per month).
- Businesses with properties with a rateable value of over £15,000 and less than £51,000 will receive grants of £1,000 per two weeks of closure (£2,000 per month)
- Businesses with properties with a rateable value of £51,000 or over will receive grants of £1,500 per two weeks of closure (£3,000 per month)

There will be a discretionary grant available to support other businesses impacted by the Tier 3 restrictions. This discretionary scheme will be funded from the resources allocated at a Greater Manchester level as part of the agreement with the Government. There are discussions taking place about operating this scheme using a common approach across Greater Manchester although for businesses in Oldham it would be managed by the Council.

#### b) Contain Outbreak Management Fund

The Council will receive a funding allocation of £8 per head of population from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund. The exact sum has not yet been confirmed but it will be around £1.9m. This is to additional funding to support local initiatives to cover such issues as:

- Targeted testing for hard-to-reach groups out of scope of other testing programmes
  - Additional contact tracing
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- Enhanced communication and marketing e.g. towards hard-to-reach groups and other localised messaging
  - Delivery of essentials for those in self-isolation
  - Measures to support the continued functioning of commercial areas and their compliance with public health guidance.
  - Targeted support for school/university outbreaks.
  - Community-based support for those disproportionately impacted such as the BAME population.

### Business Support at Tier 2

9.4 On 22 October 2020, the Government announced a further round of grant compensation for those businesses in high alert level areas (Tier 2) that are not legally closed but severely impacted by the restrictions on socialising such as hotels, pubs, restaurants, bed and breakfasts and leisure businesses. It is currently anticipated that this will be backdated to 1 August and will run to the start of the Tier 3 measures. Detailed guidance on this support has not yet been issued and eligible businesses have not yet been identified. However, once eligibility has been determined, Oldham businesses will be able to access up funding as follows:

- Businesses with properties with a rateable value of £15,000 or under will receive grants of £934 per month
- Businesses with properties with a rateable value of over £15,000 and less than £51,000 will receive grants of £1,400 per month.
- Businesses with properties with a rateable value of £51,000 or over will receive grants of £2,100 per month.

There will also be a discretionary fund to allow support for other businesses affected by closures which may not be on the business rates list and those businesses deemed vital to their local economy. More detailed information in respect of the discretionary grant will be available soon. (Anne Ryans – Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer)

## 10 **Legal Services Comments**

10.1 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)

## 11 **Co-operative Agenda**

11.1 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)

## 12 **Human Resources Comments**

12.1 N/A

## 13 **Risk Assessments**

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13.1	N/A
14	<b>IT Implications</b>
14.1	N/A
15	<b>Property Implications</b>
15.1	N/A
16	<b>Procurement Implications</b>
16.1	N/A
17	<b>Environmental and Health &amp; Safety Implications</b>
17.1	N/A
18	<b>Equality, community cohesion and crime implications</b>
18.1	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.
18.2	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.
18.3	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.
19	<b>Equality Impact Assessment Completed?</b>
19.1	Yes
20	<b>Key Decision</b>
20.1	No
21	<b>Key Decision Reference</b>
21.1	N/A
22	<b>Background Papers</b>
22.1	Council Report – COVID-19 Response – June 2020
22.2	Council Report – Covid-19 Response – July 2020
23	<b>Appendices</b>
23.1	N/A

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