



ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

29th July 2021

REPORT TITLE:	COVID-19 RESPONSE UPDATE
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides the Committee with an update on surveillance data and key areas of development in relation to Wirral's COVID-19 response and delivery of the Local Outbreak Management Plan.

This matter affects all wards within the Borough; it is not a key decision.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee are recommended to note the contents of the report, the progress made to date and to support the ongoing COVID-19 response.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 This report gives an overview of how Wirral Council will work to Keep Wirral Well and protect residents from the impact of COVID-19.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The Local Outbreak Management Plan and associated strategic priorities highlighted within this report have been developed to prevent and control COVID-19 in Wirral. Although no other viable options have been considered at this time, it is regularly reviewed to ensure the most appropriate response is in place.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 On 22 May 2020, the government asked all Councils to develop local COVID-19 Outbreak Plans. Wirral published its initial Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan in June 2020, setting out how Wirral Council will:

- prevent transmission of COVID-19 within the community
- ensure we have an effective and coordinated local approach to managing COVID-19 outbreaks across different settings within the Borough
- ensure vulnerable people are protected
- link with national and regional systems to ensure we get maximum benefit for the population of Wirral.

- 3.2 In April 2021, Wirral Council published an update to this Plan highlighting progress that has been made to date, along with a dynamic strategy for how the Council and local partners will continue to protect our communities from the impacts of COVID-19 as well as the wider effects on the health, wellbeing and livelihoods of Wirral residents. The updated plan can be found on the Wirral Council website: [Wirral Local Outbreak Management Plan - April 2021](#)

- 3.3 Daily and weekly surveillance is undertaken to understand the local COVID-19 picture – up to date information on COVID-19 in Wirral is available here: [COVID-19 statistics for Wirral | www.wirral.gov.uk](#)

- 3.4 Details of Current National Guidance in respect of COVID-19 is available here: [\(COVID-19\) Coronavirus restrictions: What You Can And Cannot Do](#)

3.5 Wirral Response to COVID-19

The update to the Council's Local Outbreak Management Plan has focused on a revised set of priorities, acknowledging the significant developments across the COVID-19 response system. A summary of key progress against these priority actions outlined within the Local Outbreak Management Plan is provided in the table below;

Priority	Progress to Date and Future Plans
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<p>1) Effective Surveillance</p> <p><i>Ensure access to timely local data and intelligence to inform local activity to prevent and manage outbreaks.</i></p>	<p>We have an established local surveillance system to capture timely local outbreak data and provide support to a variety of settings through Wirral's COVID-19 Hub. The Microsoft Dynamics case management platform has led to improvements in the collection and reporting of data captured from local settings, as well as proactive identification of exposures and sources of potential outbreaks. The utilisation of this system has enabled closer collaborative working with the Cheshire and Merseyside Hub and the regional Public Health network.</p> <p>Daily and weekly multi-agency surveillance meetings are held at local and regional levels to understand the epidemiology of current situations and to appropriately direct prevention and control measures, community engagement activity and target communications. Locally, daily surveillance has been improved by the introduction of regular OIRR (Outbreak Identification and Rapid Response) meetings to closely monitor and review current case rates, common exposures, and postcode coincidence data. These meetings are an opportunity to undertake screening and prioritisation, to interrogate data and to carry out a combined risk assessment resulting in direct actions for teams across the Hub.</p> <p>We have continued to support the development of the CIPHA (Combined Intelligence for Population Health Action) integrated data and analyst network resource for Cheshire & Merseyside, sustaining a regional understanding of the epidemic and demands on health and social care systems.</p>
<p>2) Engagement and Communication</p> <p><i>Build trust and participation through effective community engagement and communication.</i></p>	<p>With the easing of restrictions nationally on 19th July - Stage 4 of the roadmap - Wirral has continued to work closely across the City Region to develop a consistent approach. The Merseyside Resilience Forum has set out six priorities for Communications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage uptake of vaccinations (double dose) – reinforcing the vaccine as a wall of defence • Enable our residents to make informed decisions – deliver the facts, nudge behaviour • Encourage continuation of twice weekly testing – to control the spread and stop individual cases from becoming outbreaks • Continue to clarify when, how etc to self-isolate – Push on the support available (Incl. tracing) • Retain, revisit and refresh contingency plans

