

8th July 2022

REPORT TITLE:	FUTURE HEALTH PROTECTION SERVICE
REPORT OF:	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: CONSULTANT IN PUBLIC HEALTH

REPORT SUMMARY

Wirral's existing Local Outbreak Hub is funded until 30th September 2022, by the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF).

This report seeks approval for the COMF grant to continue to fund the newly revised Health Protection Delivery Service for six months, from October 2022 until March 2023, when this funding stream will conclude, to ensure local resilience and continuity. The service will be evaluated throughout this period, to inform future plans.

The continuation of the local Health Protection Service will contribute to the Wirral Plan Aims, in particular 'Active and Healthy Lives', supporting Wirral residents and communities to live safely with COVID-19 and protect the health of communities from infectious diseases and environmental hazards.

This decision affects all wards and is therefore a key decision.

RECOMMENDATION

The Director of Public Health is recommended to approve the funding of Wirral's Health Protection Delivery Service from October 2022 to March 2023 through the Contain Outbreak Management Fund in the sum of £342,600.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

1.1 This report provides an overview of the review, re-shape and transition of the existing Local Outbreak Hub to a Health Protection Delivery Service by September 2022, supporting and building upon Living Safely and Fairly with Covid-19 and wider Public Health priorities.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Other options have been considered, including the extension of the existing service at the same scale, or the removal entirely of a local health protection delivery service. The preferred option is based upon key learning from the pandemic response. The proposal recommended is financially viable and can best respond to local needs and deliver locally agreed health protection priorities, agreed by the Wirral Health Protection Board. The preferred option will ensure we have ongoing capacity and resilience to enable us to live with COVID-19, continue to work with partners to Keep Wirral Well and protect residents from the impact of COVID-19 and other health protection threats. This service will support a key priority of the Wirral Plan, through a local health protection delivery service supporting people to live fairly and safely with COVID-19.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 Local Outbreak Hub

- 3.1.1 In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a Local Outbreak Hub was established in Summer 2020; a new workforce and structure was developed and implemented at speed during the emergency response phase of the pandemic to help locally manage Covid-19 and protect local communities.
- 3.1.2 The Hub structure has developed and flexed over the course of the last two years to meet changing local needs, operate within the national policy context and deliver Wirral's Local Outbreak Management Plan. The main hub functions included Contact Tracing, Prevention and Control, Business Support and Engagement. Staff are employed on fixed term contracts, most recently extended to 30th September 2022.
- 3.1.3 The team works with key council services including Adult Social Care, Environmental Health, Housing, Licensing, Neighbourhood Services and Trading Standards as well as local businesses and education settings and across the health system with Wirral NHS Community Trust's and Wirral University Hospital Trusts Infection and Prevention Control teams.
- 3.1.4 The Hub has operated as the key point of contact for managing outbreak situations in partnership with the sub-regional Cheshire and Merseyside Hub team, the UK Health Security Agency and the Health and Safety Executive. The Hub managed the local contact tracing system, leading on follow up of cases and close contacts identified by NHS Test and Trace but, who the national system had been unable to reach. As well as the day-to-day operations to tackle outbreaks, the Hub has worked with partners across Wirral to engage with communities and residents, preventing the spread of COVID-19, and promoting vaccine uptake to ensure that the most vulnerable are supported.

3.2 Learning to Live Safely and Fairly with COVID-19

- 3.2.1 UK Government policy changed from 24th February 2022, whereby much of the pandemic response to control the virus was removed. Contact tracing of cases ceased and the legal need to self-isolate was removed. Universal free community testing ceased from 31st March 2022.

3.2.2 Public Health teams have been encouraged to learn from the pandemic response, considering local requirements and health protection capabilities. Wirral's proposed Health Protection Service will ensure a continued sustainable local approach to living with COVID-19 can be delivered, ensuring future resilience through maintaining capacity that is flexible and adaptable to local needs as required. This will ensure we have sufficient, dedicated local resources and an ability to manage increased demand, for example, as new waves of the pandemic emerge and at key points in the calendar e.g. winter.

3.2.3 The proposed Health Protection Delivery Service will not duplicate effort but will work collaboratively with internal and external specialist services and partners. The Health Protection Delivery Service will work closely with Council services including Adult Social Care, Environmental Health, Trading Standards, Housing, Licensing, Health and Safety, and Neighbourhoods services, in the delivery of a preventative and responsive work programme. The Service will build on existing working relationships developed during the pandemic, including with external agencies such as the UK Health Security Agency and Infection Prevention and Control services.

3.2.4 To deliver the required outcomes, changes are proposed to the existing staffing structure and roles within the Local Outbreak Hub to form the new Health Protection Service. A summary of the roles within the Health Protection Service are included in Appendix 1, which will provide:

- Health Protection functions in a proactive and flexible approach to support, advise and guide Wirral settings and protect the health of Wirral communities.
- A key interface for partners and stakeholders in developing and delivering health protection priorities.
- A flexible and adaptable service with the ability to flex to changing requirements.

3.2.5 It is important to emphasise that we are still in the COVID-19 pandemic and are likely to experience further waves of infection. At the time of writing this report we are experiencing a further wave, with a national upturn in COVID-19 transmission. Office for National Statistics (ONS) surveillance data shows to the week ending 1st July there was an increase in the percentage of people testing positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland likely caused by infections compatible with Omicron variants BA.4 and BA.5. In England, the estimated number of people testing positive for COVID-19 was 1,829,100 equating to 3.35% of the population or around 1 in 30 people. This increase in community transmission is also starting to translate to an increase in care home and community outbreaks, and an increase in COVID-19 patients admitted to hospital.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Survey, UK Statistical bulletins can be found here: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/coronaviruscovid19infectionsurveypilot/previousReleases>

The official UK government website for data and insights on coronavirus (COVID-19) can be found here: <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/> . This includes data on people testing positive for COVID-19, vaccination uptake, people admitted to hospital and deaths.

