



# Northumberland County Council

## HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD OSC

**21ST SEPTEMBER 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 Jeff Watson - Adult Wellbeing and Health

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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:

- Comment on the progress being made in developing and implementing the local COVID 19 Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan;
- Comment on any perceived gaps or areas of concern.

#### **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 an increase in the number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Northumberland since the week ending 9th August. Some of these cases have been linked through social groups; there have been some cases clustered around specific areas; and others have been associated with a small number of pubs (but no clear causal

link) and workplaces. NCC officers have worked with Public Health England to identify and implement a proportionate and immediate response to these clusters. The situation has highlighted an urgent need for targeted engagement with specific subgroups of our population; in common with the national picture, the average age of cases has fallen significantly in recent weeks.

5. Testing rates in the County have increased to 141/100,000 for the week ending 24th August from 118/100,000 two weeks prior. While this is positive, work is underway to widen access to testing across the County. A Task and Finish group has been established to identify appropriate sites for the development of semi-permanent testing facilities which will remain in place over the winter months; officers are working with DHSC to obtain the necessary approvals to expand testing provision in the County as soon as possible.

6. A comprehensive communications and engagement strategy is in development with dedicated support from an external provider. An innovative approach to this work which draws on Northumberland's existing partnerships is critical to the effective prevention and management of outbreaks; work is underway to tailor key national messages to ensure these resonate with local audiences and target groups.

7. The wraparound support teams are continuing to progress the development and delivery of local prevention and outbreak management plans, with all groups meeting regularly to identify and deliver priority areas of work. The care homes and educational settings groups are now primarily focused on preventative strategies, with the remaining three groups working to develop supported response mechanisms for complex individuals and settings.

## **Background**

### **Local Allocation of national NHS Track & Trace resources**

8. DHSC have announced that NHS Test and Trace will be reallocating resources from the Tier 3 and 2 contact tracing service (those elements commissioned nationally) to strengthen regional contact tracing. A dedicated team of contact tracers will be provided for Local Authorities for local areas and the aspiration is that local and national teams will work as one to ensure that as many people as possible are reached by contact tracing, working with local authority staff.

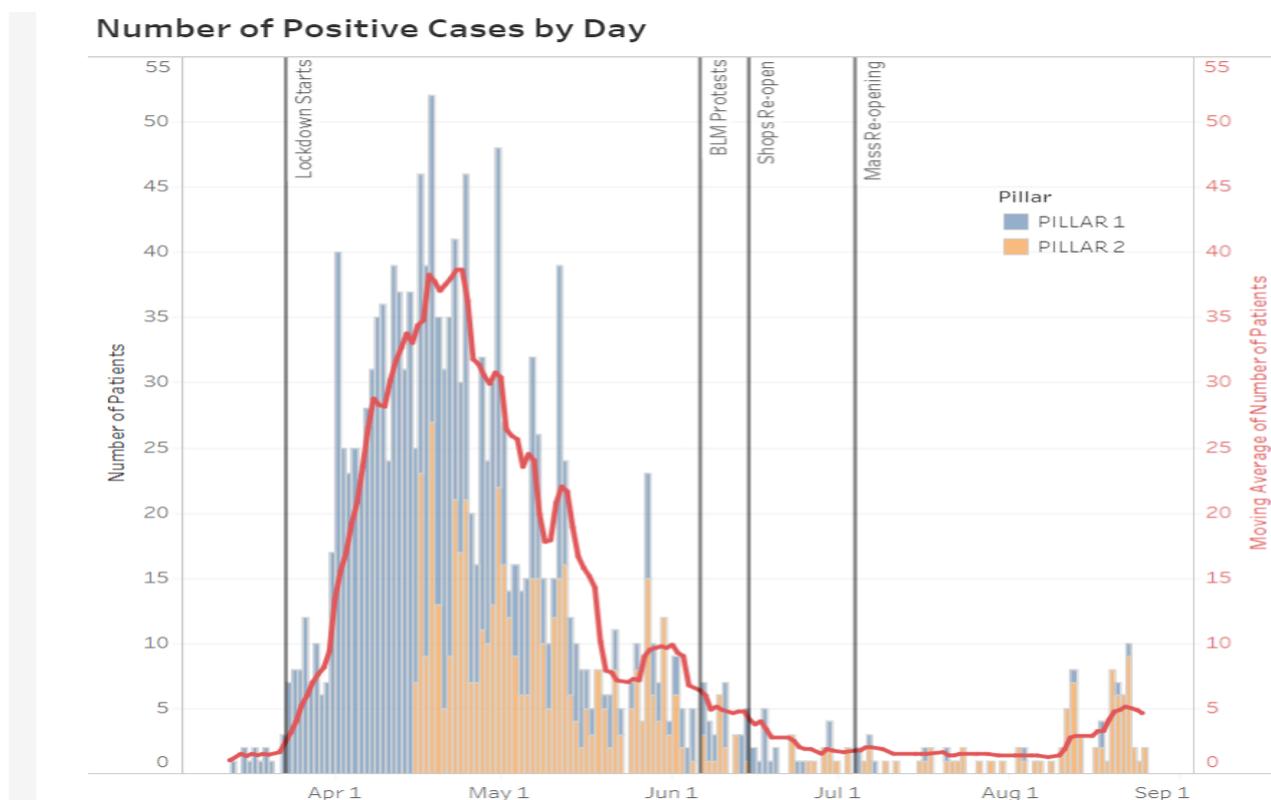
9. In the interim, PHE is providing training for contact tracing for council staff and a cohort of individuals from public health, public protection and other council staff accustomed to dealing with the public in a frontline context will be participating. However, before any element of local contact tracing is put in place, issues around information governance, SOPs and access to PHE and NHS Test and Trace systems need to be facilitated to ensure that data flows do not become more fragmented. To achieve the best

