

## **Report to HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD**

# **Oldham's COVID-19 Response**

### **Portfolio Holders:**

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

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### **Purpose of the Report**

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

### **Requirement from the Health and Wellbeing Board**

To note the content of the report.

## Oldham's COVID-19 Response

### 1. Background

- 1.1 On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) was informed of a cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. On 12 January 2020 it was announced that a new novel coronavirus had been identified, causing the outbreak. This virus is referred to as SARS-CoV-2, and the associated disease as COVID-19. Since January the virus has spread quickly across the globe, causing a global pandemic.
- 1.2 Manchester and Greater Manchester (GM) declared a major Incident on Friday 20 March 2020. This activated the multi-agency response arrangements in line with the GM generic response plan and the pandemic flu plan. The Prime Minister's unprecedented announcement at 8.30 pm on Monday 23rd March set out the seriousness of the situation and the expectations of all residents, businesses and public services.
- 1.3 New emergency legislation was quickly passed into law to support local authorities in responding to the pandemic, whilst ensuring essential business and services continue. The legislation gives the Council a statutory duty to coordinate food, self-care, medical supplies and other forms of necessary assistance to vulnerable groups in response to COVID-19.
- 1.4 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 14th, making gatherings of more than six people in England illegal, unless they meet one of the exemptions, for example, a wedding or a funeral.
- 1.5 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.
- 1.6 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.
- 1.7 On Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> October, Boris Johnson announced a new national lockdown across the UK. The new measures will come into effect on Thursday 5 November and will last until Wednesday 2 December. The key restrictions from the new lockdown are similar but not identical to the original lockdown in spring. They include:
  - Pubs, bars and restaurants must close, although food takeaways and deliveries will be permitted
  - All non-essential retail must close
  - A ban on the mixing of households, except for support or childcare reasons. Exercising outdoors with one person from outside of your household is also permitted.

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- A restriction on travel, including outbound international travel (except for work). Travel within the UK is also discouraged.
  - Staying at home to be encouraged except for education, work (if impossible from home), medical reasons, shopping for good or essentials, caring for others or exercise.

Unlike the first lockdown, nurseries, schools, colleges and universities will remain open. At the time of writing we are waiting for full details of the new restrictions.

- 1.8 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. Current Position

- 2.1 As of the 29th October 2020 there has been **9,139** cases of COVID-19 identified in Oldham, **the weekly** infection rates are currently running at around **700** cases per 100,000 people. Oldham has the highest rate of cases in Greater Manchester and the second highest in England.

- 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).

- 2.3 The number of cases in the population aged over 60 is increasing rapidly, increasing by over 50% in the week ending 24<sup>th</sup> October. As the number of cases in the older population increases, the number of people in hospital with COVID-19 is also increasing rapidly.

- 2.4 Household transmission remains a key factor, accounting for approximately 30% of cases. However, we are also aware of cases which have arisen through social contact between households in a range of other settings, including visits to other households, in hospitality and in workplaces.

- 2.5 As rates of infection in the community increase we are also seeing a higher number of cases in care homes. Currently 6 care homes have outbreaks, and there are 69 cases in care home residents and staff across all care homes in Oldham.

## 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 21st 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 reviewed by our Testing Bronze Group. This approach is based on outbreaks,

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demographics and geographical profiles. Testing at these local sites is provided by the national NHS Test and Trace service.

- 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 **Locally commissioned testing offer** – We have commissioned a local testing service to provide testing for health and care staff, and other key workers. This service is also able to provide targeted testing in response to outbreaks and delivers the door to door testing offer.
- 4.4 **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.
- 4.5 **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.
- 4.6 **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.
- 4.7 **Care Homes** – To support Care Homes during the pandemic, Oldham Council has established a STICH team (Supporting Treatment in Care Homes), bringing together community nurses, allied health professionals and social workers to work directly with care homes that have residents and staff showing possible Covid-19 symptoms. 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.
- 4.8 **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 Contact tracing is a proven method to control the spread of many infectious diseases. In COVID-19 it works by identifying contacts of people who have tested positive and then encouraging them to self-isolate and closely monitor their health, rather than continuing to mix with others and passing the virus on.

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- 5.2 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%.
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 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 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. \*Since this report was written, a new national lockdown has been announced across the UK. The new measures will come into effect on Thursday 5 November and will last until Wednesday 2 December. At the time of writing we are waiting for full details of the new restrictions\*
- 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 are required to close 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.

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.

- 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.

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- 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** – On Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> October, following the announcement of a new month-long national lockdown, it was confirmed that the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (furlough scheme) has been extended for a month with employees receiving 80% of their current salary for hours not worked and further economic support announced. The level of the grant will mirror levels available under the CJRS in August, so the government will pay 80% of wages up to a cap of £2,500 and employers will pay employer National Insurance Contributions (NICs) and pension contributions only for the hours the employee does not work.

## 7.0 **Community Engagement and Communications**

- 7.1 **Community Engagement Teams** – Five community engagement teams are being 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 **Voluntary and Community Response** – There has been a huge breadth of support from across Oldham's voluntary and community sector, with many new mutual aid groups being established to support Oldham's COVID-19 response. These groups have been providing a huge amount of support for local people impacted by the pandemic, including leafletting to reach people who are isolated and to raise awareness of support available; running errands, shopping or other activities self-isolated people cannot perform; and providing emotional support and contact for people who are self-isolating or struggling with the effects of the pandemic.
- 7.5 **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.



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- 7.6 **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.
- 7.7 **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.
- 7.8 **Test and Trace App** – Relevant Council departments and local businesses have been worked with to both promote and encourage take up of the NHS test and trace app.
- 7.9 **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.
- 7.10 **Equality and Diversity** – 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. 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.

## 8. Key Issues for Health and Wellbeing Board to Discuss

- 8.1 The evidence that we have does not currently link transmission to any specific setting, but does suggest that we are seeing transmission happening in a range of settings where there is social contact between people that is not socially distanced.
- 8.2 In order to reduce transmission and bring the R value below 1, we need to substantially reduce the amount of social contact between people from different households. SAGE, Independent SAGE and the Chief Medical Officer have highlighted that measures which go further than the current tier 3 package of measures may be needed in order to substantially reduce infection rates. However, there is evidence that more wide scale lockdowns are effective in reducing R.
- 8.4 Beyond the current period of national lockdown, it is necessary to consider what package of measures/strategy will be needed for the coming months, as the challenges of controlling transmission will persist throughout the winter and into the spring. Control measures need to be supported by effective communications, engagement, and enforcement as well as testing and contact tracing, therefore our work on these remains a vital part of our ongoing strategy.
- 8.5 Whilst the impact of additional measures on individuals, communities and businesses will be significant if appropriate mitigation (such as furlough) is not put in place, the impact of not acting in the face of rising infection levels is also significant.

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## **9. Recommendation**

9.1 To note the content of the report and consider the key issues for discussion.