3.3 Health Protection Service Model

3.3.1 The objectives of Wirral's Health Protection Service are to:

- **Respond to outbreaks** and focus on preserving life and safeguarding the vulnerable.
- **Lead the prevention** programme as well as the control and management of communicable diseases – providing advice, support and guidance to communities and settings to Keep Wirral Well.
- **Promote protective behaviours in communities and settings**, across a broad range of Public Health priorities, initiatives, and projects.
- **Protect health and improve outcomes** by supporting delivery of effective action across wider Wirral Health protection priorities e.g. strengthening preparedness and emergency planning and protecting Wirral communities from environmental hazards.
- **Act as a single point of contact** for organisations, communities and businesses in relation to health protection issues and concerns.
- **Work within agreed operating protocols** with clear roles and responsibilities, regularly reviewed in the context of changing local, national and regional arrangements.

3.3.2 As we move into the next phase of the pandemic and out of emergency response phase the Outbreak Control Cell has stood down and we have re-established the Wirral Health Protection Board. The multi-agency Health Protection Board is responsible for the oversight of health protection arrangements in Wirral and providing assurance to the Health and Wellbeing Board that there are safe, effective, integrated arrangements and plans in place across the borough to protect the health of the population and reduce health inequalities.

3.3.3 The multi-agency Wirral Health Protection board has a number of agreed priorities which will inform the workplan of the Health Protection Service. Guided by these priorities the emerging workplan for the service will include:

- To support a range of settings to reduce the risk of, and to manage, COVID-19 outbreaks as part of usual practice, now including COVID-19 alongside other respiratory illnesses.
- Deliver local activity to increase vaccination uptake (COVID-19, Flu and wider immunisation programmes); e.g., Vaccine tracing calls to encourage uptake of the COVID-19 vaccination.
- Support the delivery of the Wirral antimicrobial resistance (AMR) strategy and reduce the usage of antibiotics within the Borough, e.g., through work to promote hydration and prevent urinary tract infections among vulnerable local residents.
- Support local work to strengthen preparedness and emergency planning, e.g., through activity to support delivery of local heatwave activities and winter preparedness. The service also provides capacity to support local future emergency responses.
- Protecting Wirral communities from environmental hazards e.g., food poisoning, air quality, contaminated land, and the climate change agenda.

3.3.4 The continued funding of the local Health Protection Service will contribute to the Wirral Plan Aims, in particular 'Active and Healthy Lives', supporting Wirral residents and communities to live safely with COVID-19 and protect the health of communities from infectious diseases and environmental hazards.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Health Protection Delivery Service will be funded for six months, from October 2022 to March 2023, utilising identified ring-fenced funding as outlined in the table below. Current national guidance outlines that Covid Outbreak Management Fund must be utilised during 2022-23 and cannot be carried forward. Funding for the financial year 2023-2024 will be sought from the Public Health Grant.

Period	Grant Funding	Total
October 22 to March 23	Contain Outbreak Management Fund	£342,600

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 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, sits 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

5.2 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.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 Costs relating to this decision are set out in Section 4 of this report, and ring-fenced grant funding has been identified. There are no additional resource requirements identified at this time in relation to this decision.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 The key risk of not securing an ongoing health protection service is that we will not have the local capacity or resilience to support the management of future COVID-19 waves and over the winter period. This will have significant impacts upon both internal business continuity and also impact upon external partners and would increase the risk of poor outcomes and harm for local residents.

- 7.2 This report seeks approval for funding until March 2023, to ensure local resilience and continuity. The service will be evaluated throughout this period, to inform future planning.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The Council has and continues to engage with a range of partners and communities to understand local needs and gather insight in relation to local health protection requirements. The existing workforce is currently under formal consultation in regard to the new proposed service, as existing fixed term contracts are due to conclude in September 2022. The decision has been approved by the COMF working group.

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 are key components of a local health protection service. There are no further direct equality implications arising as a result of this report. An Equality Impact Assessment for the Health Protection Delivery Service can be located at <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments> .

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The proposed Wirral Health protection service provides local capacity to support local delivery of the Cool Wirral strategy and support Wirral Council to meet its climate target of being net carbon neutral by 2030.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The response to the Covid-19 pandemic clearly demonstrates the importance of joined up approaches to strategy development and decision-making across the system and communities. During the pandemic, we saw the brilliance and dedication of the health and care workforce enhanced by the strengthening of existing, and development of new, partnerships.
- 11.2 The case for Community Wealth Building is stronger than ever, with the pandemic

having a clear and significant impact on our residents, communities, and businesses. It is vital that everything we do at the Council contributes to the recovery and the development of a resilient and inclusive economy for Wirral.

- 11.3 Community Wealth Building in Wirral focuses on partnerships and collaboration, both within the Council and with external partners and stakeholders, including residents. The Council will work together with partners and residents to develop the place-based partnership arrangements in Wirral that meet the needs of the population, with a focus on reducing health inequalities.

REPORT AUTHOR: **Dr. Elspeth Anwar**
Consultant in Public Health
Email: elspethanwar@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Health Protection Delivery Service Roles

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Wirral Local Outbreak Management Plan (Revised August 2021) COVID-19 Response: Living with COVID-19: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-living-with-covid-19>

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
Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee	29th July 2021
Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee	23rd September 2021
Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee	13th October 2021
Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee	16th November 2021
Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee	25th January 2022
Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee	3rd March 2022
Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee	14th June 2022