

Report to COUNCIL

Oldham's COVID-19 Response - Update

Portfolio Holder:

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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 and national context**

- 1.1 In March 2021, a new and more transmissible variant of COVID-19 (the Delta variant) began to spread very quickly across the UK, becoming the dominant strain. It quickly became clear it was far more infectious than the Alpha (B.1.1.7) variant, which was already considered to be more transmissible than the original Wuhan Strain. According to Public Health England (PHE) reports in June, Delta is 64% more contagious than Alpha. The high transmissibility means that Delta now makes up 99% of sequenced COVID cases in England.
- 1.2 On 2nd December 2020, UK regulators granted emergency-use authorization to a vaccine from drug firms Pfizer and BioNTech. This was followed the same month by authorisation for use of the AstraZeneca vaccine developed by Oxford University and in January 2021, the Moderna vaccine. An Oxford University study suggests two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech jab are 93% effective at preventing symptomatic coronavirus, while the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine is 71% effective. Protection has been proved to last around four or five months, but it can wane over time.
- 1.3 In January 2021 vaccination roll-out began. Ten months after the first coronavirus jab in the UK was administered, the UK's vaccine coverage stands at about 86% of those who are eligible for a jab (73.5% of the total population have received at least 1 dose of the vaccine). The uptake of the vaccine among younger people has been slow, with just 64% of those aged 18 – 29 fully vaccinated as of 9th October 2021, compared with 96% of those in their 70s. A study from the Officer for National Statistics recently found those aged 16 – 29 were the most vaccine hesitate age group, with data showing less than one in five 16 and 17-year-olds have been fully vaccinated, though this age group has only been eligible to receive a vaccine since August. In September the UK's chief medical officer agreed to extend jabs to children ages 12 – 15.
- 1.4 On 18th October 2021, over 49.983 million people had received their first vaccine dose and 44.833 million people had also received their second dose across the UK. In September 2021, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunization (JCVI) announced a third dose of the coronavirus vaccine would be offered to everyone over 50, health care workers, and other vulnerable people. They will be given no earlier than six months after a person received their second dose of the vaccine. Around 30 million people are eligible for the booster shot, with over 2.08 million top ups administered by 11th October 2021.
- 1.5 Cases, hospitalisations and deaths have fallen since the vaccination programme started. Between 11 and 17 October 2021, 1 in 60 people (around 300k) have tested positive for COVID-19 in England, showing an increase of 15.1% compared to the previous 7 days. Between 6 October and 12 October 2021, 5,559 went into hospital with coronavirus, showing an increase of 6.9% compared to the previous 7 days. There were 7,086 patients in hospital with coronavirus on 14th October 2021. Between 11 October – 17 October 2021, there have been 852 deaths within 28 days of a positive coronavirus test, showing an increase of 8.5% compared to the previous 7 days.

1.6 September 2021 has also seen the Government issue its COVID-19 Winter Plan (Plan A). It details a programme for suppressing the virus, with a toolkit of restrictions that could be introduced in England if the NHS comes under significant pressure. The Government's current plan has five pillars:

1. **An enhanced vaccination programme**, with vaccine offered to 12 to 15-year-olds, as well as a booster programme for over 50's and the most vulnerable.
2. **Testing and isolation**, with those who test positive for Covid-19 having to isolate for 10 days, and the same rule applies to over-18s who have not been double-vaccinated when they come into contact with a positive case.
3. **Restrictions on travel**, with testing required before arrival in the UK and mandatory hotel quarantines for arrivals from "red list" countries.
4. **NHS Resources**, with a £5.4bn cash injection to the NHS in England to support the COVID-19 response over the next six months.
5. **Encouraging self-protection**, with a supporting campaign to encourage hand-washing, workplace ventilation, as well as continued mask-wearing in riskier spaces.

1.7 The Government has said that other measures (Plan B) could be required to prevent unsustainable pressure on the NHS, though these would only be implemented as a last resort. These measures include:

- **Vaccine passports** – ministers abandoned proposals for mandatory vaccine passports for entry to nightclubs and mass events from 1st October, but the plan given them the right to reintroduce the measures should cases rise.
- **Advice to work from home** – this advice was dropped after 19th July and left to employers' direction, though this could be reintroduced if cases rise.
- **Mask wearing** – masks were mandatory until 19th July in English Shops and public transport. There is now no requirement to wear them in England, unlike in Scotland and Wales, though legal requirements could be brought back, requiring people to wear face coverings in some settings.

2 COVID-19 in Oldham

2.1 As of the 14th October 2021 there have been 40,583 cases of COVID-19 identified in Oldham; the weekly infection rates are currently running at around 361 cases per 100,000 people.

