



# Northumberland County Council

## HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

12TH NOVEMBER 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 infection rate in Northumberland and current issues;
- Comment on the progress of the local COVID 19 Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan.

#### Link to Corporate Plan

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

#### Key issues

4. After a significant increase in the number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Northumberland since the end of the summer, the rate of transmission in the County has plateaued but at a relatively high level.

5. On Monday 12<sup>th</sup> October the UK Government announced a new three tier system of coronavirus restrictions in England. Northumberland, along with the rest of the local authorities in the LA7, entered into the High Tier of restrictions which came into force on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> October. In addition to the national measures already in place, areas in the High Tier are subject to further restrictions which prohibit household mixing in indoor settings. These regulations supersede the existing restrictions in place across the LA7 since the 18<sup>th</sup> September. On Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> October the LA7 region hosted a visit from the Cabinet Office to review the situation across the area. Discussions with central government concerning future restrictions in Northumberland and the wider North East were ongoing but have been paused due to additional national restrictions. This period needs to be used to take forward the high impact interventions developed and agreed by NE DsPH relating to localising contact tracing and testing and behavioural insights work.

6. After an unprecedented spike in demand for testing during September, since the beginning of October NHS Test & Trace has seen a fluctuating decline in demand for testing and we are seeing this trend reflected in Northumberland. NCC's public health intelligence team are analysing the available data to determine the segments of the population where demand has fallen markedly, and the local authority's communications team are participating in the Department of Health and Social Care's local authority communications pilot designed to improve the utilisation of testing. The Council has secured approval for two additional Local Testing Sites in Hexham and Berwick, pending final site checks and approvals. It is anticipated that these sites will be open for testing by mid-November.

7. The decision has been taken to merge the High Risk Settings and High Risk Individuals wraparound groups due to an increasing amount of overlap between the work of the two groups. The four 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.

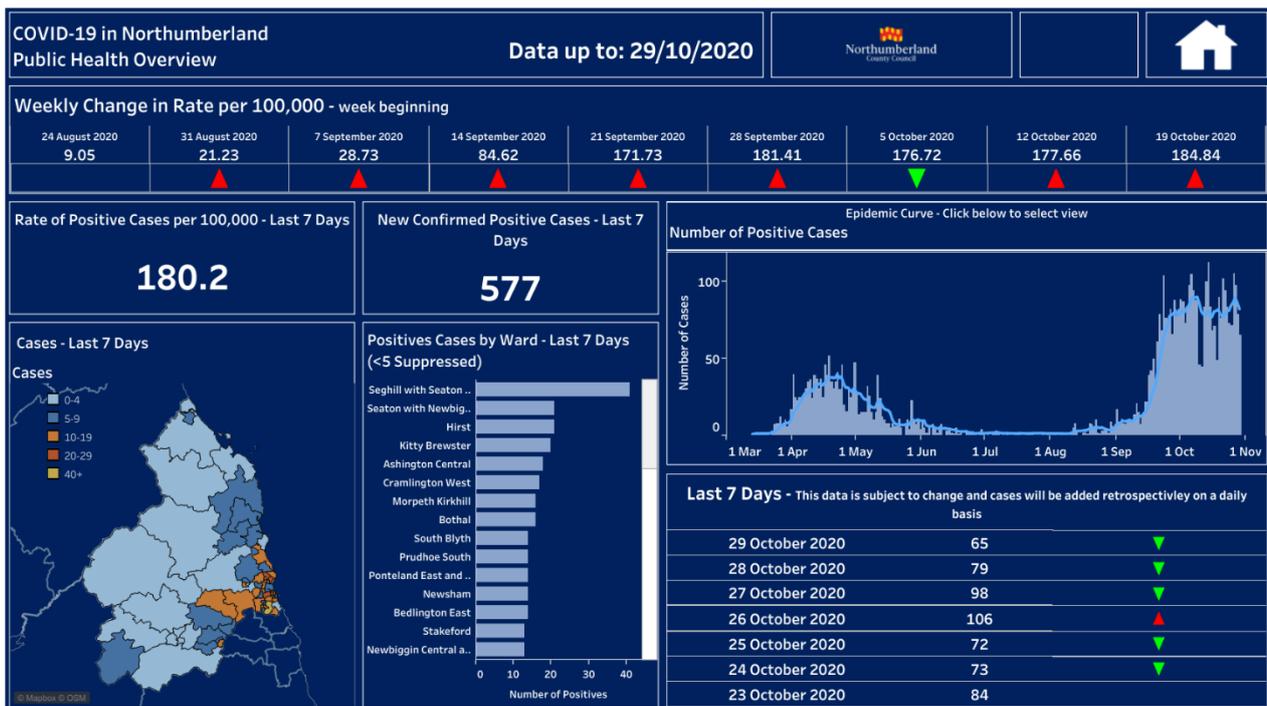
## **Background**

### **Covid-19 Surveillance update**

8. At the time of writing there had been 577 positive cases of Covid-19 in Northumberland over the 7 days 29<sup>th</sup> October and the case rate was 180.2/100,000. The most up to date County-level data is available to the public and can be accessed via the Northumberland Public Health Covid-19 Dashboard<sup>1</sup>.

