

## **MEDWAY HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD**

**16 FEBRUARY 2021**

### **COVID-19 LOCAL OUTBREAK CONTROL PLAN BRIEFING**

Report from: James Williams, Director of Public Health for Medway Council

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#### **Summary**

This report will provide an update on the Local Outbreak Control Plan (LOCP) including top-level outcomes of recent stress tests made since the last update.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

- 1.1. As part of the Department of Health and Social Care's COVID-19 response and recovery strategy, Upper Tier and Unitary Local Authorities in England were mandated to develop a COVID-19 Local Outbreak Control Plan to reduce the viruses' spread.
- 1.2. National government has provided core funding to support the Plan's delivery. Original funding to support this work was originally £300 million nationally. As the pandemic has developed, central government has provided additional resources linked to events such as national lockdown and Tiering decisions. The COVID-19 Local Outbreak Control Plan follows national outbreak management standards. Local measures are in place local to prevent, identify, and contain COVID-19 outbreaks. This plan was first published online on 30 June 2020; its most recent iteration was published on the 24 December 2020.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1. Responding to the Rise in Cases Nationally and Locally
  - 2.1.1. The rates of COVID-19 in the UK have risen dramatically since the summer. Since the Medway Health and Wellbeing Board last convened. This increase led to a range of measures including National Lockdowns and stringent Tiering measures.

2.1.2. A novel variant of COVID-19, named VUI-202012/01, was detected in the UK in December of last year. Recent evidence suggests it is 50 percent more transmissible and may have the capacity to cause more mortality. The enhanced transmissibility of the new variant led to the rapid acceleration of COVID cases seen in Medway. This new variant is now the most dominant strain across the South East and nationally.

2.1.3. In addition to current National Lockdown measures, the Director of Public Health (DPH) has taken several other measures to continue to limit the spread of COVID-19 in Medway including:

### ***Asymptomatic Testing***

2.1.4. Medway Council has launched a mass COVID-19 rapid testing pilot for asymptomatic residents; the first of its kind in the South East of England. Medway Council has successfully launched five permanent sites and multiple pop-up sites for this purpose. The exact addresses of these five permanent testing sites are:

1. Chattenden Community Centre, Swinton Avenue, Chattenden, Rochester, ME3 8PH
2. The Student Hub (The Deep End), North Chatham Maritime, Chatham, ME4 4AG
3. The Oast House, Granary Close, Rainham, ME8 7SG.
4. Rochester Cathedral, Garth House, The Precinct, Rochester, ME1 1SX.
5. Medway Park, Mill Road. Gillingham, ME7 1H

2.1.5. Underpinned by Lateral Flow Tests (LFTs), this rapid testing has enabled Medway Council to better understand levels of asymptomatic transmission locally the communities. LFTs enable a test result to be obtained within 30 mins. This helps to break the chain of transmission, with individuals and any close contacts, being informed within an hour of the need to self-isolate.

2.1.6. The Medway programme is innovative and has been developed in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care. Using local data on disease transmission and prevalence, areas of Medway and communities with the highest rates of disease were identified and targeted testing initiated. Working in partnership with our local NHS, communication was tailored to individuals at greatest risk. This involved using text messaging and personal letters to households as well as targeted social media. Key and essential workers and their dependents are also prioritised for testing. These include blue light services, social care, education, the military and others working in critical infrastructure (shop workers, delivery drivers, etc). In addition, access to testing is available for those who are unable to work from home. As of 29 January, this pilot has performed 66,911 tests in Medway.

### ***The Launch of Medway's Local Contact Tracing Services***

- 2.1.7. In partnership with NHS Test and Trace, Medway launched its own Local Contact Tracing service on 13 November 2020. This service verifies the contact details of those whom national handlers are unable to trace using local data sources. These individuals are then followed by local test and trace staff to ensure they comply.
- 2.1.8. Contact tracing is completed by either local or national Test and Trace operatives for 89% of cases in Medway; this is in line with the standards set by Test and Trace for an effective contact tracing programme.

