



Northumberland County Council

HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

10TH DECEMBER 2020

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

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;
- Support the approach being taken for rapid community testing.

Link to Corporate Plan

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

Key issues

4. Prior to the reintroduction of lockdown restrictions the number of positive Covid-19 cases in Northumberland appeared to have plateaued. However, during the first half of November the number of positive cases in the County increased significantly. Numbers of positive cases have since begun to decline.

5. The regulations in force from 2nd December return England to a three-tier system of more local restrictions which are likely to remain in force until at least the end of March 2021. Northumberland, along with the other local authorities in the LA7, has been placed into the highest tier of restrictions (Very High alert).

6. On Tuesday 24th November the Government published guidance around a relaxation of social contact restrictions for five days over the Christmas period from 23rd to 27th December. This is intended to allow contact with a wider group of family and friends than ordinarily permitted, subject to specific guidelines published around social contact and bubbled during this period. Increases in household mixing will inevitably lead to an increase in cases and these should be anticipated from the end of December.

7. Northumberland now has Local Testing Sites operating in Ashington, Blyth, Hexham and Berwick 7 days a week, in addition to drive-through Mobile Testing Units which operate on a rotational basis, offering testing at different locations throughout the week. At the national level there is now significant focus on the piloting and subsequent rollout of rapid community testing using Lateral Flow Devices. Northumberland is working with the other local authorities in the LA7 to develop a targeted model orientated around economic recovery, vulnerable communities and staff.

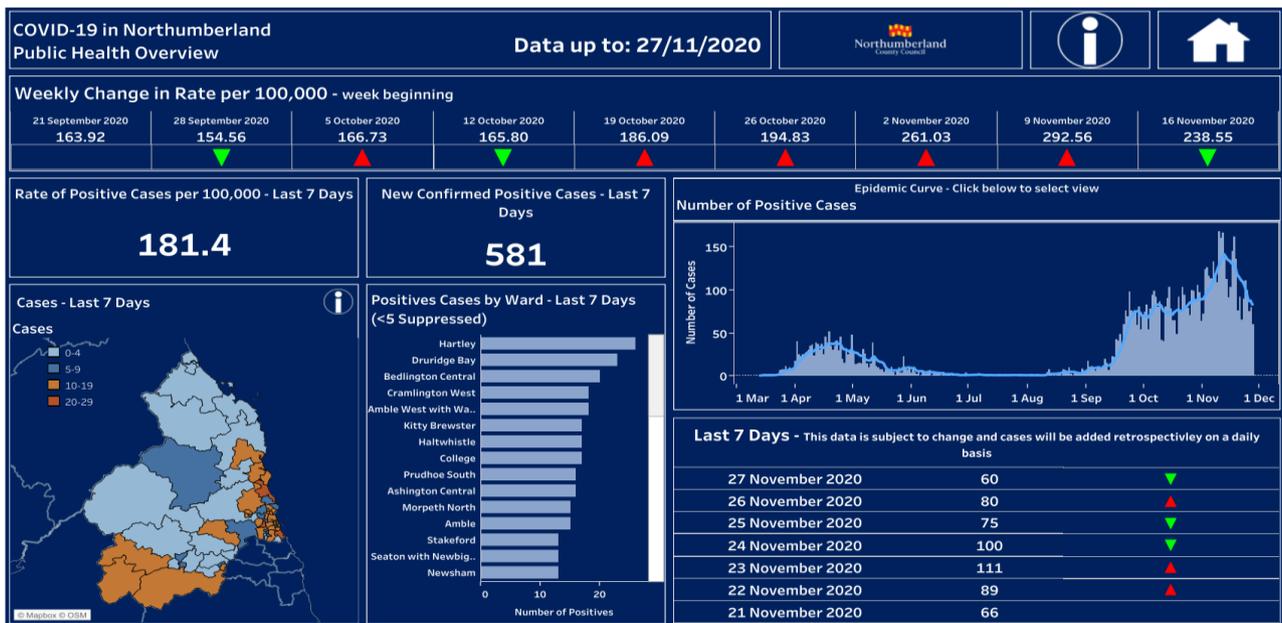
8. In line with recent announcements about the effectiveness of Covid-19 vaccines currently in development, partners in Northumberland are working intensively to prepare to support the delivery of a mass vaccination programme. NCC's Director of Public Health and the local authority's Health Protection Board will continue to provide strategic and logistical input to support this fast-moving piece of work where necessary.