2.2 Currently the highest COVID rate in the borough is in young people aged 11-16 years. This group has the highest rate of testing since the start of the autumn term. All secondary pupils are recommended to carry out twice weekly lateral flow tests. The second highest is in 5–10-year-olds. We have several outbreaks in secondary and primary schools. The Public Health team are working with education settings on outbreaks and clusters of cases, providing information, advice and implementing control measures. *Please see section 6.0 for further details.

Secondary	Primary	Tertiary	Early Years	Special	Staff	Total
155	132	21	9	6	40	363
518	245	55	16	19	41	895

363 positive cases have been notified by schools and settings to the Public Health team in the last 10 days and 895 positive cases in the last 20 days *(as @ 18.10.21)

2.3 Over the past 28 days (up to 17th September), 79,915 people have been tested for COVID-19 in Oldham. This includes 29,501 PCR tests and 50,414 LFD tests.

2.4 There have been 799 Covid-19 related deaths in Oldham (up to 1st October 2021). The number of deaths from Covid-19 has slowed significantly since the start of the vaccination programme, however we are still seeing deaths from Covid in the borough every week.

3.0 **Vaccination Programme Update**

3.1 The original Government plan included a vaccination programme comprising 1) mass vaccination sites run by Regional NHS Teams and 2) local sites run by Primary Care Networks under nationally agreed Directly Enhanced Service contracts.

3.2 The national rollout plan was executed at rapid pace and the priority for rollout was set nationally by the JCVI, which advises that the first priorities for the COVID-19 vaccination programme should be the prevention of mortality and the maintenance of the health and social care systems.

3.3 Achieving a high coverage across all population groups will contribute to reducing COVID-19 risks in the population and the associated inequalities. All people aged 18 and over are eligible the 1st and 2nd dose of a COVID-19 vaccine (or if they will turn 18 within 3 months). The NHS is offering a 1st dose of a COVID-19 vaccine to people aged 16 and 17.

3.4 All children aged 12 to 15 will be offered a 1st dose of a COVID-19 vaccine (including children who turn 12 on the date of vaccination). Parents and guardians will get a letter or email with information about when the vaccine will be offered and will be asked to give their consent. Most children will be given their vaccine at school during school hours, but we are also exploring other methods for those that do not take up this first opportunity. Some young people and children aged 12 to 17 are being offered 2 doses of the vaccine if either:

- they live with someone who is more likely to get infections (such as someone who has HIV, has had a transplant or is having certain treatments for cancer, lupus or rheumatoid arthritis)
- they have a condition that means they're at high risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19

3.5 In terms of uptake in Oldham, over 157k first doses (72.3% of Oldham's eligible population age 12 and above) and over 145k second doses (66.6% of Oldham's eligible population aged 12 and above) have been given, with an additional 10k booster shots delivered. Over 1000 vaccinations have been completed for children aged 12-15 (approximately 7% of Oldham 12 to15-year-olds).

3.6 The majority of Oldham's care homes have now been fully vaccinated, with vaccination in care homes to be complete by 1st November.

4.0 **Winter Readiness: Flu planning**

4.1 In the UK, influenza infections rapidly declined and largely disappeared during the pandemic. Social distancing measures used to contain COVID were even more effective in reducing the spread of influenza. But unfortunately, this means we now need to be braced for flu to be especially bad this year. With COVID control measures having almost completely limited people's exposure to flu over the last 18 months, natural immunity will have fallen across the population. When flu does return, it therefore may affect more people and cause more severe disease than we would normally see in a typical flu season. The

same will also apply to other respiratory viruses, therefore flu planning is critical to reduce the chance of an influenza epidemic in the UK.

4.2 Whilst Oldham will significantly contribute to ensuring the improved uptake is achieved in all 'at risk' groups, the proposed additional recommended public health actions for 2021/22 will support this work on the following 3 main areas:

- Pregnant women.
- People with learning disabilities and
- Toddlers and all school aged children

4.3 Additional focused work will also be undertaken with all primary school aged children, homeless people, travelling communities and frontline Health & Social Care workers to further increase influenza vaccination uptake to maximise protection and reduce inequalities.

4.4 Key messages –

- Get your flu jab – flu vaccination is offered free of charge to people who are at risk, pregnant women, carers and children aged 2, 3 and 4 in GP practices and 5,6 and 7 via the school vaccination programme, to ensure that they are protected against catching flu and developing serious complications.
- Keep warm – this may help prevent colds, flu or more serious health conditions such as heart attacks, strokes and pneumonia.
- Eat well – food gives you energy, which helps to keep you warm. So, try to have regular hot meals and drinks throughout the day.
- Winter illnesses – outline common winter illnesses and their appropriate treatments
- Get help – signpost key stakeholders to the appropriate channels for them to get help for their winter ailments.
- Troubleshoot – pre-empt any key flashpoints – bank holidays, Xmas hols, etc when pharmacies, surgeries, etc may be closed or running on reduced hours to alert key stakeholders and encourage them to manage their meds etc.
- Harness existing materials and information – utilise national campaign materials and existing channels such as NHS Choices to generate content both on and offline.