outcomes, contact tracing needs to be done once, and done effectively. The NE approach to a local contact tracing model is in development.

### Local outbreaks and response

10. There have been a total of 1660 positive cases in Northumberland residents (Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 testing as at 29th August) reported nationally. There have been 28 cases reported in the 7 days up to 26th August and 18 cases reported in the week prior to that. The timeline for reported cases is in Figure 1. There have been no recent outbreaks in care homes.

Figure 1. Number of positive cases by day.

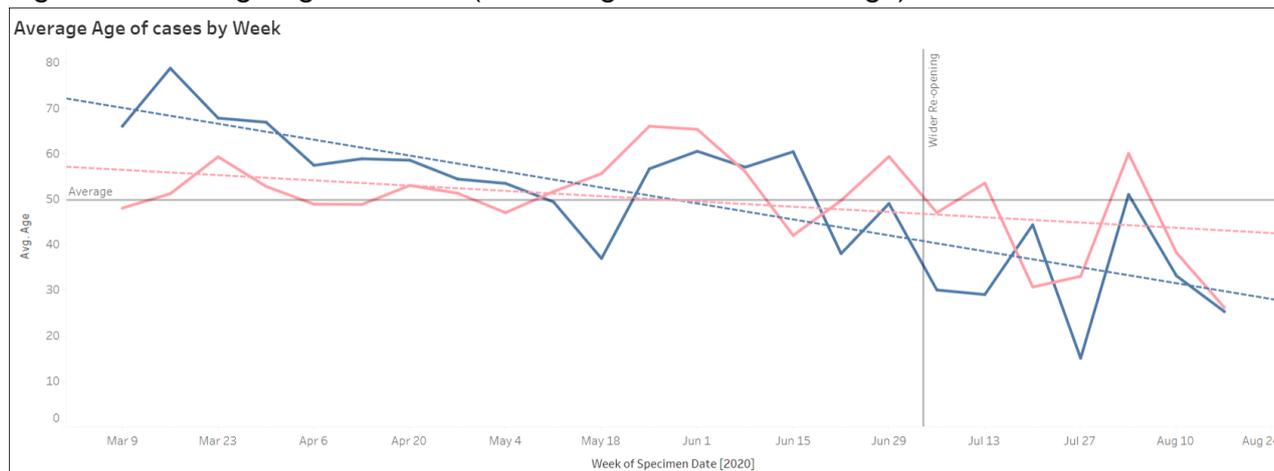


Source: Public Health Covid 19 surveillance dashboard

11. The availability of record level data is improving; LAs are now receiving data on void and negative test results in addition to information about positive tests and their potential contacts. This will enable Public Health Intelligence analysts to identify linkages between specific cases. There are ongoing issues with the quality of the data which continues to be fed back through multiple routes.

