

HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD 7 December 2023

REPORT TITLE:	CONTAIN OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT FUND GRANT CLOSURE REPORT
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

REPORT SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary to Health and Wellbeing Board on Wirral's use of the Contain Outbreak Management Fund, following the decision by Policy and Resources Committee in June 2023, as the time limited, one-off funding has concluded. The Contain Outbreak Management Fund contributed to the ambitions of the Wirral Plan.

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

RECOMMENDATION

The Health and Wellbeing Board is recommended to note the contents of the report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

1.1 This report provides an update on the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) and outlines how this grant funding was utilised locally to keep Wirral residents safe from Covid-19 and deliver projects to support residents with the wider impacts of the pandemic.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

2.1 The decision to report to the Health and Wellbeing Board regarding the COMF grant was taken by Policy and Resources Committee, and therefore no other options have been considered.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 **Background**

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the most challenging emergency the Borough of Wirral, and the Council has responded to in recent times. The nature of the pandemic saw the Council react at speed to implement government policy and local priorities to limit the spread of the virus, protect the health of all our residents and ensure the most vulnerable in our communities are safe and cared for.

3.2 Wirral's COMF Allocations

Wirral received a total of £14,784,031 COMF, starting with the initial allocation in mid-2020. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of Wirral's COMF allocations received, from the initial payment in June 2020, to the final allocation in May 2021. On an annual basis, local authorities were informed of decisions to extend the time period for full COMF utilisation. In 2022, we were informed that the end date for COMF expenditure was March 2023.

3.3 COMF allocations were sporadic, and there was very little certainty around levels of funding and time constraints for use. This feedback has been shared with national bodies, both during the height of the pandemic, and in the recovery phase to help inform future planning.

Figure 1: Wirral Contain Outbreak Management Fund allocations (June 2020- May 2021)

Allocation	Month Received/Confirmed	Total
1	Jun-20	£2,733,018
2	Nov-20	£2,701,000
3	Nov-20	£866,126
4	Dec-20	£1,018,320
5	Jan-21	£648,022
6	Mar-21	£1,134,039
7	Mar-21	£1,434,906
8	Mar-21	£1,666,343

9	May 2021	£2,582,257
		£14,784,031

3.4 Governance and Grant Criteria

The UK Health Security Agency provided funding criteria to local authorities on the required use of COMF. Directors of Public Health were responsible to sign off expenditure via national grant returns, and local authorities were instructed to utilise COMF in line with their judgement, on areas that would deliver the greatest impact, across:

- Public Health action on the impact of COVID-19 on health outcomes and health inequalities, and
- Public Health recovery projects aimed at directly addressing health inequalities.
- 3.5 In Wirral oversight of COMF during 2020 and onwards operated through the Council's COVID-19 governance arrangements, and the Strategic Outbreak Cell, which was chaired by the Director of Public Health and reported to the Council's Tactical Co-ordination Group (TCG). Regular updates on the development and delivery of Wirral's Local Outbreak Management Plan were provided to the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee, as well as to Group Leaders and local MPs, by the Director of Public Health.
- 3.5 Following additional COMF allocations distributed to local authorities in 2021, a cross party Working Group was established, following recommendation from the Policy and Resources Committee. The COMF Working Group met regularly, to review and enable detailed consideration, guidance, and support for the development of activities and initiatives, funded by COMF. The Working Group had oversight of proposals for COMF expenditure and received updates on delivery of grant funded projects from the Director of Public Health and relevant officers.

3.7 **COMF Expenditure**

Using the COMF criteria, Wirral's expenditure was managed under two overarching themes: initially the Local Outbreak Management response, and then in the latter stages of the pandemic, the Renewal and Recovery projects. Figure 2 provides a summary of Wirral's COMF expenditure by overarching themes and projects.

Figure 2: Overview of Wirral COMF expenditure by theme

Theme	Total Spend
Local Outbreak Management Response (Total)	£9,319,271
Community engagement	£3,830,847
COVID-19 Outbreak Hub	£2,819,544
Housing and homeless support	£704,025
Infection prevention control service	£501,516
Communications	£482,232
Regional Test and Trace Hub	£390,247
Support for educational settings	£246,514
Public Health intelligence	£213,484

Vaccination and testing	£130,862
Renewal & Recovery (Total)	£5,464,760
Community, Voluntary and Faith sector grants	£1,547,723
Cost of living grants	£1,304,492
Digital inclusion projects	£1,000,318
Fuel poverty projects	£501,500
Debt management and employment support	£501,044
Winter resilience	£487,183
Mental health support for children and young people	£122,500
Overall Total	£14,784,031