Background

Covid-19 Surveillance update

9. At the time of writing there had been 593 positive cases of Covid-19 in Northumberland over the 7 days to 25th November and the case rate was 185.2/100,000. The most up to date County-level data is available to the public and can be accessed via the Northumberland Public Health Covid-19 Dashboard¹.

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



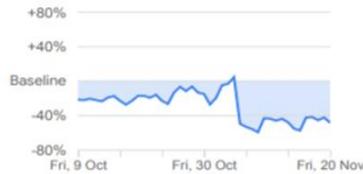
10. Following the introduction of LA7-wide restrictions and the subsequent move to a national three-tier system of restrictions in mid-October, the number of positive Covid-19 cases in Northumberland plateaued and the rate of increase in transmission slowed down. However, during the first half of November the number of positive cases in the County increased significantly. Data appears to support the hypothesis that these cases may have been associated with increased household mixing and social activity during October half-term and during the period immediately prior to the second lockdown². The figure below shows a peak in numbers of Northumberland residents attending retail, cultural and hospitality venues as well as public spaces including parks and beaches towards the end of October.

² https://www.gstatic.com/covid19/mobility/2020-11-20_GB_Northumberland_Mobility_Report_en-GB.pdf

Retail and recreation

-48%

compared to baseline

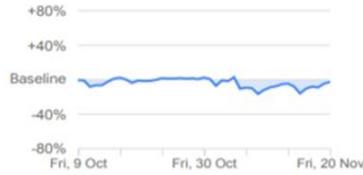


Mobility trends for places such as restaurants, cafés, shopping centres, theme parks, museums, libraries and cinemas.

Supermarket and pharmacy

-3%

compared to baseline

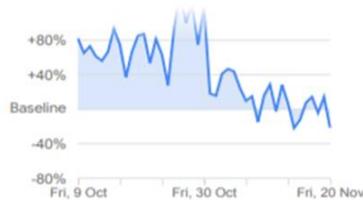


Mobility trends for places such as supermarkets, food warehouses, farmers markets, specialty food shops and pharmacies.

Parks

-21%

compared to baseline



Mobility trends for places like national parks, public beaches, marinas, dog parks, plazas and public gardens.

The number of positive cases has since begun to decline following several weeks of lockdown restrictions.

Second national lockdown and Covid Winter Plan

11. E ngland returned to a three-tier system of restrictions on 2nd December and it is envisaged that this system of regulations will remain in force until at least the end of March 2021. The furlough scheme has been extended across the same period to provide continuing financial support to those businesses and employees affected by ongoing restrictions. Restrictions under these tiers will be tougher than under the previous three-tier system which the Government has acknowledged was insufficient to reduce the R number to an acceptable level. On 23rd November, the Government published its [Covid Winter Plan](#) which sets out an approach to managing Covid-19 during the winter, including plans for rapid community testing and vaccination.

12. On Thursday 26th November regions in England were allocated to one of three tiers of restrictions which came into force on 2nd December. Northumberland, along with the other local authorities in the LA7, has been placed into the highest tier of restrictions (Very High alert). The figure below summarises the restrictions imposed on all local

authority areas in the Very High tier.

MEETING FRIENDS AND FAMILY  <p>No mixing of households indoors, or most outdoor places, apart from support bubbles. Maximum of six in some outdoor public spaces (e.g. parks, public gardens).</p>	BARS, PUBS AND RESTAURANTS  <p>Hospitality is closed, with the exception of sales by takeaway, drive-through or delivery.</p>	RETAIL  <p>Open.</p>	WORK AND BUSINESS  <p>Everyone who can work from home should do so.</p>
EDUCATION  <p>Early years settings, schools, colleges and universities open. Childcare, other supervised activities for children, and childcare bubbles permitted.</p>	INDOOR LEISURE  <p>Open. Group activities and classes should not take place.</p>	ACCOMMODATION  <p>Closed (with limited exceptions)</p>	PERSONAL CARE  <p>Open.</p>
OVERNIGHT STAYS  <p>We advise against overnight stays other than with household or support bubble.</p>	WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS  <p>15 guests for weddings, civil partnerships and wakes; 30 for funerals. Wedding receptions not permitted.</p>	ENTERTAINMENT  <p>Indoor venues closed.</p>	PLACES OF WORSHIP  <p>Open, but cannot interact with anyone outside household or support bubble.</p>
TRAVELLING  <p>Avoid travelling outside your area, other than where necessary such as for work or education. Further exemptions apply. Reduce the number of journeys where possible. Plan ahead and avoid busy times and routes on public transport. Avoid car sharing with those outside of your household or support bubble.</p>	EXERCISE  <p>Classes and organised adult sport can take place outdoors, but people should avoid higher-risk contact activity. Group exercise activities and sports indoors should not take place, unless with your household or bubble. Organised activities for elite athletes, under-18s and disabled people can continue.</p>	RESIDENTIAL CARE  <p>COVID-secure arrangements such as substantial screens, visiting pods, and window visits. Outdoor/airtight visits only (rollout of rapid testing will enable indoor visits including contact).</p>	LARGE EVENTS  <p>Events should not take place. Drive-in events permitted.</p>