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



9. Whilst achieving a reduction in the rate of increase and a plateau is a significant achievement, continuing at that level leaves the system at some risk as winter approaches and a reduction in rates is required. Unlike the previous peak, the aim is to maintain elective work in the NHS and in particular, those prevention, diagnostic and screening activities which also have a significant impact on health. In order to do that the NHS system needs to remain in a position where it is not overwhelmed by patients requiring treatment for Covid-19 related symptoms. It also needs to avoid a situation where a significant proportion of staff are absent due to self-isolation as this may also impose restrictions on the delivery of some services but for different reasons.

#### Introduction of three tier system of restrictions

10. On Monday 12<sup>th</sup> October the UK Government announced a new three tier system of coronavirus restrictions in England. The restrictions which apply to local authorities in each tier can be summarised as follows:

- Medium – equivalent to the baseline national restrictions including the Rule of Six, 10pm curfew for hospitality venues and restrictions on the number of guests permitted to attend weddings and funerals.
- High – As above with additional restrictions including a ban on household mixing in any public or private indoor setting.
- Very High – The Government has set out baseline measures for this tier which include the closure of all pubs and bars unless they serve food in a similar manner to a restaurant, a complete ban on household mixing with the exception of those in support bubbles, and a ban on wedding receptions. Travel in and out of Very High local authority areas is advised against. In addition to these baseline measures

which are applicable to all local authority areas in the Very High tier, central government will negotiate with local leaders in areas entering the Very High category to determine the additional restrictions necessary to prevent further escalation of transmission. This is based on the assumption that the implementation of the baseline measures alone will be insufficient in order to reduce the rate of transmission in these areas.

11. Prior to the introduction of the three tier system of restrictions, the Chancellor announced an expansion of the Job Support Scheme. Under the scheme Government will pay two thirds of employees' salaries for those unable to work as a result of the new restrictions, and grant funding for businesses forced to close has increased to £3000 per month. The Contain Outbreak Management Fund has also been updated to reflect the three tier system. Local authorities in the Medium, High and Very High Tiers will receive £1, £3 and £8 per resident respectively to support proactive containment and intervention measures.

12. Northumberland, along with the rest of the local authorities in the LA7, entered into the High Tier of restrictions which came into force on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> October. These regulations supersede the existing restrictions in place across the LA7 since the 18<sup>th</sup> September. Discussions with the Chief Medical Officer and central government around future restrictions in Northumberland and in the LA7 region are ongoing. On Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> October the LA7 region hosted a visit from the Cabinet Office to review the situation across the region. On 26<sup>th</sup> October LA7 local authority and business leaders released a joint statement declaring that the area should remain in the High Tier of restrictions and urging all residents to play their part in reducing transmission. A set of supportive high impact interventions have been proposed based on enhanced testing; localisation of the wider NHS Test and Trace programme (as opposed to localised enhanced contact tracing which is currently on offer); proactive support to protect and support those most at risk of the harmful consequences of Covid 19 infection; additional enforcement powers; and behavioural insight work to get a better understanding of how we can support the behaviour change needed to achieve a better uptake of Covid-19 prevention interventions aimed at preventing spread.

13. By 5<sup>th</sup> November, the whole of England will have moved into a shared set of additional restriction until early December at the earliest. Negotiations about any move to Very High have been paused.

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

### **Communications and engagement**

14. The Covid-19 Control Board Communications and Engagement Sub Group will now meet on a monthly basis after each meeting of the Joint Health and Wellbeing Board. 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 priority areas. These resources have now been finalised and circulated to the wraparound group leads for discussion and utilisation by the groups. A public-facing version of these documents has been shared on the Council website.

15. The Council continues to use its communications channels to raise awareness of community transmission, releasing up-to-date statistics on a twice-weekly basis and sharing national messaging around hand hygiene, social distancing, face covering and testing. Northumberland is now one of a handful of local authorities participating in the Department of Health and Social Care's communications pilot to improve local uptake of testing, using social media channels to publicise available testing appointments and raising awareness of when and how residents should book a test.