3.8 Local Outbreak Management Response

In 2020 all local areas were mandated by government to develop Local Outbreak Management Plans outlining how local areas will break chains of transmission to prevent and contain outbreaks and protect high risk setting and residents. The COMF grant was a key enabler to successfully delivering against the objectives in Wirral's Local Outbreak Management Plan, funding the wide-ranging priorities and objectives. COMF supported Wirral's Public Health team to work in partnership with colleagues and across the system to prevent, contain and manage local outbreaks and transmission. COMF enabled Wirral's approach to be flexible, sustainable, and collective, working as a system, across a number of priorities. Figure 3 provides an overview of the key activities, services, and projects delivered using COMF within Wirral's Local Outbreak Management Plan.

Figure 3: Wirral's Local outbreak management priorities funded by COMF

Priority	Summary of key activities, services, and projects
Ensure access to timely local data and intelligence to inform local activity to prevent and manage outbreaks.	Implemented robust local surveillance system to manage outbreaks and provide support to variety of settings through Wirral's COVID-19 Hub. Implemented and developed case management platform leading to improvements in the collection and reporting of data, and proactive identification of exposures/potential outbreaks. Council leadership in daily multi-agency surveillance meetings at local and regional levels to understand epidemiology, and direct prevention and control measures, community engagement activity and targeted communications. Public Health intelligence contributed to the Cheshire & Merseyside data and analyst network, helping to sustain regional understanding and likely system demands.
Engagement and Communication	Supported communications under the 'Keep Wirral Well' branding, enabling a strong focus on engagement and communication, with a clear strategic, insight-led approach.
Build trust and participation through effective community	Developed a test, trace, isolate, and vaccinate communications plan to reinforce key messages, helping to reduce transmission, aligned to changing national policy.

engagement and
communication

Established a Community Champions' network enlisting over 600 local champions who helped by distributing guidance and encouraging adherence and behaviour change in local communities. The programme was jointly evaluated as part of the LGA behavioural change programme and has been upheld as good practice at a national event.

Invested in local Community Connector service, recruiting extra Community Connectors, to undertake proactive engagement with communities with lower testing and vaccination uptake.

Invested in local ethnic minorities link workers, to enhance existing engagement with communities, to maximise participation with testing and vaccination.

Higher-risk settings, communities, and locations

Identify and support high risk workplaces, locations, and communities to prevent and manage outbreaks. Partnership led by the Council's COVID-19 Hub on prevention and management of outbreaks in high-risk settings, implementing robust review processes and using local intelligence to proactively support higher risk settings. Co-ordinated health and social care response; overseeing capacity, trends, resources, updated guidance, led system partnership, responding to emerging system pressures. Council's COVID-19 Hub School Support Team provided dedicated support and guidance on national policies and implementation of required measures for various settings. Engaged with local third sector, voluntary and other organisations, and groups to respond to needs of local communities particularly at risk of COVID-19. Worked with the local business sector, including Wirral Chamber of Commerce, to support COVID-safe organisational settings, including development of business toolkit to maintain safe working environments.

Supporting vulnerable and underserved communities

Proactively support individuals and communities, ensuring test, trace, isolate, and support systems are accessible and meet the diverse needs of communities.

Developed a Humanitarian partnership, co-ordinated by the Council, with over 100 local groups, working together to support local communities.

Developed targeted communications in areas of high incidence, highlighting guidance/support available, and maintained contact with clinically extremely vulnerable residents.

Worked with local multicultural third sector groups to support access to regular symptom free testing.

Vaccination

Support the roll-out of the COVID-19

In partnership with NHS, supported roll out of COVID-19 vaccination programme, in line with Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation priorities. First COVID-19 vaccination administered in Wirral on 8th December 2020.