13. Unlike the previous three-tier system, there will be no negotiation between central government and local authorities around local variations to the restrictions. These will be reviewed every 2 weeks, the first review date being the 16th December. Decisions will primarily be based on five key indicators:

- a. Case detection rates in all age groups;
- b. Case detection rates in the over 60s;
- c. The rate at which cases are rising or falling;
- d. Positivity rate (the number of positive cases detected as a percentage of tests taken); and
- e. Pressure on the NHS, including current and projected occupancy.

It is quite possible that areas with higher rates will be in a lower tier than areas with a lower rates.

14. On Tuesday 24th November the Government published guidance around a relaxation of social contact restrictions for five days over the Christmas period from 23rd to 27th December. This is intended to allow contact with a wider group of family and friends than ordinarily permitted under the three-tier system of regulations, subject to specific guidelines published around social contact and bubbling during this period. Between 23rd and 27th December people from three households may join together in an exclusive support bubble and may travel to other areas of the country including where their

destination is in a different tier of restrictions than their usual place of residence. Christmas bubbles are permitted to meet in private households and gardens, places of worship and public spaces; they are not permitted to socialise in hospitality venues and are advised to adhere to national guidance around social distancing and infection prevention behaviours as strictly as possible to minimise transmission.

15. Since increased household mixing inevitably leads to transmission, cases are expected to rise towards the end of December. The public are being advised to think very carefully before extending their existing household arrangements and to make a personal judgement, mindful of the risks to themselves and others, particularly those who are vulnerable.

Northumberland COVID 19 Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan - Progress Report

Covid 19 vaccination programme

16. Pfizer, Moderna and the AstraZeneca/Oxford University partnership have recently reported successful results from their Covid-19 vaccine clinical trials. NHS partners across Northumberland and the wider region are currently working intensively to establish the complex logistical infrastructure required to deliver a mass vaccination programme at pace to NHS staff and other groups. Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust has established a Strategic Vaccination Operations Centre to support mass vaccine delivery across the region. Specific requirements around the storage and administration of the Pfizer vaccine in particular pose considerable challenges. A CCG-led Board has been established to direct this work in Northumberland, with NCC's Director of Public Health providing input into the regional strategic vaccination cell and the NENC Flu and Covid 19 Vaccination Board. Northumberland's Health Protection Board acts as a forum for identifying linkages between the vaccination programme and the wider delivery of the County's Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan, with partners providing input and support where necessary.

Testing

17. Demand for Covid-19 testing continues to fluctuate, peaking at a 7 day moving average of 1254 tests per day on 18th November following a trough at 909 cases per day on 28th October. The data on testing indicates that 7272 Pillar 2 tests were undertaken in the 7 days up to 25th November. This latest peak and subsequent reduction probably reflect levels of community transmission, but recent behavioural insights work commissioned at the LA7 level suggested a lack of understanding amongst residents around when and how to book a test. The Communications and Engagement team will continue to use the multiple media channels to promote the availability of testing and will work with the DHSC to understand national trends driving demand for testing.

18. Walk-through Local Testing Sites are fully operational at the following locations:

- People's Park (Institute Road) car park, Ashington
- Marine Terrace car park, Blyth
- Sandstell Road car park, Berwick
- Former Fire Station site, Hexham

These sites offer testing between 8am and 8pm seven days a week; residents can book test appointments online or by calling 119. Mobile Testing Units continue to offer drive-through testing in different locations across the County on alternate days each week.

