



# Northumberland County Council

## HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

8TH OCTOBER 2020

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### Update on the Northumberland COVID 19 Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan

**Report of:** Cath McEvoy-Carr Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services

**Cabinet Member:** Cllr Richard Dodd – Deputy Leader

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#### Purpose of report

1. To provide an update on the epidemiology of COVID 19 in Northumberland and developments with the Council's COVID 19 Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan.

#### Recommendations

2. The Health and Wellbeing Board is invited to:

- Note the increase in the number of infections in Northumberland and current issues;
- Comment on the progress being made in developing and implementing the local COVID 19 Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan;
- Agree that all stakeholders work collaboratively to protect vulnerable populations; keep schools operating; keep businesses open; and keep routine NHS services functioning.

## **Link to Corporate Plan**

3. This report is linked to the 'Living' priority included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2021.

## **Key issues**

4. There has been a significant increase in the number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Northumberland in recent weeks and the rate of infection is increasing rapidly across the North East region. Cases have doubled in the week prior to this report being written and were 10 times higher than a similar period in August. Infection rates are similar to Gateshead's and Northumberland was in the top 10% of Local Authorities in terms of infection rates. Particularly high rates of infection have been seen in various wards in South East Northumberland. The number of cases being identified through NHS labs (i.e. elective and non-elective hospital admissions) also shows a marked increase, reflecting both an increase in community prevalence and corresponding increase in hospital admissions for Covid-positive patients. These local trends reflect a national upswing in community transmission and Covid-related hospital admissions (which had doubled in the previous week), including an increase in the number of patients admitted to ICU.

5. On Friday 18th September new restrictions designed to slow the rate of transmission in the North East came into force across the LA7 area. These localised restrictions included limiting household mixing and hours of operation for hospitality businesses. These restrictions are designed to address the drivers of community transmission including household mixing and a failure to maintain social distancing in hospitality venues. Some of these restrictions have been subsequently enacted in national legislation and on Monday 28th September it was announced that further restrictions would be imposed commencing 30th September. At the time this report was written, the regulations had not been released but are expected to make law, some of that which had previously been guidance.