5.0 **Winter Readiness: COVID-19 Planning**

5.1 We are continuing with the key elements of our approach on testing, contact tracing, support for self-isolation, outbreak management, engagement, comms and vaccination, and these will remain the cornerstones of our approach for the winter period. If we were to move to 'plan B' nationally or if we receive additional support as an area of enduring transmission, or rates rise to the extent that we are offered additional national support then additional measures may be introduced in line with the national contain framework and local need.

5.2 The majority of COVID-19 outbreaks will be best dealt with at a local level, and we work with a wide variety of settings including businesses and schools to reduce the risk of transmission and manage outbreaks.

5.3 During the winter, PCR testing sites will change their opening times to 8-6 from 1st November instead of 8-8.

5.4 In 2020 the Government provided funding through the COVID winter grant scheme, enabling local authorities to provide direct assistance to support families with children, other vulnerable households and individuals most in need as a result of the pandemic. This

funding is no longer available; however, the Government has launched a new £500m support fund to support vulnerable households over the coming winter. Oldham will receive £2.419 million to assist vulnerable households via small grants to meet daily needs, such as food, clothing and utilities. Some of this funding will be used to cover food voucher support for children eligible for means tested Free School Meals over the October half-term holiday 2021. School holiday food voucher support will also be available over the Christmas 2021 holiday and February 2022 half term.

5.5 We are continuing to work across the Oldham Partnership to provide a system wide approach to support, underpinned with data and insight, engagement, community development, co-production and support from a wide selection of partners. Oldham's Place Based Teams are continuing to work with the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector (VCFSE) to provide crisis and poverty alleviation support to communities, including emergency food support via Oldham Foodbank and members of the Food Solutions Network, emergency clothing and goods via organisations including REEL Clothing Rack and SAWN furniture and white goods, and more broadly through a whole host of groups and organisations delivering crisis and community support. Between April – August, From April-August, Action Together have awarded 122 micro grants totalling £83,462 from the Community Recovery Fund to enable VCFSE groups to deliver ongoing COVID-19 Support to communities.

6.0 **Winter Readiness: Schools - COVID Guidance, Start of Autumn Term 2021**

6.1 Schools and colleges no longer implement specific restrictions in relation to COVID-19 such as bubbles of pupils and staff, limits of gatherings and assemblies, restrictions on events, social distancing, and reducing the movement of staff.

6.2 Schools are no longer expected to contact trace within their settings. Details of contacts will be taken from the case (or their parent) by the national Test and Trace Team. Settings still have obligations to protect staff from exposure and so should still report staff contacts via the national helpline. Oldham Public Health Team are still asking all cases within education settings to be notified to our SPOC to quickly identify outbreaks/clusters and provide support.

6.3 Unvaccinated young people up to the age of 18 years and 6 months, and fully vaccinated adults, are now no longer required to self-isolate if they are a close contact of someone with Covid-19, including if they live in the same household. 18-year-olds will be treated in the same way as children and young people until 6 months after their 18th birthday, to allow them the opportunity to get fully vaccinated.

6.4 All schools will receive CO2 monitors to assess their ventilation, helping them provide a safe environment for Oldham's young people. As we approach the colder winter months, Public Health are emphasising the importance of maintaining good ventilation in classrooms, staff rooms and common areas in school. Some schools are asking students to wear their jumpers or blazers to allow the windows to be kept open.

6.5 As a result of high COVID rates across the region, GM Directors of Public Health have agreed a framework for responding to cases, and outbreaks in schools. This works alongside the *Contingency Framework* to support schools. It outlines the types of actions that can be taken at each level of COVID within a school, from prevention (with no cases), through to a sustained outbreak that isn't responding to measures. This framework will be used by all ten boroughs of Greater Manchester.

7.0 **Community Engagement and Communications**

7.1 As we head into winter it's predicted that we'll be seeing rising COVID-19 rates as the weather gets colder and people spend more time inside. In order to keep transmission rates down and residents safe Oldham Council's communications will be focusing on:

- Promoting the importance of getting first, second and booster vaccinations
- Promoting getting Covid tested twice a week using LFT tests and PCR tests if people have symptoms
- Highlighting general Covid safety – washing hands, making space for other people, wearing masks in crowded areas and keeping areas well ventilated

7.2 With over 70% of the borough having received their first and second jab a focus will be on those groups who currently have lower take up rates and are most at risk. This will involve promoting the booster jab to those who are eligible and encouraging those who have not had their first or second jab to get themselves protected from the worst effects of the virus.

7.3 Myth busting will also be taking place to dispel misinformation and highlight trusted sources, and we will also be supporting local business by encouraging them to apply for grants.

