

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 As we enter Winter there are multiple risks ahead associated with COVID-19, its direct and indirect impact on people and services, as well as the impacts of other winter pressures. Whilst many aspects of life have begun to see a return to pre-pandemic times, the transmission and impact of COVID-19 still requires careful management, and if rates continue to rise further measures to mitigate the impact on individuals, society and economy may be required.
- 1.2 On 26th November 2021 the World Health Organisation designated the Covid variant B.1.1.529 a variant of concern, named Omicron. First identified in South Africa, Omicron has now been identified in several other countries, including the UK. Work is ongoing to understand the virulence of the new variant, its transmissibility and how effective the vaccines are at combatting it.
- 1.3 On 6th December 2021, over 51.138 million people had received their first vaccine dose and 46.582 million people had also received their second dose across the UK. 20.910 million people had received a third or booster dose of the vaccine. The Government has secured an additional 114 million vaccine doses for use over the next two years.
- 1.4 Cases, hospitalisations and deaths have fallen since the vaccination programme started. Between 1st and 7th December 2021, 336,893 people have tested positive for COVID-19 in England, showing an increase of 12.1% compared to the previous 7 days. Between 27th November and 3rd December 2021, 5,349 people were admitted to hospital with coronavirus, showing a small decrease of 0.1% compared to the previous 7 days. Between 30th November and 6th December 2021, there were 857 deaths within 28 days of a positive coronavirus test, showing an increase of 3.0% compared to the previous 7 days.
- 1.5 The Government has reintroduced various measures to combat the spread of COVID-19 in England. These measures include:
- Compulsory face coverings on public transport and in shops
 - Pupils strongly advised to wear face coverings in communal areas in secondary schools
 - Contacts of suspected Omicron cases to self-isolate for 10 days, regardless of age or vaccination status
 - Travelers to the UK to take PCR or lateral flow tests prior to departure, and to take a PCR test within 48 hours of arrival in the UK, isolating until they have a negative result.

2 **COVID-19 in Oldham**

- 2.1 There is still considerable uncertainty about the future course of the pandemic, funding and government policy. In this context our local response needs to remain agile. Given Oldham's experience of COVID-19 to date our response is well established and wide in scope and as such we are well placed to be able to adapt as needed.

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- 2.2 As of 27th November 2021 there have been 44,813 cases of COVID-19 identified in Oldham; the weekly infection rates are currently running at around 308 cases per 100,000 people. This remains the lowest in Greater Manchester and lower than the England rate of 434 per 100,000.
 - 2.3 Currently the highest COVID rate in the borough is in young people aged 10-19 years. In the seven days ending 26th November White/White British was the ethnicity with the highest case rate. Over the same period Chadderton North was the ward with the highest case rate (470 per 100,000 population) and St Mary's had the lowest (121 per 100,000).
 - 2.4 Testing rates in Oldham are currently 445 per 100,000 per day (excluding lateral flow tests for those without symptoms), with a positivity rate of 10.1%.
 - 2.5 There have been 823 Covid-19 related deaths in Oldham (up to 19th November 2021). The number of deaths from Covid-19 has slowed significantly since the start of the vaccination programme.

3 Vaccination Programme Update

- 3.1 Increasing vaccination uptake remains the primary focus of our local response. Over 162,000 Oldham residents have received their first doses (74.7% of Oldham's eligible population) and over 148,000 have received second doses (72.9% of Oldham's eligible population), with an additional 52,000 booster shots or third doses delivered.
- 3.2 As the vaccination programme has evolved in Oldham the number and range of settings where vaccination clinics are provided has widened substantially, informed by feedback from residents. Current clinics include GP surgeries, pharmacies, the hospital and community venues. In addition, vaccinations for 12-17 year olds have been offered in education settings.
- 3.3 The vaccination programme has been supported by local communications and engagement plans, including the community champions programme, in order to encourage uptake and dispel vaccination myths.

