

Report to COUNCIL

Oldham's COVID-19 Response - Update

Portfolio Holder:

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

Officer Contact:

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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 new cases in 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 In September and October, COVID-19 spread rapidly in all parts of the country. Central Government introduced three-tier coronavirus alert levels: Medium Level (Tier 1), High Alert (Tier 2) and Very High Alert (Tier 3). On Friday 23rd 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.
- 1.2 In November the government responded with new national restrictions, including a four-week national lockdown, lasting until the 2nd December, which aimed to bring transmission under control. Unlike the tiered system, this new lockdown applied to everyone, though schools remained open during the lockdown.
- 1.3 Following the national lockdown, government reintroduced the regionally-differentiated approach, where different tiers of restrictions apply in different parts of the country. Greater Manchester was again placed into local Covid alert level very high (tier 3) restrictions.
- 1.4 Under tier three, very high alert level rules, hospitality settings, such as bars, pubs, cafes and restaurants are closed – they are permitted to continue sales by takeaway, click-and-collect, drive-through and delivery services, while household mixing is banned indoors and outdoors in private gardens. However, you can see friends and family you do not live with (or do not have a support bubble with) in some outdoor public places, in a group of up to 6. This limit of 6 includes children of any age.
- 1.5 The government has announced arrangements that will be in place over the Christmas period. From 23rd December to 27th December, residents from up to three households may choose to form a Christmas bubble. A Christmas bubble will be able to spend time together in private homes, to attend places of worship, or meet in a public outdoor place. There is additional guidance for the Christmas period including how to meet friends and family, visit pubs and restaurants, and attend places of worship.
- 1.6 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 5th December 2020 there has been **15,164** cases of COVID-19 identified in Oldham, **the weekly** infection rates are currently running at around **153** cases per 100,000 people.
- 2.2 Over the past 30 days (**up to 4th December**), **34,970** people have been tested for COVID-19 in Oldham. This includes **9,991** in Pillar 1 (tests undertaken through hospital and Public Health England laboratories) and **25,059** in Pillar 2 (commercial labs that process most of the at-home and community tests). Out of the **34,970** tests undertaken, **3,285** people tested positive (**270** in Pillar 1 and **3,015** in Pillar 2). There have been **464** deaths in Oldham (up to 27th November).

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 and Trace, Vaccination, Enforcement and Compliance, and Community Engagement and Communications.

4.0 **Test**

4.1 **Local Testing** – 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 4th December of 409/100,000.

4.2 **Door to Door Testing** – Our door to door testing offer launched on Friday 14th August. This offer is operating alongside community engagement work. To date we have held over 25,000 conversations with households and tested 4,000 people on the doorstep. Doorstep testing is being planned systematically based on need, trends and cases, using our hotspot mapping tool.

4.3 **Mobile Testing Units (MTU)** – MTU test sites for December have been finalised and we are working with highways to ensure all routes are gritted and each location is winterproofed. Local control over our MTU sites is being reviewed by GM and we are waiting to hear the outcome.

4.4 **Care Home Testing** – There will be a national push to roll out rapid antigen testing to care homes to include testing for visitors. Care homes will need support with training and safe use of tests. Care Home staff training commences on Wednesday 9th December via Webinar. Based on this webinar, the role out will include a mixed offer of training care homes to deliver testing on site, and for those unable, a centralised offer at the Queen Elizabeth Hall focusing on care home visitors.

4.5 **Contact Tracing** – We have processed 2662 cases to date in local contact tracing (which operates alongside the NHS Test and Trace System) and as at 2nd December there were no unallocated cases. Volume is reducing and we are now working on a 7-day rolling average of 20. A new locally led approach for complex settings commenced on Monday 7th December. This will mean that Tier 1 cases (where a case or cases have been identified in complex settings such as Care Homes, Schools, early years settings, high risk work places, health settings) will be allocated to either GM or Oldham and will be followed-up in conjunction with our Environmental Health team.