12. The average age of cases is reducing and has fallen from 50 in the last week of June to 29 in cases up to 24th August (see Figure 2). This pattern is being seen in other areas.

Figure 2. Average age of cases (excluding care home settings) over time.



Source: Public Health Covid 19 surveillance dashboard

13. There has been some clustering of cases in some areas; a number of the cases are related to linked social groups including holidays overseas; some have a common exposure through local pubs but no clear causative link. A meeting was held with PHE and key staff from public health, public protection and communication teams to discuss emerging cases in the area based on cases, the outcome of the contact tracing process and soft intelligence from the public protection team. Environmental health officers engaged with specific venues to seek assurance around Covid-secure measures in place and to provide advice as part of our immediate response which was accompanied by general communications messages boosted to relevant geographical areas. The council and PHE will continue to monitor new cases.

14. NCC’s Communications team is working to engage the county’s younger residents via boosted social media posts. Youth engagement is emerging as an important strand of the wider Outbreak Prevention and Control communications and engagement strategy and some urgent insight work is required with younger people in their 20s/30s to ascertain the best way of getting messages across and influencing behaviour change. NCC’s communications team are currently working with regional partners to gather evidence of tried and tested approaches to engaging with younger residents with a view to developing a targeted campaign. Identification of age-specific approaches to engaging with complex individuals and across settings has also been highlighted as a potential future area of work for several of the wrap around teams.

Northumberland COVID 19 Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan - Progress Report

Communication and engagement plan

15. The Communications and Engagement Sub Group meets fortnightly. External resources are in place to support the development and delivery of the Outbreak

Prevention and Control Communications and Engagement Plan and to drive forward the mapping of existing stakeholder networks and communications channels. This exercise, while valuable in itself, will also inform the development of a toolkit of communications and engagement resources tailored to the needs of each wrap around group. The toolkit is due to be launched by mid-September.

16. National messaging around hand hygiene and social distancing continues to be shared. In addition, to further boost awareness of the key messages, a local campaign has been developed. Graphics have been developed which will be featured on the Council's website and social media channel. These have also been adapted to maximise the visibility of messaging in local communities; signage developed for lamp posts, bollards, roundabouts, bin wagons etc are currently being installed across the County. The key message is 'Protect yourself, protect others and protect Northumberland.'

17. Targeted engagement with younger residents has been discussed elsewhere in this report and it is likely that this will remain a priority workstream for the Communications and Engagement sub group.

18. Targeted engagement with visitors to Northumberland is also ongoing. In addition to the Tourist Charter already developed and featured on the Visit Northumberland website, specific messaging has been developed to support the engagement of tourists with NHS Test & Trace should they become unwell while on holiday in Northumberland. This will ensure clear guidance is provided to tourists and accommodation providers about how to engage with the Test & Trace system and self-isolate while away from home, and will ensure NCC receives timely information about positive cases amongst visitors.

19. NCC Public Health colleagues are collaborating with PHE and regional colleagues around the development of a 'Train the Trainer' model for raising awareness of key messages and challenging common misconceptions around Covid-19, existing guidelines and measures in place to protect individuals and communities including NHS Test & Trace. Officers are due to participate in an initial training webinar after which a plan will be developed outlining how this model will be rolled out across the County, and how the approach and resources developed can be adapted to engage hard-to-reach groups. In addition to this, an online Champions network is also in development which will enable key messages and alerts to be shared widely across online community networks. The involvement of partners including Northumberland Communities Together and the third sector in the development and rollout of both online and physically-distanced face-to-face Champion models will be crucial.

## Testing

20. Levels of testing continue to increase and the new data on negative tests should enable the identification of variations in uptake. Clear arrangements remain in place for symptomatic and asymptomatic testing in care homes using both local and national mechanisms and for the local testing of individuals in the community prior to entering a care home. Turnaround times for Pillar 2 testing and access to testing kits for care homes remain key issues which are being highlighted on an ongoing basis through a variety of routes. To even out the demand on commercial testing labs, DHSC has asked care homes to consider testing at the weekends.