4 Testing Update

- 4.1 Oldham has a wide-ranging testing offer, including lateral flow testing for people who do not have symptoms, and PCR tests for people with symptoms and those who have been close contacts of a confirmed case.
- 4.2 In line with the national testing programme Oldham residents are encouraged to make regular testing a habit and test before attending high risk events or crowded places. Lateral flow testing kits are available from nationally commissioned testing routes such as home delivery and pharmacy collect, but this is supplemented through a local offer which includes libraries and leisure centres. The locally commissioned pharmacy offer includes supported self-testing for those who are unable to, or do not wish to, process their own tests at home. In addition to pharmacy testing sites, outreach testing and training provision are used to ensure that testing can be tailored to community needs, settings, workplaces and events.
- 4.3 There are four PCR local testing sites (LTS) within the borough, with the aim of ensuring good access and minimising travel time. In addition to the static sites, mobile testing units (MTUs) are routinely used around the borough to ensure that wards with greatest travel distance or barriers in accessing an LTS have access to the MTU. Where data identifies areas of high transmission or low testing uptake, MTUs are strategically placed in these areas. Where larger outbreaks are identified, the MTUs move to the setting for proactive case finding.

4.4 A local clinically-led PCR testing service is used to support vulnerable residents and provide flexible capacity to respond to outbreaks (either in a setting or in a community). A key role of this service is the domiciliary support available to residents who cannot access a main-stream test site due to physical disability, mental capacity or learning difficulties.

4.5 Oldham continues to advocate, individually and alongside other GM areas, for an approach to testing to be maintained which reduces inequalities, provides access for the most vulnerable and supports early identification of cases.

5 **Communications**

5.1 A multi-channel communications and engagement plan is in place to support the COVID-19 response, including social and digital media, print and out of home advertising, video and direct mail/newsletters to specific groups.

5.2 The current focus of communications activity is on increasing vaccination uptake and reminding residents that “Covid is still here”, meaning that standard infection, prevention and control measures are still important.

5.3 Communications activity ranges from boroughwide communications, such as high-profile videos, billboards and media activity, through to targeted communications with key audiences in hotspot areas, communities and age groups.

5.4 Targeted campaigns include video encouraging people to shop local and safely in the run-up to Christmas, and a dedicated website aimed at young people aged 12-19. The website will be promoted through Instagram and TikTok, as well as through education partners, newsletters and wider media.

6 **Consultation**

6.1 N/A

7 **Financial Implications**

7.1 The primary funding stream supporting the local COVID-19 response is the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF). Total COMF funding available to the borough in 2021/22 is c£8.33m; a combination of funding carried forward from 2020/21 and a new allocation for 2021/22. The funding must be spent by end March 2022.

The short term nature of this funding presents a risk in being able to maintain all elements of the current COVID response into 2023. Alongside other areas Oldham has been making the case to central government for additional funding to support COVID response beyond the end of March 2023.

8 **Legal Services Comments**

8.1 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)

9 **Co-operative Agenda**

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- 9.1 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)
- 10 **Human Resources Comments**
- 10.1 N/A
- 11 **Risk Assessments**
- 11.1 N/A
- 12 **IT Implications**
- 12.1 N/A
- 13 **Property Implications**
- 13.1 N/A
- 14 **Procurement Implications**
- 14.1 N/A
- 15 **Environmental and Health & Safety Implications**
- 15.1 N/A
- 16 **Equality, community cohesion and crime implications**
- 16.1 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.
- 16.2 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.
- 16.3 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).
- 17 **Equality Impact Assessment Completed?**
- 17.1 Yes
- 18 **Key Decision**
- 18.1 No
- 19 **Key Decision Reference**
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19.1 N/A

20 **Background Papers**

20.1 Council Report – COVID-19 Response – June 2020

20.2 Council Report – COVID-19 Response – July 2020

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

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

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

20.6 Council Report – Covid-19 Response Update – November 2021

21 **Appendices**

21.1 N/A