### ***The Vaccination Programme***

- 2.1.9. The management and roll-out of the vaccination programme is the responsibility of the DHSC. Medway Council is working closely with stakeholders from the DHSC to support them in meeting their vaccination targets for the local area. By 15 February 2021, this programme aims to have inoculated the following key groups identified by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI):
- All residents in a care home for older adults and their carers
  - All those 80 years of age and over and frontline health and social care workers
  - All those 75 years of age and over
  - All those 70 years of age and over and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals
- 2.1.10. Vaccines are delivered by three types of vaccination sites:
1. Vaccination centres – using large-scale venues such as football stadiums; accessed via a national booking service
  2. Hospital hubs – using NHS Trusts across the country
  3. Local vaccination services – made up of sites led by general practice teams collaborating via pre-established primary care networks and pharmacy teams through community pharmacies

### ***Education during National Lockdown***

- 2.1.11. In keeping with national guidance, unless they are deemed critically vulnerable or are the children of critical workers, Medway's schoolchildren have been required to learn from home since 4 January 2021. Those eligible for free school meals will still have these provided on teaching days while schools are closed. Both special schools and early year settings (nurseries and childminders) are able to accept students or charges as normal.
- 2.1.12. Returning to college or higher education has also been disrupted by the National Lockdown with colleges and universities organising and communicating new learning arrangements for their pupils. To replace traditional exams, students taking their GCSEs and A-Levels will now receive their grades via teacher-assessments and, in some special cases, via external exams which will be arranged throughout the year.

- 2.1.13. It is important to note that the proportion of key worker children attending in-person schooling in Medway is significantly higher than the national average.
- 2.1.14. Medway Council has supported our educational sector with access to training so they can test both teachers and students. In addition, all education staff and people living or working in Medway are able to access symptom free testing via any of the 5 fixed testing sites. Addressing the impact on the wellbeing of young people in Medway during period of restriction is key. Children's services, education and the public health department are collaborating on a number of initiatives to improve support for mental wellbeing.

### ***Restricting Events during National Lockdown***

- 2.1.15. In light of restrictions associated with National Lockdown, risk assessment and appropriate action has been taken to curtail and cancel any event that could have resulted in increased community transmission of the virus. This work is ongoing in partnership with the Enforcement Cell of the Kent Local Resilience Forum.

### ***Local Outbreak Engagement Board – Engagement Strategy***

- 2.1.16. As the Local Outbreak Engagement Board, the Kent and Medway Joint Health and Wellbeing Board actioned a new strategy to facilitate two-way communication and engagement with residents and Council members. Between 9 November 2020 and 23 November 2020, residents were invited to submit any queries and questions regarding Kent and Medway's Local Outbreak Control Plan via [an online form](#) prior to the Joint Board meeting that took place 8 December 2020. The following key areas of concern amongst residents were identified through this process: 1) schools remaining open, 2) care services remaining open 3) poor compliance with Tier 3 restrictions amongst local businesses 4) bailiff threats and visits & 5) building out data platforms to improve COVID transparency with the public. All questions posed came from Medway residents and answers were included in Appendix 1 of the [Joint Health and Wellbeing Board briefing document](#) that was prepared in advance of the 8 December 2020 meeting. Questions that have come in since this meeting will be considered at the next Joint Health and Wellbeing Board meeting scheduled for 10 March 2021.

## **2.2. Stress Testing Local COVID-19 Outbreak Control Plan**

- 2.2.1. Local authorities across England were requested by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to test their Local COVID-19 Outbreak Control Plan (LOCP).
- 2.2.2. An LOCP stress test development group was formed with representation from multiple agency partners and members of the Health Protection Board (HPB) to produce the exercise scenarios for Kent County Council (KCC) and Medway Council (MC) to be tested. An additional four stress tests have been conducted since the last meeting of the Medway Health and Wellbeing

Board; details of these are provided below:

#### ***Scenario 4 – Food Processing Industry Stress Test***

- 2.2.3. This test was run in collaboration with a food manufacturing company based in Sittingbourne. The test identified the actions that would need to be taken in this setting in response to an outbreak and clarified the role of environmental health officers in said response. Issues addressed included isolation, management of products handled by a positive case, communicating guidelines to staff members and customers and considering when to close facilities.

#### ***Scenario 5 – College Stress Test***

- 2.2.4. This test was run in collaboration with a further education college with campuses in both Kent and Medway. This test aimed to identify the actions that would need to be taken to curb an outbreak in this setting as well as when and how outbreak response would have to be escalated to the point of campus closure. Issues addressed included adapting teaching methods, considering when to convene an outbreak control team, communicating guidelines and updates to staff members and pupils and contact tracing pupils who lived off-campus.