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to monitor and review data – making informed decisions to flex, adapt and retarget comms messaging <p>We continue to ensure a strong focus on engagement and communication as part of our COVID-19 response, with a clear strategic and insight-driven approach. Colleagues across intelligence, engagement and communications meet fortnightly to plan and review activity, examining data, setting parameters for engagement and feeding back insight to inform local and targeted communications messaging. These meetings are attended by both Council and Wirral CCG representatives to ensure a whole system approach.</p> <p>A comprehensive vaccine communications plan has been developed, focusing on four target groups – younger cohorts, those less engaged or living in deprived communities, younger males aged 24 – 45 and second dose uptake. Engagement activity has also focused on vaccine hesitancy and behaviours around those aged 16-29 – links with the Humanitarian Cell group have been maximised, in order to gain insight from key stakeholders and partners.</p> <p>The vaccination programme is also being promoted across Wirral’s corporate social media channels to target younger people using popular themes such as Friends and Love Island. This campaign is focused on communicating the importance of second doses for full protection. Vaccine walk-through videos and updated mobile testing schedules continue to be promoted as part of the COVID-19 communications plan.</p> <p>Wirral’s Community Champions network has now enlisted over 650 local people, with the programme also currently being evaluated by Hitch Marketing as part of the Local Government Association (LGA) behavioural science programme. The Engagement HQ platform continues to be developed to improve the two-way flow of information between the Council and the Champions. More information on the Community Champion Programme can be found here: Keep Wirral Well during COVID-19 www.wirral.gov.uk</p> <p>Hi-Impact have produced a series media videos focused around the organisational sector and the impact of COVID-19 on local businesses and tell the story of several companies across the Borough and how the Council has supported them to navigate the pandemic.</p>
3) Higher-Risk Settings,	<p>The COVID-19 Hub continues to work closely with local partners to prevent and manage outbreaks in high-risk</p>

<p>Communities and Locations <i>Identify and support high risk workplaces, locations and communities to prevent and manage outbreaks.</i></p>	<p>settings with a robust daily review process and use of local intelligence to proactively target settings at higher risk of outbreaks.</p> <p>There is a coordinated health and social care response; overseeing capacity, trends, resources, and updated guidance, leading the partnership across the system including voluntary sector, to respond to emerging pressures and system needs. We will build on learning to date and work in partnership to ensure our Health and Care system is able to deliver high quality COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 care for Winter 2021, including surge capacity to respond to further surges in COVID-19, the emergence of new COVID-19 variants, and a potential surge in other respiratory viruses.</p> <p>The COVID-19 Hub School Support Team continues to liaise with Children's Services to successfully provide dedicated educational support and guidance on national policies and implementation of required measures. Links with local third sector, voluntary and other organisations and groups are now well established to respond proactively to the needs of local communities particularly at risk of COVID-19.</p> <p>The Hub's engagement team meet regularly with stakeholders from across the Borough, attending Council meetings as well as partner forums such as the Youth Collective Forum and Digital Enablement and Choice Group to gain insight and promote key messages. Regular meetings are held with representatives from across the local business sector, including the Wirral Chamber of Commerce, to support COVID safe organisational settings. We have revised and updated the Council's Business Toolkit and frequently monitor it to ensure employers and employees understand their responsibilities and are supported to maintain safe environments. A further review is currently taking place to update the toolkit, taking into consideration the new government guidance released 15th July for Stage 4 of the roadmap.</p>
<p>4) Supporting vulnerable and underserved communities <i>Proactively support individuals and communities, ensuring services</i></p>	<p>We have maintained excellent community links with over 100 local community groups and organisations through the Humanitarian partnership and regular meetings, working together to support local communities and have ensured targeted communications in areas of high incidence, to over 35,000 properties, highlighting current guidance and support available as well as maintaining regular contact with our clinically extremely vulnerable residents.</p> <p>We have worked with the local multicultural third sector to support access to regular symptom free testing and have</p>