16. The Council continues to work closely with colleagues across the LA7 on the development of a regional campaign which includes PR, social media activity, radio and specific comms activity targeting 20s and 30s including Instagram and Spotify advertising. A key element of this work is the development of regional behavioural insights which will enable us to better understand the perceptions and behaviours of residents across the region and develop targeted communications campaigns designed to increase local compliance with guidance.

17. Work is progressing to develop a Covid Community Champions model for Northumberland which will harness the power of local community networks to share key messages about Covid-19 in the County and support the delivery of campaigns. A communications plan and key governance documents are in development to support this project, which will be key to engaging local communities in our work to reduce community transmission.

## Testing

18. Demand for Covid-19 testing has fluctuated and dropped since the beginning of October. Data indicated that 6286 Pillar 2 tests had been undertaken in the 7 days up to 29<sup>th</sup> October, a fall of about 1000 tests per week over what had previously been the uptake. There is no clear evidence showing what is driving this dip in demand though possible causes include a levelling out of the number of symptomatic cases; reduced asymptomatic and inappropriate testing; reduction in the number of tests associated with international travel and school re-openings; and a reluctance to get tested since the introduction of the legal obligation to self-isolate following a positive test result.

19. Local Testing Sites at People's Park (Institute Road) car park in Ashington and Marine Terrace car park in Blyth are now fully operational and offer walk-through (as opposed to drive-through) testing between 8am and 8pm seven days a week; residents can book test appointments online or by calling 119. The Council's Testing Task and Finish group has been working closely with DHSC and its partners to identify additional

Local Testing Sites in Berwick and Hexham. Both sites have now received approval from DHSC and, pending final site checks, are scheduled to be open for testing by mid-November. These sites will ensure that testing is available to residents in the North and West of the County seven days a week. Mobile Testing Units continue to operate in Morpeth, Berwick and Hexham on alternate days each week.

20. An expression of interest has been forwarded to DHSC to participate in the rapid rollout of Lateral Flow Tests for Covid-19 infection in individuals who do not have symptoms. This is a North East wide proposal. These use pregnancy testing technology to provide a more rapid turnaround of results and the proposal is that their use is targeted at visitors to care home residents; domiciliary care and other support workers who regularly go into the home of those most vulnerable to coronavirus; and in the future, more frequent testing of care home staff. Northumberland with North Tyneside is also piloting the use of Pillar 2 (PCR) tests to regularly test health and social care professionals who visit care homes.

#### Wraparound support teams

21. Care homes. 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, with a risk assessment undertaken to determine weekend responses; 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; an outbreak control flowchart for domiciliary care, and a regional decision-making framework for care home closures.

22. Key areas of progress this month include the successful management of issues and/or outbreaks in 40 care homes and homecare agencies, preventing further escalation. The total number of positive cases recorded in care homes since 10th July 2020 is 115. To support the tracking and management of positive cases, care homes with active outbreaks now provide data at an individual resident level which can be cross-referenced with NHS T&T data.

23. In total, 247 care home staff across 45 care homes have participated in additional face-to-face training, with staff from a further three homes completing training online via a webinar format. A flowchart has been developed to support a coordinated response to outbreaks in domiciliary care settings. A Task and Finish group has been established to determine how domiciliary care and independent supported living services can be best

supported to prevent and control outbreaks, leading to an agreement to develop bespoke Infection Prevention and Control webinars for these settings.

24. A Covid-19 training webinar for care homes has been developed in partnership with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and will be uploaded to YouTube along with two videos covering Infection Prevention and Control. A surveillance audit of all 69 older persons care homes began during the week commencing 21<sup>st</sup> September with the results currently being analysed by members of the care homes wraparound group.

25. A decision-making framework for care home closures across Northumberland and the wider region has been agreed. The Infection Prevention and Control arrangements for care home visiting have also been reviewed and a set of principles developed for care home visiting.

26. Key areas of focus over the next month include the development of an Infection Prevention and Control training module to be delivered via the online learning platform, the analysis of the Infection Prevention and Control checklists completed by all 69 older persons care homes, working closely with care homes to develop messaging around mental health and wellbeing, and the development of a regular newsletter with key messages from the CCG, Public Health England, NCC and Northumbria Healthcare's Infection Prevention and Control team to be circulated to 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 experiencing an increase in the scale of outbreaks in care homes as well as an increase in the number of domiciliary care providers requiring additional support. Due to an increased workload generated by increasing numbers of care homes with positive cases, the Infection Prevention and Control team will conduct risk assessments in order to prioritise support provided at weekends.