vaccine programme, Prioritised homeless people and rough sleepers for the identifying and COVID-19 vaccine using local data, intelligence, and tackling inequalities engagement to address areas of low uptake within local in vaccine coverage. communities. Facilitated targeted COVID-19 vaccination Q&A sessions for social care staff with clinical experts from midwifery. pharmacy, and general practice. Increased access opportunities with outreach vaccination programme, delivered in partnership. **Testing** Developed flexible local testing offer across symptomatic, asymptomatic and outbreak testing, including an in-house Identify cases of testing service commencing in December 2020. Wirral was COVID-19 by one of the first areas to commence symptom-free ensuring access to community testing in the UK. Developed and sustained Wirral's Testing Strategy aligning testing for those with and without to the national plans for community testing. symptoms and for Implemented outreach and mobile testing and test kit distribution, targeting testing in high-risk settings, for the outbreak most vulnerable residents. management. Provided training and quality assurance around testing processes in workplaces and other settings. **Contact tracing** Delivered an in-house local contact tracing service, participating in national programmes, helped improve case completion rates by use of local knowledge and support. Effectively deploy Worked collaboratively with the Cheshire and Merseyside local contact tracing Hub, Public Health England and the Department of Health to reduce the and Social Care Local Tracing Partnership forums, to onward transmission influence and strengthen the local contact tracing system, of COVID-19. reaching people national systems were unable to, and responding to high-risk complex cases and settings. Supported health and social care, schools, local businesses and other settings through intelligence led contact tracing and where a focused outbreak response is appropriate. Support for self-Produced targeted guidance on self-isolation accessing the isolation self-isolation payment scheme, wider welfare support and non-financial support available. Ensure access to support, including Worked with Wirral Chamber and local businesses to where appropriate support awareness of employer responsibilities in financial support, to supporting staff to self-isolate when required. ensure people who Supported people at risk of being unable to self-isolate, need to self-isolate through follow up messaging and proactive welfare checks. Provided practical support throughout isolation period for can do so. most vulnerable, or at risk of not being able to isolate. Engaged with local communities to understand barriers for self-isolation, using insight to address gaps in local response and other areas of support. Responding to Responded locally to a Variant of Interest across the

Variants of Concern (VOC)

Develop robust plans and working with local, regional and national partners to enable surge capacity, to respond to local outbreaks and VOC. Northwest, in December 2021 working with national and local partners to undertake enhanced contact tracing, access to additional symptomatic testing capacity and effective public communications.

Developed local plans outlining surge responses related to enhanced contact tracing, testing, communication, and engagement.

Compliance, Enforcement and Living with COVID-19 (COVID secure)

Work 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.

Established systems between COVID-19 Local Outbreak Hub and Environmental Health and Enforcement, to manage local compliance and enforcement.

Supported joint working across Liverpool City Region on compliance and regulations multi-agency partnership, ensuring consistency across Merseyside.

Monitored operations and compliance of local businesses responding to reports of non-compliance, conducting thousands of visits to businesses, supporting organisations to operate safely.

Contributed to planning for local recovery, and gradual reopening, supporting with testing and vaccination, provided consistent guidance.

Governance, accountability, and resourcing

Establish robust governance structures for decision making with clear accountability and effective resource use.

Adapted robust emergency response governance system established in March 2020, implemented local COVID-19 governance structure to manage and respond effectively. Managed and responded effectively to COVID-19 through strong partnerships at strategic and operational levels across local, regional, and national stakeholders. Built resilience in our experienced and established local teams.

3.9 Recovery and Renewal

In addition to the direct impacts of COVID-19 it was recognised that the pandemic and the local response to contain transmission was leading to many wider impacts. In response to national strategy and policy around living with COVID-19, a cross Council strategic renewal group established in 2021 developed a programme focused on recovery and renewal. Using feedback from a range of stakeholder, and local intelligence and insight, recovery and renewal projects were developed, with the aims to:

 Respond to the impacts of COVID-19 on the health and wellbeing of our communities, including the impact of social issues like social isolation, financial

- worries or concerns, increased poverty, and increased vulnerability of specific groups of residents such as our homeless population.
- Ensure support to our most vulnerable residents continues throughout a transition period as COVID-19 evolved, providing help and support to people when and where they need it.
- Support schools and colleges to ensure children can return safely, building on partnership working as schools open their doors again for learning.
- 3.10 Projects were proposed by the Strategic Recovery and Renewal Group, approved by the Director of Public Health and Strategic Outbreak Cell, and monitored by the COMF Working Group. Many of the renewal and recovery projects enhanced existing services which were overwhelmed with demand due to the pandemic. Figure 4 provides an overview of the key activities, services, and projects delivered using COMF within the Recovery and Renewal Programme.