### Mobile Testing Units (MTUs).

21. Northumberland currently has access to Mobile Testing Units which are dispatched daily from the Regional Testing Centre at Great Park, Newcastle. The MTUs rotate at the following locations:

- County Hall Overflow Car Park, Morpeth
- East Ord, Berwick
- Mart site, Hexham

Residents who are symptomatic are able to book a test online or over the phone and attend the MTU in person. MTUs offer a quicker means of getting tested than home testing and may be the preferred testing route for many residents who have access to a car. MTUs form part of a regional pool of test facilities and may be redeployed to neighbouring localities at short notice as well as providing additional testing capacity in Northumberland via a reciprocal arrangement should the need arise.

### Local Testing Site (LTSs).

22. Looking ahead to winter, the intention is to retain the existing provision of mobile testing across the County. However, as MTUs currently offer predominantly drive-through testing, a Task and Finish Group has been established to identify sites in primary and secondary towns across the county which could host a more enduring Local Testing Site (LTS). LTSs have the potential to significantly expand the provision and uptake of testing across the county, by enabling NCC to adapt the testing model to meet the needs of local communities by, for example, offering pedestrian access to testing in areas of low car ownership. LTSs will be 'winterised', located either in existing buildings or in purpose-built semi-permanent structures.

23. The initial priority of the Task and Finish group is to identify sites in the South East of the County to improve access to testing in the County's most populous areas; officers are currently liaising with DHSC around initial sites identified in Blyth and Ashington. Going forward, the group will work to maximise access to testing and drive up demand for testing across the County through the analysis of record level data and strategic location of LTSs and MTU provision. Planning is also underway to identify a number of standby sites which could accommodate an MTU or 'pop-up' testing site in response to a local surge in cases.

24. A strategy for the deployment of surge testing capacity for the County has been developed which outlines the principles for testing in the event of an outbreak or a localised or wider geographical increase in cases that require action.

#### Wraparound support teams

25. Care homes. The work of the care homes wraparound group is well developed with a 7-day response in place to support care homes with suspected case/s and/or confirmed outbreak/s. The Infection Prevention and Control Service are core to this work, delivering 7-day follow ups to care homes with suspected cases or outbreaks as well as playing an integral role in the initial response. A weekly MDT meeting is in place to further strengthen support to care homes; this group conducts a formal weekly review of all homes with live cases. A range of tools and documentation have been developed to support this work including an issue and outbreak log to track developments and the impact of support from teams including Infection Prevention and Control, and an Infection Prevention and Control training log. All new admissions to care homes are now tested for Covid-19 as standard.

26. Key milestones achieved this month include the successful management of incidents or issues in 15 care homes during August, preventing further escalation and transmission of the virus; sporadic asymptomatic cases in residents and staff are being identified through the whole care homes testing process. The group has provided formal Covid-secure guidance to Adult Social Care teams regarding the reopening of day centres in order to protect service users and staff and the safe reintroduction of care home visiting. Preparation has been undertaken for a surveillance audit of all 69 older peoples' care homes. This is a key element of the prevention strategy so support can be tailored and targeted to those priority care homes. An overarching Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan is in development for the care homes wraparound group which will pull together resources developed to date including Standard Operating Procedures and flowcharts.

27. Key areas of focus over the coming month will include finalising the group's Standard Operating Procedures and flowchart documentation and completion of the Care Homes Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan mentioned above. The group will work to enhance the Infection Prevention and Control training offer to include out of hours and an online learning platform, and develop an outbreak control pocket size contact card with key information for care home staff. The surveillance and prevention questionnaire audit will be completed with all 69 older persons care homes.

28. Ongoing issues and challenges for the care homes wraparound group include ongoing problems with Pillar 2 testing, primarily the recall of RANDOX testing kits and delays in sending out replacement testing kits. The need to implement social distancing has also resulted in a longer than usual timeframe for the roll out of infection prevention and control training to all care home staff. Staff are also continuing to grapple with the multitude of guidance issued in relation to care home settings which in some instances has led to confusion. The timeliness of notification from Public Health England also remains a challenge.