28. Educational settings. The educational settings wraparound group are working to provide a rapid response to schools by supporting the management of all positive cases on the day they are reported. All data is collated in the education public health intelligence dashboard which enables effective and coordinated case management across a number of Council teams. All educational settings reporting multiple positive cases are subject to review by the team. Relevant guidance and resources continue to be circulated to all educational settings and the wraparound group is supporting school leaders and governors in the management of complex cases as well as responding to more general queries staff may have, working closely with NCC's Health and Safety and Human Resources teams. The wraparound team continues to support schools with their external communications as well as keeping a broad range of stakeholders informed with regards Covid-19 in educational settings and work to control and prevent transmission.

29. Although a small number of schools have had to close due to staffing issues, all were open before half term. Half of Northumberland's schools have not reported a case in their student population.

30. 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. The group's Terms of Reference is currently being reviewed in order to ensure the most effective use of time and resources, cascading of information and appropriate group membership. Following the national move to a three-tier system of restrictions new legislation has been issued which reflects these changes. The wraparound team continues to provide advice to businesses on adherence to legislation and guidelines and continues to take enforcement action where necessary, as well as investigating complaints about individual businesses submitted by members of the public via the Council's online form for reporting concerns. There have been a small number of significant outbreaks in workplaces over the last few weeks which have necessitated a multi-disciplinary outbreak control team and visits to premises. This has required close cooperation between PHE, the HSE and council communication, public health and public protection teams.

31. A new team leader has been appointed to take responsibility for the operational management of a new Covid compliance team, and a cohort of staff have been trained to undertake compliance visits. These include out of hours and weekend visits delivered jointly with Northumbria Police, drawing on pooled intelligence to prioritise visits to the highest risk businesses in areas with the highest infection rates. Formal enforcement including the issue of Direction Orders and fixed penalty notices is now being utilised, with businesses deemed to pose a significant risk to public health subject to an enforced temporary closure. There had been four closures up to 1<sup>st</sup> November. Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service are undertaking compliance visits in lower risk establishments. Letters have been circulated to 20,000 businesses across Northumberland to advise them about new regulations and responsibilities.

32. 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. NCC's Head of Housing and Public Protection also participates in the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum (LRF) Compliance Cell which has been convened to provide regional leadership on enforcement and regulatory matters. A standard operating procedure governing outbreak response has now been signed off by the wraparound group following a successful four-week trial period and will be reviewed and updated on a monthly basis.

33. Over the next month, key objectives will be to ensure the team are prepared to support the new restrictions and to think about any future potential move to the Very High tier; the further development of communications channels between different agencies; and ensuring clarity of message in communications with the business community.

34. Ongoing challenges for the businesses and workplaces wraparound group include capacity constraints and the potential for the team to be overwhelmed by a significant increase in the number of outbreaks, resulting in an inability to respond effectively. Going forward, the impact of a potential move to the Very High tier of restrictions on Northumberland's tourism and hospitality sector is an area the group intends to explore further.

35. High risk individuals and settings A decision has been taken to merge the High Risk Individuals and High Risk Settings wraparound groups in light of the significant overlap between the work of both groups. The newly consolidated wraparound group has adopted a Standard Operating Procedure which will govern its response to outbreak management, and is currently finalising an online system which will support reporting and management of positive cases and outbreaks and which will feed directly into the public health intelligence dashboard. Work is ongoing to map the high risk settings and a comprehensive list is in place and has been shared with the relevant partners to support the tracking of cases; this is a live document which will be continually updated.

36. Over the coming weeks the group's priorities will be to further develop and embed the dashboard and reporting process to ensure all outbreaks are captured and monitored, and to explore approaches to meaningful engagement with high risk individuals and settings. The Department of Health and Social Care has recently launched a new approach to testing for high risk individuals and vulnerable groups which allows local authorities to access test kits directly for those who would otherwise struggle to access testing through the usual channels. Over the coming weeks the group will be working to develop the local delivery plan which must be in place in order to be granted access to test kits via this route. It is hoped that this will support access to testing for some of the most vulnerable people in the County.

#### Escalation of emergency planning and response procedures

37. 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 and a number of sub-groups including a Compliance Cell. 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, twice weekly Covid 19 Gold Command meetings continue to be held with executive Directors to shape the council's strategic response and re-focus capacity.

#### Summary

38. 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 four

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	Helen Lancaster
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Chris Hands
Relevant Executive Director:	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Chief Executive	Daljit Lally
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