7.4 We are also continuing to find alternative ways to engage and communicate key messaging to hard to reach communities, for example, through Oldham's Community Champions programme, a project delivered in partnership between Oldham Council and Action Together, which aims to support people disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, including minority ethnic communities and people with a disability. £225k of additional funding from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund has recently been allocated to extend and expand the programme, focusing on providing targeted messaging and community engagement as we move into the winter months.

8 Consultation

8.1 N/A

9 Financial Implications

9.1 In 2021/22 the Government has continued to allocate a range of unringfenced and ringfenced grants to support the Local Government response to COVID-19. The Council has received £7.737m of unringfenced funding with an additional £0.352m expected grant compensation for lost sales, fees, and charges income. 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.

COVID Specific Grants

9.2 During 2020/21 the Council received 19 COVID specific grants totaling £21.838m grants and at the end of the financial year, £7.951m of this had not been spent was carried forward into 2021/22. All of the £7.951m will be spent in full during this financial year. The highest value grants carried forward are;

- Contain Outbreak Management Fund - £5.341m
- Local Authority Test and Trace Service Support Payments - £0.851m
- Funding for Local Authorities for Support the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable Individuals - £0.541m

9.3 So far in this financial year, a total of twelve specific grants have been notified by Government at a value of £11.684m. highest value grants received are:

- Adult Social Care Infection Control and Testing Grant - £2.610m (two tranches)

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- Household Support Fund - £2.419m
 - Control Outbreak Management Fund - £1.997m

In addition, £0.183m is being received via the Greater Manchester Combined Authority in respect of the GM Self Isolation Pathway.

- 9.4 The Council will maximise the use of the grants ensuring that it complies with the terms and conditions of each grant. At this stage it is understood that all ringfenced grants must be used by 31 March 2022.
- 9.5 Furthermore, the Council continues to receive contributions from the NHS via Oldham CCG (as prescribed in NHS Guidance) to support Adult Social Care provision including hospital discharges into a social care setting.

Support for Businesses

- 9.6 Members will recall that during 2020/21, the Council administered the Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSG) scheme on behalf of Government. This was essentially a mandatory grant scheme for which the Council received a total grant of £28.417m covering 15 individual grant types, qualifying periods and eligibility criteria. The final date for applications for the last round of LRSG was 30 April 2021 and the final payment date 30 June 2021. At the end of 2020/21 £19.556m had been spent, with a final total of £20.092m at the end of June 2021. In total therefore, £8.325m of grant remained unspent to be returned to Government. Every effort was made to issue grants to all qualifying businesses.
- 9.7 Restart Grants became available from 1 April 2021 to support businesses who were forced to close during national lockdown to help them reopen safely as COVID 19 restrictions were lifted. In this regard, on 6 April the Government paid the Council £10.542m to administer mandatory Restart Grants and the Oldham grant scheme opened that day. The grant payable to businesses was calculated as follows:

Non-essential Retail Businesses

- Businesses with a rateable value of £15,000 or under - grants of £2,667
- Businesses with a rateable value of over £15,000 and less than £51,000 - grants of £4,000
- Businesses with a rateable value of £51,000 or over - grants of £6,000

Hospitality, Leisure, Accommodation, Personal Care, Gym and Sports Businesses

- Businesses with a rateable value of £15,000 or under - grants of £8,000
- Businesses with a rateable value of over £15,000 and less than £51,000 - grants of £12,000
- Businesses with a rateable value of £51,000 or over - grants of £18,000

- 9.8 The final dated for applications for these grants was 30 June 2021 and the final date for payment was 31 July 2021. The Council received £10.542m to support such payments and at 31 July 2021 had paid 1,417 grants totaling £9.703m, thus £0.839m remained unspent.
- 9.9 In addition to the grant schemes outlined above, there was also a discretionary business grants scheme, the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG). During 2020/21, a total of £7.123m was received to administer the AFG scheme. By 31 March 2021, £3.076m had been spent with the balance, £4.047m spent by June 2021. A further tranche of grant was paid to the Council in July 2021 in the sum of £1.214m. Currently, £0.402m is still available. The grant must be spent by 31 March 2022.

9.10 The Council has also administered Business Rate Relief on behalf of Central Government. For the first three months of the 2021/22 financial year (April to June), there was 100% business rate relief for properties in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors. From July 2021, those properties are receiving 66% relief until March 2022. The total benefit to businesses in Oldham is expected to be £9.798m. The Council receives full grant compensation from the Government for Business Rates it is therefore not collecting.

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. (Jonathan Downs – Corporate Policy Lead).

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

22.4 Council Report – Covid-19 Response Update – December 2020

22.5 Council Report – Covid-19 Response Update – March 2021

23 **Appendices**

23.1 N/A