#### ***Scenario 6 – Domiciliary Care Stress Test***

- 2.2.5. This stress test was run in collaboration with a local domiciliary care provider; their staff are trained to provide support to the vulnerable within their own homes. This test aimed to identify the actions that would need to be taken to respond if a domiciliary care user fell sick with COVID-19. Issues addressed included who would classify as a close contact, how to respond to a possible breach in PPE usage, how to communicate service updates with other care users without causing undue alarm, when to call an Outbreak Control Team and how to replenish staffing numbers to ensure service users receive continuity of care.

#### ***Scenario 7 – EU Exit Manson Site Stress Test***

- 2.2.6. In preparation for the UK's exit from the EU, Operation Fennel raised several issues relating to COVID-19 that will need to be addressed on an ongoing basis. This includes (i) access to Pillar 2 testing sites due to traffic congestion, specifically regional sites at Manston and in North Kent, local testing site in Canterbury and any mobile testing sites and (ii) outbreaks occurring at lorry holding sites (Manston, Sevington and Waterbank). This scenario focused on how the Manston management team would respond when a driver presents as symptomatic for COVID-19 while on-site. Issues raised included where to accommodate drivers when required to self-isolate, how to track contacts effectively, how to replenish staff numbers and how to manage communications regarding to the range of stakeholders involved without raising undue alarm or prematurely shutting operations. This stress test included stakeholders from Stone Hill, South East Coast Ambulance Service (SEACamb), the Department for Transport (DfT), HM Revenue and

Customs, the Border and Protocol Delivery Group of the Cabinet Office, Thanet District Council, Kent County Council, the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF), Operation Fennel, the NHS Kent and Medway CCG, Public Health England (PHE), NHS England and NHS Improvement South East.

- 2.2.7. The board should note the benefit of undertaking these tests were released following the introduction on enhanced surveillance in Europe associated with border controls to manage the transmission of the new variant found in the UK to Europe.

### 3. Risk Management

- 3.1. By running stress test exercises on a variety of scenarios related to the LOCP, as outlined in section 2.2 of the report, we aim to minimise the risks associated with similar events occurring by (i) identifying any gaps within the LOCP, (ii) creating awareness of the communication channels that exist between the agencies, (iii) creating awareness of the roles of different agencies, (iv) clarifying the escalation triggers and process, (v) identifying areas where additional support may be required, (vi) identifying any potential challenges and their solutions and (vii) identifying actions that need to be taken and when.

### 4. Consultation

- 4.1. Stress Testing the LOCP as described in section 2.2 of the report, has and continues to be undertaken in consultation with partner agencies across Kent and Medway as well as stakeholders from other local authority areas where relevant. Stakeholders from national agencies are also invited where relevant.

### 5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. Initial funding was provided through the Test, Track & Trace Support Grant using 2020/21 Public Health allocations as a basis for distribution. Additional funding of £8 per head of population for those Local Authorities in the highest tier of national restrictions was in place up to 2 December 2020. Since when the funding has been £4 per head of population per 28 days for those Upper Tier authorities in the highest tier of restrictions. To date Medway Council has received £4.936 million of funding through these arrangements.

### 6. Legal Implications

- 6.1. Medway Council, under the leadership of the Directors of Public Health, has a statutory duty to protect the population's health by responding to and managing communicable disease outbreaks which requires urgent investigation and presents a public health risk.
- 6.2. The legal context for the councils' response to COVID-19 sits within the following Acts:

- The Coronavirus Act 2020
- Health and Social Care Act 2012
- Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984

- 6.3. As part of the Department of Health and Social Care's COVID-19 response and recovery strategy, Upper Tier and Unitary Local Authorities in England were mandated to develop a COVID-19 Local Outbreak Control Plan to reduce the viruses' spread.
- 6.4. The Coronavirus Act 2020, Health Protection (Coronavirus Restriction) (England) (No.3) Regulations 2020 gave the DPH the authority to close individual premises and public outdoor places as well as restrict events with immediate effect if they concluded it was necessary and proportionate to do so without making representations to a magistrate. The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No.4) Regulations which came into force on 5 November 2020, provide further restrictions including the closure of specified businesses.

## 7. Recommendation

- 7.1. The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to note the update presented in the report.

## Lead Officer Contact

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## Appendices

None

## Background papers

None