4.6 **Tracing in Schools** – Following a recent trial, schools are now asked to complete a google form for all positive notifications and associated number of contacts. This uploads to a spread sheet through an automated process and has reduced workload and requirements of those operating the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) by a significant amount. Case workers can now focus on contact tracing support rather than administration tasks.

5.0 **Vaccination**

5.1 **National Programme** – The United Kingdom has become the first country to approve a COVID-19 vaccine that has been tested in a large clinical trial. On 2nd December, UK regulators granted emergency-use authorization to a vaccine from drug firms Pfizer and BioNTech, just seven months after the start of clinical trials. The NHS is currently offering the COVID-19 vaccine to people most at risk from coronavirus.

At this time, the vaccine is being offered in some hospitals to:

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- some people aged 80 and over who already have a hospital appointment in the next few weeks
 - people who work in care homes
 - health care workers at high risk

The vaccine will be offered more widely, and at other locations, as soon as possible.

5.2 **Vaccination in Oldham** – Alongside other Greater Manchester authorities, we are preparing to deliver the vaccination program across Oldham, starting with the most vulnerable segments of our population. We will be establishing pop-up mass/community vaccination sites in each of the 5 Primary Care Network areas of the locality, supported by mobile arrangements to ensure equitable access to vaccination.

6.0 **Enforcement and Compliance**

6.1 **Support to Businesses** – The Government has introduced Local Restrictions Support Grants to help businesses within the Business Rates System that have been legally required to close due to restrictions being put in place to manage coronavirus. The grants are available for those businesses within the Business Rates system that were open and providing in-person services to customers from their business premises and were then legally required to close. Eligible businesses are those:

- required to close during localised restrictions when Oldham was placed in Tier 3 restrictions from 23rd October 2020 until 4th November 2020 (i.e. before national lockdown began). This affects:
 - pubs and bars who had to close from this date, it excludes pubs and bars that stayed open to operate as if they were a restaurant - which means serving substantial meals, like a main lunchtime or evening meal and where alcohol was served as part of such meal
 - casinos
 - bingo halls
 - betting shops
 - adult gaming centres
 - soft play centres
- required to close from 5th November 2020 until 2nd December 2020 under the national lockdown. This affects businesses as determined by [law](#).
- required to close in March 2020 and not yet been allowed to reopen. Eligibility for this scheme starts from 1st November 2020 until 4th November 2020 (i.e. until national lockdown began) and affects nightclubs and sexual entertainment venues

6.2 Local Restrictions Support Grant is also payable to businesses that remained open during the period from 1st August 2020 up to the national lockdown but were impacted by COVID in terms of trading income (this support also extends to businesses who are not within the rating system). The amounts payable depend on rateable value (where applicable). A further discretionary grant, Additional Restriction Grant is available to support businesses that do not fall within any of the above categories.

6.3 **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 ended on 31st October. On 9th 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. The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme has been extended until 31st March 2021 and the government will review the scheme in January 2021.

6.4 **Enforcement** – The Enforcement Team (Environmental Health, Licensing, Community Safety and GMP colleagues) have been working 7 days a week visiting premises, responding to complaints and attending gatherings and other breaches. 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). The proposed introduction of Covid support officers in the town centre will also provide support and guidance on key messages Hands/ Face / Space to provide public reassurance. These officers will be linked into the partnership approach for support if more formal activity is required.

7.0 **Community Engagement and Communications**

7.1 **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. Communications are being prepared and updated on an ongoing basis around the Tier system. We are preparing communications for targeted testing and mass vaccination.

7.2 **Self-isolation Payments** – We are continuing to promote self-isolation payments to support people self-isolating. On 20th 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 28th September 2020.

7.3 **Community Engagement** – The Community Engagement team are continuing to visit locations based on data and intelligence. We have a continued focus on older people's accommodation, with support from housing providers and home care providers who have let residents know we are visiting and provided access to accommodation. As a result, we have been able to have conversations and provide tests for a much higher proportion of households than in previous weeks.