19. Councils are under some pressure to put in place rapid community testing using Lateral Flow Devices (LFDs) modelled on the Liverpool mass testing pilot. The Health Protection Board does not support that approach for a number of reasons subsequently summarised by the Association of Directors of Public Health and the faculty of Public Health in a [joint statement on targeted community testing](#). DHSC has offered LFD testing to care homes to support care home visiting, the rollout for which is ongoing. A regional approach to the use of targeted rapid community testing is being developed as part of the work of the LA7 which will focus on economic recovery (focused testing in strategic and/or high risk workplaces), communities (those in contact with the most vulnerable groups) and staff (to support business continuity in key operational frontline public sector staff). NHS Trusts are already testing their own staff.

Communications and engagement

20. The Council continues to use its communications channels to raise awareness of community transmission, releasing up-to-date statistics on a daily basis and sharing national messaging around hand hygiene, social distancing, face covering and testing. External resources have been engaged to support the implementation of NCC's Communications and Engagement Strategy. Communications resources are regularly updated and uploaded to the Council website.

21. 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 is progressing. Key initial findings are as follows:

- Residents have a good knowledge and understanding of the behaviours which protect against Covid-19;
- Residents' knowledge and understanding of how and when to seek a Covid-19 test is weaker;
- A number of residents use emotional reasoning to justify non-adherence to guidelines e.g. household mixing for mental health reasons.

These insights will be fed into the development of an LA7 regional campaign which includes PR, social media activity, radio and specific comms activity and is due to

launch the week commencing the 7th December. In addition to the regional behavioural insights work, plans are being developed for behavioural insights research targeting specific groups of key workers including teachers and care home staff in Northumberland.

22. The development of a Covid Community Champions model for Northumberland is progressing, with a pilot scheme launched in Bedlington on 27th November. As well as harnessing the power of local community networks to share key messages about Covid-19 in the County, two-way information sharing will allow NCC to work together with local communities to identify new approaches to community engagement and to respond to local intelligence around the messaging and resources which would be of benefit. An induction session is scheduled for Community Champions identified as part of the pilot, and resources for Champions have been developed. This project will be key to engaging local communities in our work to reduce community transmission. The Northumberland Covid Community Champions scheme will roll out across the County in early December.

Wraparound support teams

23. Care homes. In addition to the existing measures in place to support the management of Covid-19 outbreaks in care homes, over the last month the wraparound group has facilitated the delivery of infection prevention and control training to domiciliary care providers identified by the CQC and developed a weekly newsletter for care homes which contains relevant news and developments as well as preventative messaging and advice from Northumbria Healthcare's Infection Prevention and Control team.

24. Existing measures in place to deliver a coordinated response to outbreaks in care homes include 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.

25. Key areas of progress this month include the successful management of issues and/or outbreaks in 39 care homes (older persons and specialist residential), independent supported living settings and homecare agencies, preventing further escalation. The total number of positive cases recorded in care homes since 10th July 2020 is 168.

26. In total, 265 care home staff across 48 care homes have participated in additional face-to-face training, with staff from a further four homes completing training online via a webinar format. A link to the Covid-19 Infection Prevention and Control training webinar for care homes developed in partnership with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

has now been published on YouTube and shared with care homes. A newsletter has been developed for care homes which provides staff with key information and Infection Prevention and Control guidance and advice. A surveillance audit of all 69 older persons care homes is ongoing with the results currently being analysed by members of the care homes wraparound group.

27. 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 to identify any service improvement needs and key messages, working closely with care homes to develop messaging around mental health and wellbeing; working to secure the Infection Prevention and Control capacity required to provide 24/7 support to providers; and the development of a more pro-active approach to Infection Prevention and Control visits based on both formal and informal intelligence with the aim of preventing further outbreaks.

28. 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, placing additional demand on the Infection Prevention and Control team. 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.

29. Educational settings. The wraparound group are working to reiterate and share best practice across educational settings. In particular, the group is providing bespoke support and advice to schools which are managing their first positive Covid case or outbreak and continues to support to schools with more than one Covid case. The team review existing infection prevention and control measures and working practices in these settings and respond to Covid-related queries from all educational settings in Northumberland, as well as supporting staff, headteachers and school governors to expand their understanding of best practice approaches to managing Covid in educational settings. To enhance our understanding of transmission in schools incoming data from NHS Test and Trace and Public Health England is cross-referenced with local intelligence to ensure all cases are recorded and managed, and that the educational settings intelligence dashboard is maintained accordingly. School and educational settings data and activity is frequently reported to partners including County Councillors, headteachers, school governors and teaching unions, and the team also supports the development of communication materials for dissemination to staff and parents.