<p><i>across test, trace, isolate and support systems are accessible and meet the diverse needs of our local communities.</i></p>	<p>also developed our consequence management process for outbreaks to include support from Wirral Change where required.</p> <p>The national Community Testing Programme, delivered by Local Authorities, has mandated a shift in focus from universal testing to targeted offer for local under-represented groups and disproportionately impacted groups. The Council's Testing Service are currently liaising with local organisations to establish those pathways.</p>
<p>5) Vaccination <i>Support the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine programme, identifying and tackling inequalities in vaccine coverage.</i></p>	<p>Wirral Council, in partnership with Wirral CCG and Primary Care Networks, continue to ensure an effective delivery model to support the roll out of the COVID-19 vaccination programme in Wirral. Our first COVID-19 vaccination was administered in Wirral on 8th December 2020, and since then considerable progress has been made with the local roll-out. As of 15th July 2021, 83% of the eligible population of Wirral had received the 1st dose of the vaccine, with 68% having received both doses.</p> <p>'Pop-up' vaccination sites have been identified and deployed in the community in areas where vaccine uptake has been lower. Walk in appointments were made available to all adults from 19th June 2021 at Local Vaccination Sites and a schedule of fixed and mobile vaccine provision continues to be rolled out, again targeting those communities with lower uptake. This includes use of the regional 'vaccination bus' which was deployed on 12th July 2021, providing residents with an alternative and convenient way to access the vaccine, without the need to make an appointment. A follow up approach, for cohorts 1-10 is also currently under development alongside ongoing engagement with the care sector to optimise uptake amongst staff. From the initial vaccine rollout, we have locally prioritised vulnerable people for the COVID-19 vaccine and will continue to use local data and intelligence, including a local programme of engagement based on insight, to identify any areas of low uptake within local communities and address any issues through a comprehensive programme of engagement and information.</p> <p>Citizen's Advice Bureau's social prescribing team has carried out targeted work with a small number of clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) patients (housebound and/or severely frail) registered as declining their vaccine offer. Using a general wellbeing call the team contacted individuals to understand their COVID-19 vaccine experience and offer a person-centred intervention to tackle</p>

	vaccine hesitancy. This approach has led to residents taking up their vaccination offer.
6) Testing <i>Identify cases of COVID-19 by ensuring access to testing for those with and without symptoms and for outbreak management.</i>	<p>Wirral's Testing Strategy was revised in February 2021, aligning to the national plans for Community Testing, maintaining accessible testing for people with symptoms, complemented by mobile testing units and outreach testing and distribution.</p> <p>In June 2021, national Community Testing Strategy was reviewed, and Local Authorities received confirmation of the programme extension until 30th September 2021. From July 2021, Councils are asked to focus our symptom-free testing offer for under-represented groups and disproportionately impacted groups, and therefore Wirral's Testing Team are working closely with local organisations to develop clear pathways and ensure symptom free testing is easily accessible, encouraging uptake amongst those target groups.</p> <p>We have continued to promote testing within local settings and workplaces, offered alongside training and quality assurance processes. This rapid and reactive testing approach for workplaces is a key aspect of our outbreak management process, with mobile testing units deployed quickly in response to reported cases in workplaces and settings.</p> <p>Throughout June and July the Council's Testing Service has worked closely with Children's Services and Education Teams, to support those secondary schools with identified need to resume on-site symptom-free testing amongst pupils. This support will remain in place at several secondaries in Wirral until the end of the academic year. We are currently working through DfE (Department for Education) and DHSC (Department of Health and Social Care) guidance regarding Testing requirements for the start of the new academic year in September 2021, to provide support and advice where possible to our local secondary schools and higher education providers.</p> <p>We continue to review our local strategy as national policy changes and testing capacity and capabilities continue to emerge – ensuring that we retain our ability to respond and mobilise surge mass testing as required, for example due to a Variant of Concern, and align to enhanced contact tracing.</p> <p>We will review the outcomes and learn from national pilots related to 'test to release' (daily testing to reduce self-isolation period) and 'test to enable' (e.g., to attend events) approaches.</p>

<p>7) Contact Tracing</p> <p><i>Effectively deploy local contact tracing to reduce the onward transmission of COVID-19.</i></p>	<p>Wirral employs a local contact tracing service within the COVID-19 Hub, with a skilled and fully trained dedicated team in place. Wirral has been participating in both the 'Local 0' and 'Local-Contacts' programmes, with all local cases and contacts channelled through the CTAS (Contact Tracing and Advisory Service) system to the local team for contact tracing and welfare support.</p> <p>As of July 2021, and as per national policy, local cases have been temporarily redirected to the national team in response to the rapid upturn in case numbers, enabling Wirral's local contact tracing team to prioritise our focus on managing outbreaks, clusters, and cases in high-risk locations, to continue to offer targeted local support to the most vulnerable.</p> <p>We have worked collaboratively with the Cheshire and Merseyside Hub, Public Health England and the Department of Health and Social Care Local Tracing Partnership forums, to influence and strengthen the local contact tracing system, enabling us to reach people who the national system has been unable to contact and to prioritise and respond to high-risk complex cases and settings.</p> <p>We have continued to support health and social care, schools, local businesses, and other settings through intelligence led contact tracing and where a focused outbreak response is appropriate. Wirral's COVID-19 Hub has also commenced formal support of local NHS Trusts, helping where contacts of positive inpatients or recent discharged residents are identified.</p> <p>Once the local contact tracing of all local contacts and cases resumes, we will look to gain a better understanding of reasons for failure to engage and utilise this insight to shape communications and support, as well as developing adaptable systems and suitable delivery models for focused contact tracing for areas with high transmission, exploring contact tracing via home visits in specific circumstances.</p>
<p>8) Support for Self-Isolation</p> <p><i>Ensure access to support, including where appropriate financial support, to ensure people</i></p>	<p>We have information available on the Council website and in leaflets distributed by Community Connectors, on self-isolation for a range of target audience cohorts. This includes advice and guidance on accessing the self-isolation payment scheme, wider welfare support and non-financial support available, as well as working with Wirral Chamber and local businesses to support awareness of employer responsibilities in supporting staff to self-isolate when required.</p>