7.4 **Engagement with the Roma Community** – The Council's Roma outreach worker and representative from Oasis Academy are working with Roma community leaders to promote and carry out testing.

7.5 **Winter Grant Payments** – The Council is in receipt of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) £974,689 Winter Grant funding to support residents with food, fuel and other essential costs during winter (from December 2020 to March 2021). Most of the recipients of the funding will be families with children; however, there is some flexibility to be able to offer support to families and individuals without children who are particularly vulnerable or in financial hardship including for example, homeless families and individuals and those with no recourse to public funds.

In Oldham, in accordance with Government guidelines, the Winter Grant will be used to fund:

- a supermarket food voucher programme for families with children who are entitled to Free School Meals, widened to include families on low incomes with pre-school

children and to care leavers over the Christmas 2020 and February 2021 half term holidays;

- additional support for the Warm Homes programme to augment the provision of fuel vouchers to residents with pre-payment meters and support with boiler repairs; and
- support for other vulnerable residents with supermarket food vouchers over the winter.

Work is ongoing across services to ensure the mechanisms are in place to support the timely distribution of the vouchers and to match this with other sources of funding for example the DEFRA Emergency Assistance Fund; vouchers from the GM Mayor's No Child Should Go Hungry Campaign; Local Welfare Provision and resources available within the VCFSE sector. This will enable us to ensure that support reaches the maximum number of vulnerable families and individuals - giving them peace of mind in the run up to Christmas, and over the winter months, that they will be able to access help with food and essential bills.

8 Consultation

8.1 N/A

9 Financial Implications

9.1 The Government continues to allocate a range of ringfenced and un-ringfenced grants to support the Local Government response to COVID-19. The Council has received £23.978m of un-ringfenced funding including £1.282m as compensation for lost sales, fees and charges income. There will be two further rounds of sales, fees and charges compensation and there may yet be further general grant. These general grants are 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, the Council has been notified of thirteen specific grants to support its COVID response. The total funding received or notified is £14.992m. This includes the £0.975m of funding in relation to the Winter Grant programme as outlined at paragraph 7.5 above.

9.3 As Oldham remains in Tier 3 restrictions it is in receipt of Contain Outbreak Management Fund grant. This is 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.
- 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.

9.4 Three tranches of this funding have been received. Tranche 1 was payable at £8 per head of population (£1.897m). The second and third tranche were payable at £4 per head of population, £0.948m and £0.440m respectively. This funding is within the £14.992m outlined above.

9.5 The Council has received £3.517m to provide grant payments to those businesses forced to close due to Tier 3 and national restrictions. It has received £1.884m to support businesses that remained open but had their trade impacted from 1 August to the national lockdown and £5.017m to provide discretionary support under the Additional Restrictions Grant. The Council is ensuring it follows Government guidance in the administration of these grants.

9.5 Further grant support for business from the end of the national lockdown on 2 December 2020 is also being provided, following the pattern of support for closed and open businesses as outlined above. The Government has not yet notified of funding allocations for this grant support. (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 lived 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**

13.1 N/A

14 **IT Implications**

14.1 N/A

15 **Property Implications**

15.1 N/A

16 **Procurement Implications**

16.1 N/A

17 **Environmental and Health & Safety Implications**

17.1 N/A

18 **Equality, community cohesion and crime implications**

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 **Equality Impact Assessment Completed?**

19.1 Yes

20 **Key Decision**

20.1 No

21 **Key Decision Reference**

21.1 N/A

22 **Background Papers**

22.1 Council Report – COVID-19 Response – June 2020

22.2 Council Report – COVID-19 Response – July 2020

22.3 Council Report – COVID-19 Response Update – November 2020

23 **Appendices**

23.1 N/A

DELETE THE SIGNATURE BOX IF THE REPORT IS A CABINET DECISION

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