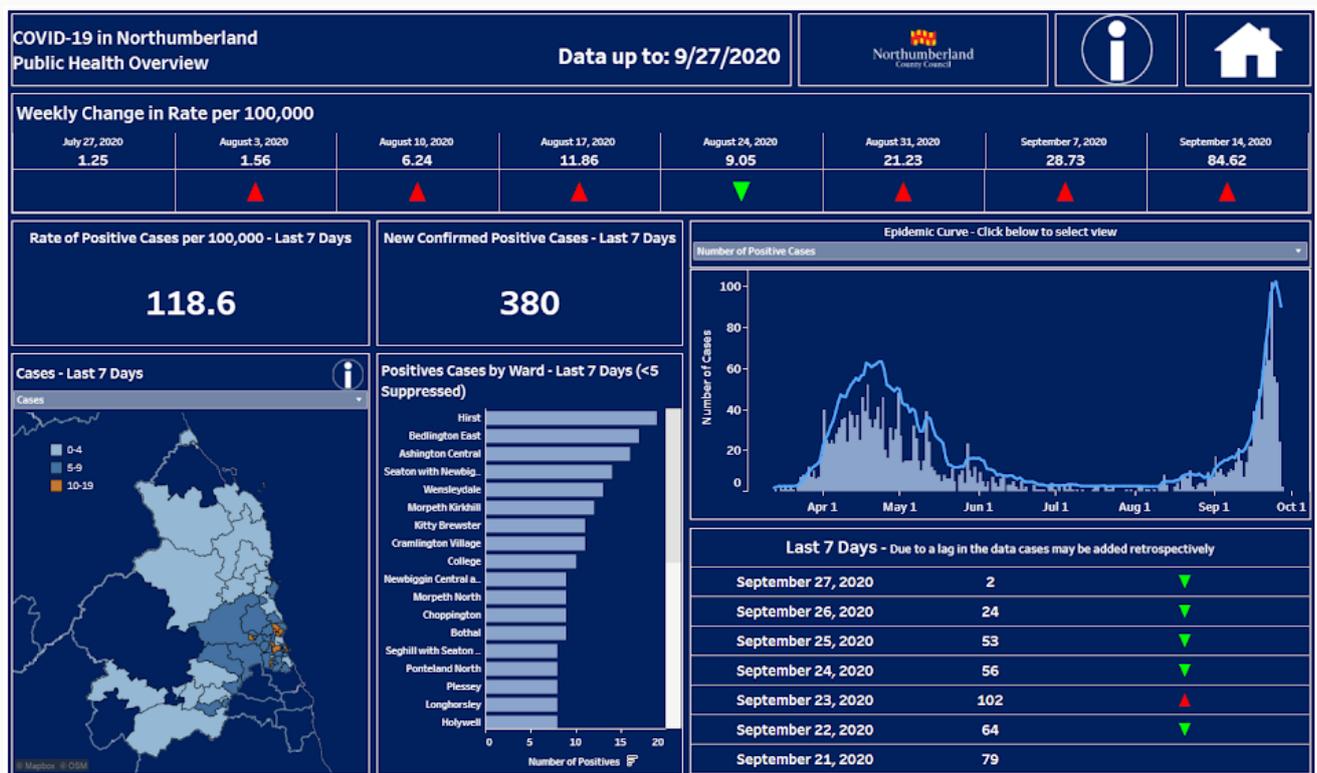
6. The national Test and Trace system continues to be affected by extremely high demand for testing and we are seeing this trend reflected across Northumberland. Two Local Testing Sites are now operational in Ashington and Blyth which offer walk-through (as opposed to drive-through) testing to residents in the most populous areas of the County where infection rates are higher. These semi-permanent sites provide testing seven days a week between 8am and 8pm. This testing provision is additional to the Mobile Testing Units which operate from sites in Hexham, Berwick and Morpeth on alternate dates throughout the week. While the opening of these additional testing sites is an important step towards improving access to testing in the County, officers are continuing to work with DHSC colleagues to ensure that testing is available to residents across the County.

7. The five wraparound support teams are working to coordinate multi-partner responses to sector-specific outbreaks as well as progressing the development and delivery of local prevention and outbreak management plans.

**Background**

Covid-19 Surveillance update

8. At the time of writing there have been 380 positive cases of Covid-19 in Northumberland over the last 7 days (to 27/9/20) and the rate of transmission is 118.6. The most up to date County-level data is now available to the public and can be accessed via the Northumberland Public Health Covid-19 Dashboard<sup>1</sup>.



Escalation of response to increase in cases

9. A letter has been sent to care homes advising them to cease all non-essential visits. This is a difficult decision and will be upsetting for residents and their relatives alike, but necessary to protect some of our most vulnerable residents; many care homes were already planning to adopt this policy.

10. We are using both soft and hard intelligence to identify areas of concern relating to the Covid security of workplaces and businesses and any linked outbreaks. Concerns

<sup>1</sup> <https://public.tableau.com/profile/julian5701#!/vizhome/COVID-19inNorthumberland/Introduction>

related to specific businesses are recorded and followed up by public protection officers either by phone or through a physical visit based on an individual risk assessment. Public Protection colleagues have also made preparations for the use of the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations to close events or venues where they pose an imminent threat to public health and prohibitions are needed to control the spread of COVID-19.

11. Owing to significant demand from schools for advice from the PHE Health Protection Team following the start of term, the local Public Health team is providing additional capacity to support schools, undertaking risk assessments and tracing contacts of single confirmed cases of COVID-19 in staff and pupils, as well as responding to numerous enquiries about pupils who are unwell.

12. The Council's communications team has worked with the Outbreak Prevention and Control wraparound groups, elected members and others to develop a comprehensive Communications and Engagement Plan which is currently being finalised. In addition to delivering NCC's core public campaign which reinforces government messaging around the behaviours residents should adopt in order to prevent transmission of the virus i.e. Hands Face Space, the Council's communications team have been working to make residents aware of the new local restrictions and in liaison with DHSC, to reinforce messaging around the launch of new Local Testing Sites and when residents should seek testing for Covid-19.