30. Key areas of concern include the number of children experiencing disruption to their education due to isolation requirements; 900 pupils in Northumberland have completed two or more isolation periods this term with a small number of pupils having

completed up to four isolation periods. This poses problems for teachers striving to maintain students' educational progression and highlights the wider impact a failure to adhere to social distancing and other guidelines in all settings can have on specific groups including Northumberland's school age population.

31. Businesses and workplaces. Weekly meetings continue to be held to update and progress the Workplace and Business Support Action Plan. 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. Formal enforcement including the issue of Direction Orders and fixed penalty notices continues to be employed, with businesses deemed to pose a significant risk to public health subject to an enforced temporary closure. Surveillance monitoring visits to determine the operating status of businesses during the second national lockdown have also been undertaken. The wraparound group's standard operating procedures are regularly reviewed to ensure the highest risk businesses are targeted for action.

32. NCC's Head of Housing and Public Protection also chairs the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum (LRF) Compliance Cell which has been convened to provide regional leadership on enforcement and regulatory matters. A budget of £3.5 million has been allocated between each of the local authorities to support enforcement; while plans are still in development it is likely that this will support the expansion of compliance and regulatory capacity both in Northumberland and the wider region.

33. Key areas of focus over the last month included preparing for Northumberland's transition to the Very High Tier of restrictions with a focus on staff readiness and the development of key messages for business; and the recruitment of six Covid Safe Trading Officers.

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. The group is working to mitigate this risk by working with local authorities across the region to develop additional outreach and enforcement capacity. Providing relevant and timely communications to the wide range of businesses across Northumberland continues to pose a challenge. The group will continue to work closely with NCC's communications channels and other partners to engage the business community.

35. High risk individuals and settings. The High-Risk Individuals and Settings wraparound group continues to work with partners to support a wide range of vulnerable groups and individuals across Northumberland. In order to streamline the work of the group and in light of the nature of support required by Independent Supported Living Settings and Specialist Residential care homes, the decision has been taken to bring outbreak management and prevention work for these settings into the remit of the care homes wraparound group.

36. Key areas of progress this month include finalising the electronic reporting system linked to NCC’s public health intelligence database, reviewing and agreeing the group Terms of Reference, meeting structure and membership to ensure effective representation and governance, providing support to partners managing complex cases and reviewing lessons learned to identify any gaps in existing procedures and training, and continuing to map all high risk settings in Northumberland. Additional flow charts have been produced to support the rollout of the electronic reporting system.

37. Over the coming weeks the group’s priorities will be to cross-reference the intelligence gathered so far with data from NHS Test and Trace to enhance our understanding of transmission in high-risk communities and how this has evolved since the beginning of the pandemic. This will then be used to supplement data about positive cases received directly from partners. The group will also work to embed a new group structure in which NCC lead officers will take responsibility for communicating with a subset of partners which provide services linked to a particular theme e.g., homelessness. It is hoped that this approach will be more streamlined and will enable us to provide partners with more targeted information and support.

Summary

38. Significant staff resources continue to be 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. Plans for the delivery of the Covid 19 vaccine and rapid community testing will be the focus of activity for the next few weeks and months. Communication and engagement continue 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 move into winter, all avenues for engaging additional capacity and for mutual aid continue to be explored.

Implications

Policy	Strategic policy implications have been considered in relation to the Council receiving policies from the Central Government and developing policy locally
Finance and value for money	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.

Legal	No comments
Procurement	Procurement support has been provided by the Council's Shared Procurement Service including support for the sourcing and purchase of additional PPE.
Human Resources	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.
Property	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.
Equalities (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.
Risk Assessment	Risk Assessments have been undertaken for a wide range of Council related activities and these are held centrally for reference purposes.
Crime & Disorder	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.
Customer Consideration	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.
Carbon reduction	The Council has continued with its climate change work during the emergency response and this will be monitored.
Health and Wellbeing	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.
Wards	All

Background papers:

None

Report sign off

	Full name of officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Helen Lancaster
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Chris Hand
Relevant Executive Director:	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Chief Executive	Daljit Lally
Portfolio Holder(s)	Richard Dodd

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