Figure 4: Recovery and Renewal priorities funded by COMF

Priority	Summary of key activities, services and projects
Children's Health and Emotional Wellbeing	Invested in local 0-19 service, providing additional posts within the existing team which helped address the backlog of contacts and pressures resulting from the COVID-19 restrictions, and the direct impact of the pandemic on
Enhance current support for children and young people's health and emotional wellbeing.	children and young people. Commissioned a broad ranging programme of support for children, young people and school staff with Action for Children, to help support children's emotional health and wellbeing, providing practical tools and coping skills to help prevent more intense mental health issues.
Resilient communities	Delivered a borough wide grants programme, designed with the Community Voluntary and Faith (CVF) sector, which provided additional resources to small charities and local
Enable improved connectiveness, hope, identity, meaning and purpose and empowerment for communities.	grassroots community-based organisations. A wide variety of CVF projects were delivered using this grant funding including employment focused projects, projects supporting health and wellbeing, children's mental health and supporting community spaces. The funding also helped many organisations apply for additional external funding to sustain projects post March 2023. The impact of the investment was far ranging from improvements in people's wellbeing to gaining employment or accessing further education for young people.
Cost of Living Programme of initiatives to help support residents with increasing cost of living.	Developed CVF Cost of Living Grants programme with the sector and Wirral's cost of living strategic response group, encouraging a collaborative response. COMF funded projects across Wirral, with a focus on food poverty, fuel poverty, warm hubs and vulnerable groups. The programme funded 15 projects that included warm hub provision in 54 locations across the Borough. Fuel poverty collaborative established between five

organisations, Wirral Foodbank, Age UK, Wirral CAB, Energy Project Plus and Involve Northwest, investing in additional staffing and resources across services to support residents across Wirral with fuel poverty, including specialist energy advisors, benefit maximisation support, debt management support, warm home packs, emergency heaters, LED Bulbs, emergency out-of-hours support with fuel including evening and weekend provision, winter warm campaign for over 65's. Service extended following the initial 12-month period, to cover winter 2023 – 24. **Employment** Commissioned a holistic employment support service (Help Support Out) with Involve Northwest to complement the existing worklessness service (Reach Out), improving access to Support for residents employment opportunities for local people by providing to access wraparound support to improve mental health and employment wellbeing, supporting people to be 'job ready', addressing individuals' fears and barriers. opportunities. Provided outreach support to engage unemployed people with the service, engaging with local employers to promote vacancies e.g.in social care and NHS. Information and Invested in additional specialist staff as part of Information **Advice Service** and Advice commission delivered by Wirral Citizens Advice Service, Ask Us Wirral, to support with food poverty, fuel poverty, debt, maximising income and other advice issues Support for residents to access timely and for residents. appropriate advice and signposting to services. **Digital Inclusion** Designed in partnership with stakeholders, COMF funded the delivery of four overarching digital inclusion projects, Support digitally providing positive outcomes for residents, led by One Wirral CIC, Health Junction, Wired, Age UK, Citizens Advice excluded residents. to improve digital Wirral and the Council's Children and Young People's access and abilities. Team. In total, 22 organisations participated in the projects, delivering digital drop-in sessions, one to one and group training, providing access to equipment and online resources, encouraging learning and new skills. Sessions were developed with resident feedback, on areas such as health and wellbeing, accessing online services, financial inclusion, skills and education, online safety, and employment. Feedback from residents showed improved confidence and motivation to use digital technology and improved wellbeing through social interaction, learning new skills within community settings. **Homeless Support** Invested in additional resources to provide intensive

Support for settings for socially excluded groups including hostels and homeless shelter.	support required with managing the impacts of COVID-19, for example, ensuring those with chaotic behaviours are complying with isolation requirements, through additional staffing and practical measures to increase likelihood of compliance, and reduce the risk of further spread of the virus. The funding has also supported enhanced infection prevention control measures and increased cleaning, which will continue to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading within the setting, helping to keep vulnerable people safe.
Mental Health System partnership approach and training to better understand mental health needs and support residents with mental health challenges.	Commissioned the delivery of Mental Health First Aid training for residents across Wirral, targeting key public facing roles across local business sectors, and within the Council, including elected members.
Behavioural Insight Enhanced local insight to support better outcomes for residents.	Resourced a system and infrastructure for generating qualitative insights and applying scientific analysis to inform policy, improve public services, and deliver positive results for people and communities in Wirral.
Winter Resilience Support for the COVID-19 emergency welfare response.	COMF funding contributed to Council's response services, complementing national Household Support Funding, supporting residents to access food, fuel, and other essential items. Funding helped to deliver a collaborative response connecting people with support, and supported provision including the emergency food warehouse, and out of hours help with food and utilities, including emergency support during challenging winter period and Christmas 2021.