<p><i>who need to self-isolate can do so.</i></p>	<p>Self-isolation support is aligned to local contact tracing, with support needs identified during the customer journey and referrals for practical support managed by a commissioned team of Community Connectors. Between 19th April 2021 and 11th July 2021, Community Connectors have provided direct practical support and advice around self-isolation to around 100 individuals and families in Wirral – with referral numbers rapidly increasing in recent weeks in line with the surge in case numbers. Where close contacts were previously proactively contacted, the same process has continued through the Local-Contacts programme. Wirral continue to process applications for both discretionary and eligibility Test & Trace payments, with guidance and help with application completed via the dedicated COVID-19 helpline. We have seen an increase in applications for financial support, as the surge in local cases and contacts having to self-isolate and continue to manage the Test and Trace payment scheme, which was extended recently until 30th September 2021.</p> <p>We will continue to engage with local communities, to further our understanding of the breadth and extent of the barriers for self-isolation across our population, using this insight to identify any gaps in our local response, both in terms of the financial support available, including the discretionary fund, as well as the non-financial practical and other areas of support.</p>
<p>9) Responding to Variants of Concern (VOC) <i>Develop robust plans and working with local, regional and national partners to enable surge capacity, to respond to local outbreaks and VOC.</i></p>	<p>In February 2021, Wirral responded locally to the identification of a Variant of Interest across the Northwest, working with national and local partners to undertake enhanced contact tracing, access to additional symptomatic testing capacity and effective public communications.</p> <p>Throughout June 2021, the Delta variant (VOC) rapidly spread across the Northwest region and because of the surge in cases, Wirral as part of the Liverpool City Region, was identified as an area of Enhanced Response Support. Wirral contributed to the proposed support package request, with a focus on driving uptake of the vaccine.</p> <p>Wirral has developed local plans outlining how we would enable surge responses related to testing and enhanced contact tracing within a specific geographical area or targeted at specific common exposures for a select time. Currently, transmission is borough wide however we continue to review the surveillance daily.</p> <p>Local outbreak and consequence management processes continue to reflect the increased transmissibility of the current dominant variant by triggering immediate outbreak control meetings with input from Public Health England,</p>

	<p>Testing and Communications to put actions into place as quickly as possible to control and manage the virus.</p> <p>A key part of our response to VOCs (Variants of Concern) is effective communication and community engagement to ensure local communities understand the purpose of the VOC response, and what people need to do to contain the spread of the virus. We will also continue to work closely with Public Health England, the Department of Health and Social Care and Northwest Local Authority colleagues to ensure we have agreed local processes in place for managing outbreaks linked to a VOC.</p>
<p>10) Compliance, Enforcement and Living with COVID-19 (COVID secure) Work <i>collaboratively to guide, inform and support local compliance with regulations and restrictions, support local enforcement where necessary, and plan for gradual re-opening of wider society.</i></p>	<p>We have an established system in place to ensure effective partnership working and communication between the COVID-19 Hub and local Environmental Health and Enforcement teams, to manage compliance and enforcement across Wirral.</p> <p>We have monitored the operations and compliance of local businesses including responding to reports of non-compliance, conducting over 1,500 visits to local businesses, across hospitality, close contact services, supermarkets, retail, and other premises. In June 2021, the COVID-19 Hub's Prevention and Control officers also commenced setting visits, proactively attending close contact services to provide support and advice.</p> <p>We continue to contribute to the strategic design and planning for local recovery, particularly following the relaxation of restrictions on 19th July 2021, to ensure alignment with testing and vaccination programmes, and local plans to manage summer events, providing clear and consistent advice and guidance, and a strong community engagement approach.</p> <p>Wirral's Event Safety Advisory Group continues working closely alongside the Public Health team to take a pragmatic approach to safely managing events in Wirral over the coming months. Guidance from the Public Health team is being used alongside the national guidance, as part of the approach to considering applications for events, with resident safety the utmost priority. Wirral also continues to work across the wider Merseyside Resilience Forum to try and ensure that there is a consistency of approach for all event applications across that geographical landscape.</p>
<p>11) Governance, accountability, and resourcing <i>Establish robust governance structures for</i></p>	<p>We have adapted the robust emergency response governance system established in March 2020, revising the local COVID-19 governance structure recently to continue to hold organisations to account, taking decisions and agreeing necessary actions to manage and respond effectively to COVID-19.</p>