#### Introduction of new local and national restrictions

13. On Friday 18th September new restrictions designed to slow the rate of transmission in the North East came into force across the LA7 area. These localised restrictions include limiting household mixing and hours of operation for hospitality businesses. Hospitality venues must now remain closed between the hours of 22:00 and 05:00 and may only serve food and drink to customers seated at a table. Residents are prohibited by law from hosting people from other households in their homes or gardens where guests are not members of the host's support bubble, and are advised against socialising with people from other households in any public venue. These restrictions are designed to address the drivers of community transmission including household mixing and a failure to maintain social distancing in hospitality venues.

14. While rates of transmission differ across local authority areas in the LA7 and across different localities within Northumberland, as many residents frequently travel between areas for work and social activities the introduction of these restrictions across the LA7 footprint is a crucial and necessary step towards slowing the rate of infection. While household mixing for the purposes of providing informal childcare was initially prohibited by the new regulations, this position has since been revised meaning that residents who rely on informal childcare in order to work should not be negatively affected. North East MPs and other stakeholders were instrumental in amending what was a

national issue. A comprehensive FAQs to support residents' understanding of and adherence to the new guidelines is available on the Council's website.

15. In response to the rise in the number of Covid-19 infections nationwide, on Tuesday September 22nd the Prime Minister outlined a tightening of national restrictions including stricter rules around the use of face coverings, encouraging home working, the closure of hospitality venues between 22:00 and 05:00 and further measures designed to reduce close contact within these venues, and additional restrictions on organised group activities including weddings and indoor sports. These restrictions are anticipated to remain in place for six months, and the government has announced a further £60 million in funding to support enhanced enforcement of the new guidelines by local authorities and the police.

16. On 28th September, the SoSHSC announced further restrictions for large areas of England including the north east. This will include making some of those recommendations that were previously advisory into a legal requirement. This will come into force on 30th September but the regulations had not been received at the time of writing this report.

#### North East Test and Trace Hub funding announcement

17. On 11th September, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care announced new investment in a Test and Trace Hub for the North East, North Cumbria, Yorkshire and the Humber, following a bid submitted earlier in the summer by Newcastle Hospitals and Newcastle City Council. In addition to a new Lighthouse laboratory, which will be based in Gateshead, there will also be a specialist innovation lab at the Helix site in Newcastle dedicated to the development of new technologies and processes. Expected to be operational by December 2020, the integrated Covid hub will be part of the national Test and Trace infrastructure, linking testing into clinical data systems used by hospitals; the laboratory facilities will be run by the NHS rather than a commercial provider.

### **Northumberland COVID 19 Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan - Progress Report**

#### Communication and engagement plan

18. The Communications and Engagement Sub Group has been meeting fortnightly. External resources have supported the development and delivery of a communications and engagement strategy and associated plans to support the Local Outbreak Plan and toolkits for each of the five priority areas. The mapping of existing stakeholder networks and communications channels took place as part of this work. A main report has been drafted – outlining the approach, summary feedback and insights around each area with key recommendations to take forward. Four toolkits have been produced (high risk areas considered together) to support the work of each priority area which will be rolled out in the coming days. The toolkits are a collation of communications materials developed

within and outside the council, alongside comments and requests from key stakeholders. They also provide ideas to take forward and suggestions made on how to do this.

19. The Council continues to amplify the national messaging around hand hygiene, social distancing, face covering and testing. The national Stay Alert campaign has been re-launched with the Hands Face Space strapline. This will feature social media, TV radio etc. and will be shared on NCC channels. NCC's Communications Team will also support the NHS winter campaign. In addition, to further boost awareness of the key messages, a local campaign has been developed. Graphics have been developed which feature on the Council's website and social media channels. These have also been adapted to maximise the visibility of messaging in local communities; signage developed for lamp posts, bollards, roundabouts, bin wagons etc have been installed across the County. The key message is 'Protect yourself, protect others and protect Northumberland.'