3.11 Enduring capabilities

COMF helped to establish services, projects and activities which have been sustained beyond the scope of the time-limited funding, through the Public Health Grant. Examples of these include:

 Fuel poverty collaborative – The initial programme was funded for a year and following review by the Director of Public Health and lead commissioner, was extended using Public Health Grant funding to continue until March 2024, ensuring that additional support for residents with fuel poverty continued throughout the winter months.

- Wirral's Health Protection Service Wirral established a Local Outbreak Hub in 2020 to lead in the delivery of the Local Outbreak Management Plan. This team quickly formed excellent working relations and strong partnerships locally and regionally, to achieve the desired outcomes of the Plan. For example, our good links with IPC teams, and positive relationships with Environmental Health and Enforcement colleagues locally, supported the development of local good practice in successfully managing outbreaks, engaging local settings and businesses, and supporting to reduce transmission. In 2022, the Hub was reviewed and reduced significantly in capacity and transitioned into the Wirral Health Protection Service, funded by the Public Health Grant, to lead on the partnership delivery of Wirral's Health Protection Strategy, whilst sustaining surge capacity and the essential responsive expertise locally to address health protection issues and outbreaks.
- Qualitative Insight The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the importance of working in partnership with local communities, listening to and understanding their needs. Building on existing local intelligence, the qualitative insight service gathers and synthesises qualitative information, which is key to supporting policy implementation and improving health outcomes. The work of this team supports across a breadth of programmes being delivered by the council, including public health commissioning, neighbourhoods, and regeneration, as well as the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The service is now funded by the Public Health grant and was subject to a comprehensive review in 2023 led by the Director of Public Health.
- Wirral Infobank During the pandemic, COMF supported with the development
 of Wirral Infobank one single database for local people with a range of
 information, signposting and resources available within local communities/areas.
 This resource has now developed much wider than COVID, with over 2,500
 entries supporting residents with a range of topics, from cost-of-living to local
 activities. https://www.wirralinfobank.co.uk.
- Digital Inclusion COMF funded several digital inclusion projects to tackle the digital divide highlighted during the COVID pandemic. As part of this work the TechKnow Digital Inclusion group was set up. This group undertook a collaborative approach, working with 18 partner organisations to provide a variety of digital projects to address the digital divide in Wirral. The projects looked at the impacts of improving accessibility and access to online services, developing skills and education and through this increasing job opportunities, and improving health and wellbeing through using digital equipment and skills to allow people to connect with others, find new hobbies and work on their own self-care using online resources. At the end of 2022, representatives from Wirral's digital inclusion project team joined the Liverpool City Region Digital Inclusion Network, supporting the sharing of best practice, funding opportunities and criteria needed to help support digital inclusion projects.
- In 2023 Wirral CVF organisations were supported to apply for a UKSPF grant focused on Digital Connectivity for Community Facilities. The fund has so far awarded £105k to various organisations across Wirral (including two directly involved with the TechKnow project), with a further £150k available for Wirral projects in 2024.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Wirral Council has received a total of £14,784,031 from the COMF which covered the period June 2020 to March 2023. This report draws to a conclusion the use of the one-off, time limited grant which was provided to all local authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic and confirms the full utilisation of Wirral's allocation as per the conditions of the grant.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 This report is for information for Members of Wirral's Health and Wellbeing Board and as a result there are no resource implications.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 There are no ongoing risks relating to this report. Project risks related to the use of the COMF grant were managed by the Director of Public Health through the governance procedures outlined in section 3.4 of this report.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The use of the COMF grant in Wirral was closely informed by local evidence, intelligence, and insight. Wirral's Outbreak Management Plan was delivered in partnership and collaboration with multiple stakeholders helped to shape and develop projects and grants enabled by COMF.
- 8.2 COMF grant was utilised to enhance Wirral's capabilities around engagement with residents and communities, enabling the development of local insight service.

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 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.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The COMF grant contributed to supporting the delivery of the concepts of community wealth building e.g. community resilience increasing local employment opportunities.

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APPENDICES

N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

 Contain Outbreak Management Fund Guidance -https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/contain-outbreak-management-fund-guidance-financial-year-2021-to-2022

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Health and Wellbeing Board in accordance with Section C of its Terms of Reference:

(c) To provide a local governance structure for local planning and accountability of health and wellbeing related outcomes

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Policy and Resources Committee	9 th June 2021
Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee	13 th October 2020 19 th November 2020 18 th January 2021 2 nd March 2021 7 th June 2021 29 th July 2021 23 rd September 2021 13 th October 2021 16 th November 2021 25 th January 2022 3 rd March 2022 14 th June 2022 25 th July 2022