<i>decision making with clear accountability and effective resource use.</i>	<p>We will continue to manage and respond effectively to COVID-19 by strengthening existing partnerships at strategic and operational levels across local, regional, and national stakeholders.</p> <p>The Wirral COVID-19 Hub will be retained until September 2022, with extension of current temporary contracts to build resilience in our experienced and established local teams. In the wake of increasing case numbers, further recruitment is currently underway to strengthen teams across the COVID-19 Hub.</p>
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4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The delivery of the Outbreak Control Plan is funded via national grant funding with the prime funding source supporting the plan has been the Contain Outbreak Management Fund. For the period of June 2020 to March 2022, Wirral has been allocated a total of £14,784,032 - £6,817,546 of which was received after the start of March 2021. Scrutiny of the funding takes place at the COVID-19 Outbreak Strategic Control Cell.

Outbreak Management support area	Planned spend to 30 Sept 2022
Hub operations	£3,331,538
Community Engagement	£1,923,081
Infection Prevention Control service	£784,459
C&M- Regional Test and Trace Hub	£446,892
Supporting Educational Settings	£500,000
Communications	£485,515
Intelligence	£157,868
Additional COMF budget for COVID-19 public health activities during 2021/22: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renewal Programme • COVID-19 Hub Resources – Contact tracing, support to self-isolate, Prevention and control, business support. • Specialist health protection support • Public Health intelligence & surveillance • Testing and surge contingency • Increasing vaccination uptake • Environmental health and licensing • Communications • Community engagement and inequalities • COVID-19 Helpline • Digital / IT system development 	£7,154,680
Total	£14,784,033

- 4.2 In addition to COMF, Wirral receives funding for Community Testing. Testing was initially agreed as part of the approved Liverpool City Region Business case in December 2020, covering costs up to 11th April 2021. The national Community Testing programme was then funded from 12th April until 30th June 2021, with a focus on outreach testing. In June 2021, the national programme was extended until 30th September 2021, with the Council being reimbursed by DHSC for incurred costs, capped depending on the agreed delivery model. We anticipate an update in August/September 2021 for Local Authorities regarding any extension of the Community Testing programme.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.
- 5.2 A duty for the management of communicable diseases that present a risk to the health of the public requiring urgent investigation and management by the Council, in conjunction with Public Health England, sit with:
1. The Director of Public Health under the National Health Service Act 2006; and
 2. The Chief Environmental Health Officer under the Public Health (Control of Diseases) Act 1984
- 5.3 The Director of Public Health has primary responsibility for the health of the local community. This includes being assured that the arrangements to protect the health of the communities that they serve are robust and are implemented through developing and deploying local outbreak management plans. Each authority must make available the necessary resources to investigate and control any outbreak at the request of the Outbreak Control Team. The Council's Local Outbreak Management Plan has been developed in accordance with the Authority's statutory duties and Public Health England guidance.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 This report is for information to Members and as a result there are no resource implications.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 It should be noted that data relating to case rates, hospitalisation and operational management of the COVID-19 response is frequently changing and as a result, some of the information contained within this report is likely to be outdated by the time of publication.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 No direct public consultation or engagement has been undertaken in relation to this report. However, community engagement is a key priority in ensuring an effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity. Equality considerations were a key component of the actions noted in 3.5 of this report, however there are no further direct equality implications arising.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no direct environment and climate implications arising from this report.

REPORT AUTHOR: **Julie Webster**
Director of Public Health
Wirral Council
juliewebster@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Wirral Local Outbreak Management Plan 2021

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee	13th October 2020
Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee	19th November 2020
Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee	18th January 2021
Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee	2nd March 2021
Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee	7th June 2021