20. Following the introduction of the LA7 restrictions, a communications campaign has been developed to run across the region. The Council is working closely with colleagues from the neighbouring authorities to develop the campaign, this includes PR, social media activity, radio and specific comms activity targeting 20s and 30s including Instagram and Spotify advertising. The Coronavirus information Hub on the council website is updated daily, to ensure it features the latest information and guidance. It also features a dashboard showing the latest rates and figures for the county. Regular #ListenToLiz videos are also created and shared on social media.

### Testing

21. There has been a marked increase in demand for Covid-19 testing in recent weeks. This presents significant challenges for the NHS Test and Trace system which has struggled to meet the need for increased testing. Increased demand is likely to be driven in large part by the rapid increase in the number of people experiencing Covid-19 symptoms, however, inappropriate use of testing due to misperceptions amongst the public around when they should self isolate and/or when they require a test has placed additional demand on the system. The rapid increase in demand nationwide has outstripped laboratory capacity to process tests, and has resulted in a lack of availability of bookable test slots for local residents as well as home test kits.

22. The Council's Testing Task and Finish group has worked to support DHSC to set up Local Testing Sites at People's Park (Institute Road) car park in Ashington and Marine Terrace car park in Blyth. These sites are now fully operational and offer walk-through testing between 8am and 8pm seven days a week; residents can book test appointments online or by calling 119. Sites are semi-permanent and designed to deliver vital testing capacity to local communities over winter. With no drive-through facility, the sites are located in close proximity to residential areas to enable those without access to a vehicle to walk or cycle to the site to get tested. Site operations and security are provided by third

parties on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Care; these facilities are not operated or controlled by the Council.

23. The testing capacity created by the Local Testing Sites now operational in Blyth and Ashington is additional to the County's allocation of Mobile Testing Unit capacity; MTUs continue to operate from Berwick, Hexham and Morpeth on alternate days throughout the week. However, the deployment of Mobile Testing Unit capacity continues to be controlled nationally, with resources redeployed to other regions experiencing significant outbreaks including in the North West and Yorkshire. Given the geography of Northumberland, it is of vital importance that this MTU provision is retained, particularly in the North and West of the County, to enable the Council and its partners to effectively prevent any further increases in transmission and control any outbreaks. The Council will continue to escalate these concerns through the appropriate channels while exploring all available options for improving access to testing for our residents including the provision of more Local testing Sites.

#### Wraparound support teams

24. Care homes. The care homes wraparound group continues to meet on a weekly basis. The following measures are currently in place to deliver a coordinated response to outbreaks in care homes: a 7-day supported response to care homes with suspected cases and/or confirmed outbreaks; 7-day follow ups by the Infection Prevention and Control team for care homes with suspected cases and/or confirmed outbreaks; a weekly multidisciplinary team meeting to coordinate and strengthen the support delivered into care homes; a weekly formal review by the MDT of all care homes with live cases; care home specific outbreak meetings where necessary; maintenance of an incident and outbreak log to track all cases and assess the efficacy of wraparound support; an Infection Prevention and Control training log; testing of all new admissions to care homes; notification process to inform clinical leads and PCNs of new care home outbreaks; and an Infection Prevention and Control checklist used by Community Nursing Teams to identify additional Infection Prevention and Control training needs in care homes.

25. Key areas of progress this month include the successful management of issues and/or outbreaks in 36 care homes, preventing further escalation. The total number of positive cases recorded in care homes since 10th July 2020 is 59. In total, 205 care home staff across 38 care homes have participated in additional face-to-face training. The care homes Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan is complete, with Standard Operating Procedures in place which have recently been enhanced to include a High Level Prevention protocol. A surveillance audit of all 69 older persons' care homes has been commenced. A Care Homes Communications Task & Finish group has also been established and has agreed to refresh posters highlighting key Infection Prevention and Control messaging prior to circulation to all care homes. Outbreak management cards will be developed for distribution to staff and a YouTube video will be created to communicate key messages.

26. Key areas of focus over the next month include the further development of the Infection Prevention and Control training offer to include out-of-hours training and an online learning platform. The outbreak control pocket-size contact cards containing key information for care home staff will also be produced. The intelligence gathered from the surveillance and prevention audit with all 69 older persons care homes will be analysed, and Infection Prevention and Control checklists will be completed for all 69 older persons' care homes.

27. Challenges relating to the work of the care homes wraparound group include ongoing issues around Pillar 2 testing, the inability to roll out Infection Prevention and Control face-to-face training to all care homes at pace due to the requirement to maintain social distancing, the timeliness of notifications from Public Health England, and confusion amongst care home staff about conflicting guidance. Northumberland is now experiencing increasing numbers of positive cases of Covid-19 in care homes, as well as an increase in the scale of individual outbreaks i.e. the number of positive cases per outbreak. It is evident that some care home staff are not following guidance around social distancing outside of the workplace and this has contributed to an increase in the number of positive cases in care homes.

28. Educational settings. Since schools reopened in September there have been 91 cases of Covid-19 across 48 educational settings in Northumberland, with 59 pupils and 28 staff testing positive. With the support of the Council's Public Health and Education teams schools are working to inform and where necessary isolate the close contacts of symptomatic staff and pupils, though the situation remains challenging. While fewer than 60 children have tested positive since the start of term, implementing the self-isolation requirements for close contacts means that far greater numbers of pupils continue to miss out on education. As community transmission of the virus increases, a corresponding increase in the numbers of positive cases linked to educational settings is inevitable. There is little evidence of transmission in schools.

29. Businesses and workplaces. Weekly meetings continue to be held to update and progress the Workplace and Business Support Action Plan. The group is working closely with the DPH and PHE to ensure workplace and business support is risk based, targeted, and reflective of changes to local and national regulations and guidelines. A team leader has been appointed to lead operational management of the ongoing response to Covid-related issues and a cohort of staff will be upskilled to conduct visits to business premises with the potential to develop an on-call rota to enable an urgent response out of hours. A standard operating procedure for responding to outbreak notifications has been developed, prioritising highest risk business sectors with a focus currently on the hospitality sector.

30. Weekly liaison meetings have been established with Northumbria Police to share intelligence and concerns about businesses, and twice weekly meetings are held with other members of the LA7 to ensure consistency of messaging and enforcement. Options are being explored to utilise Northumberland Fire and Rescue staff to assist in Covid-secure assessment of workplaces. The Council website has been updated to include a

new form for reporting concerns about businesses and for businesses seeking advice about Covid security, and letters will be circulated to 20,000 businesses across Northumberland to advise them about new regulations and responsibilities.

31. Over the next month, key objectives will be to expand the cohort of staff with the training and skills to respond effectively to an outbreak and implementing the Standard Operating Procedures recently developed to support this. Channels of communication between partners will continue to be identified and developed in order to ensure relevant messages reach as many Northumberland businesses as possible. Ongoing challenges include delivering this work with existing staff capacity and the potential for the team to be overwhelmed by a rapid increase in the number of business enquiries and concerns reported.

32. High risk individuals and communities The High Risk Consequence/Individuals and Communities sub-group meets on a weekly basis. The group is currently working to review the existing prevention measures and Standard Operating Procedures partners have in place and confirm Single Points of Contact. Key areas of work over the next month include the delivery of scenario planning exercises which will support partners to assess our collective readiness to respond to an outbreak amongst high risk individuals and communities and to develop systems and processes for working together cohesively to control an outbreak and reduce any further transmission. A communications toolkit is currently being developed; once finalised, this resource will support partners to identify strategies and resources for communicating key messages to high risk groups and communities around the behaviours which will help them to protect themselves and others from the risk of Covid-19 transmission. The group is interested in exploring how conducting backward contact tracing with those clients who test positive for Covid-19 could support our understanding of the dynamics of transmission amongst these groups, enabling us to tailor our approach to the prevention and control of the virus.

33. High Risk Settings. A key area of work for the group going forward is the development of a Standard Operating Procedure which will govern the management of outbreaks and clarify when an outbreak will be declared. To support this process the group is working to confirm Single Point of Contact arrangements in all key partner organisations. The group will also organise and participate in a series of scenario planning workshops which will allow partners to understand any gaps in our response plans for dealing with complex scenarios for example, where symptomatic individuals are present in high-risk settings but refuse to engage with the Test and Trace process, or where individuals refuse to self-isolate. As part of this work, the group has identified a need to review the current prevention measures in place across our high risk settings and how these may have changed since the end of the initial lockdown period and in light of recent changes in government guidance.

34. The group is also working on mapping where high-risk schemes are located and developing a visual representation of this information to support information sharing,

communications and response planning. Plans to develop communications with group members include a weekly bulletin email to share any relevant updates, resources and key messages between meetings and which can be cascaded to staff across service areas. Work is ongoing to identify resources in languages relevant to our settings, as well as easy read information for those with learning disabilities. Engaging a number of key providers in the work of the group remains a key priority.

### Escalation of emergency planning and response procedures

35. The Northumbria Local Resilience Forum Strategic Coordinating Group has been re-established in response to the escalating numbers of cases and local restrictions as has the Tactical Control Group. More locally, regular meetings with the Trust focusing on winter and covid related issues have been put in place with Northumbria Trust. These are in addition to other meetings that were already in place across a wider footprint. At council level, daily Covid 19 Gold Command meetings are held with executive Directors to shape the council's strategic response and re-focus capacity.

### Summary

36. Significant staff resources are currently being deployed to effectively manage local outbreaks across a wide range of settings in Northumberland, in addition to ongoing work to prevent any further escalation of transmission. This is being done largely via the five wraparound support groups which are providing specialist input into outbreak response activities. Communication and engagement continues to be a critical component of the outbreak prevention and control plan; continuous strengthening and targeting of our communications is important in order to prevent further transmission. Capacity across the system remains a challenge as we continue this phase of increased transmission and all avenues for engaging additional capacity continue to be explored.

### Implications

<b>Policy</b>	Strategic policy implications have been considered in relation to the Council receiving policies from the Central Government and developing policy locally
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	The Council has robust records relating financial expenditure for COVID 19 related activities and these are being reported in line with reporting structures locally, regionally and nationally. The Council has received additional funding for COVID-19, some expenditure against which has been agreed.
<b>Legal</b>	Legal advice is being sought from the Head of Legal Services/Monitoring Officer throughout the COVID-19 response.

<b>Procurement</b>	Procurement support has been provided by the Council's Shared Procurement Service including support for the sourcing and purchase of additional PPE.
<b>Human Resources</b>	The Council has operated within its existing policies and procedures as part of its COVID-19 response and has worked with trade union colleagues to develop new policies, procedures and protocols where appropriate.
<b>Property</b>	Property regulations have been adhered to throughout the emergency response with additional support provided for Facilities staff in relation to cleaning regimes as per any additional guidance received.
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The effect of COVID 19 has been to exacerbate existing inequalities so all plans must ensure that groups are not disadvantaged.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	Risk Assessments have been undertaken for a wide range of Council related activities and these are held centrally for reference purposes.
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	The Council has maintained regular contact with Northumbria Police throughout the COVID-19 emergency response, paying particular attention to national policy including lockdown arrangements, travel and any anti-social behaviour/crime issues which have been managed locally.
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	Northumberland Communities Together and our Contact Centre/Customer Services colleagues have worked closely to ensure that we have responsive service available to our residents at all times, particularly those in need and who are vulnerable.
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	The Council has continued with its climate change work during the emergency response and this will be monitored.
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	This paper is relevant to the health and wellbeing of our residents and our staff and the Council's Director of Public Health has been involved in the Council's emergency response

	throughout. COVID 19 disproportionately affects those who already live in deprived circumstances and the plan will take all steps to ensure that health inequalities are not perpetuated.
<b>Wards</b>	All

**Background papers:**

None

**Report sign off**

	Full name of officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Liam Henry
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Chris Hand
Relevant Executive Director:	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Acting Chief Executive	
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