29. Educational settings. Schools and other educational settings in Northumberland are well prepared for reopening in September with a range of Covid-secure measures in place. Schools have risk assessments in place and have received guidance and training from a range of NCC departments including public health, health and safety, human resources and school transport. Procedures for the identification and management of symptomatic children and staff have been developed, and standard operating procedures and FAQ guidance has been developed to support a coordinated response in the event of an outbreak. This suite of guidance and resources including standardised reporting has been rolled out to schools in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of Covid-secure school reopening and a streamlined response to school-related cases across the County. Communication with schools is ongoing to support two-way information sharing over the coming weeks. An intelligence dashboard is also in place which enables NCC to identify any emerging issues in schools and ensure a rapid response is launched to control the situation and mitigate any further transmission. Further scenario planning activities are planned in order to enhance schools' and partners' preparedness to respond to an outbreak.

30. Businesses and workplaces. An action plan has been developed and expanded which sets out the actions necessary to deliver the objectives outlined in Northumberland's Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan for Workplace and Business Support. Weekly meetings of the wraparound group are being held to update and progress the plan, with membership of the group currently under review to ensure appropriate representation, including business representation. Group leads are working closely with the DPH and PHE to ensure workplace and business support is risk-based, proportionate and targeted, and with Northumberland Communities Together to ensure that both employees and the wider community are able to access essential services and support, particularly in rural and vulnerable communities. Links with the Health and Safety Executive have also been forged and a position statement drafted clarifying roles between NCC and the HSE.

Key areas of progress:

- Action cards have been sent to more than 800 businesses in the hospitality sector which offer advice about what to do in case of an outbreak.
- Officers approached a large holiday park company who have agreed to be a Covid-secure business advocate and to assist other businesses as required
- NCC website has been updated to include advice for businesses
- Key staff are working closely with the NE Public Protection network, HSE, and PHE to maintain a timely response to intelligence regarding outbreaks or clusters in the community.

Efforts to be focussed in the next month and key objectives:

- Identifying a cohort of trained staff to attend business premises and provide support in response to an outbreak
- Development of Standard Operating Procedure

- Ensure communication channels between different partners are mapped and strengthened

31. High risk individuals and communities. The high risk consequence/individuals and communities subgroup recently had its third meeting with weekly meetings planned in order to progress this work over the coming months.

Key areas of progress:

- Strong representation from partners working with a range of high risk individuals and communities, ensuring group activities are underpinned by specialist knowledge and local insights
- Identification of core areas of focus for the group's preventative work including targeted communications and pooling of intelligence to support the rapid identification of outbreaks or areas of risk
- Collaboration with external communications partners to map existing communications networks and channels to support the work of the group

Key areas of focus over the next month:

- Reviewing existing partner business continuity plans to identify any new ways of working as organisations transition to 'new normal' operations and resume face-to-face service delivery
- Identifying a Single Point of Contact for all partner organisations
- Working with the Health Protection Board to establish the role of the wrap around group and its partners in response to an outbreak amongst high risk individuals or groups in line with the Standard Operating Procedures currently in development
- Developing a comprehensive mapping of existing stakeholder and communications networks, as well as any existing or planned communications resources with a view to adapting these to engage high risk individuals or groups
- Identifying how existing intelligence can support targeted engagement with high risk individuals and groups to prevent transmission

Ongoing challenges:

- Identifying approaches to engagement with high-risk individuals not already in contact with services, including approaches to pooling informal intelligence
- Identifying the potential input required from specialist services in an Outbreak Control Team

32. High Risk Settings. The Group has now met twice and fortnightly meetings have been scheduled to ensure that work continues to progress effectively. Terms of Reference and core group membership have been agreed.

Key areas of progress:

- Collation of Single Point of Contact details for each organisation / partner to enable effective communication
- Agreement that an Assurance Document be developed to obtain confirmation that business continuity plans are in place and that staff have received relevant information and training
- PHE Action cards for Hostels & Refuge settings have been shared
- Updated Hostel Guidance has been shared with all providers
- Discussion has taken place with external communication resource to agree communications resource requirements and how messages can be disseminated across groups

Key areas of focus over the next month:

- Working with Communications & Engagement Sub-group to develop and share timely and effective communications with both staff and clients
- Developing agreed Assurance Document
- Developing a partnership protocol / agreement to support access to other hostels should an outbreak occur which requires the relocation of residents from one hostel in response to an outbreak

Ongoing challenges:

- Ensuring that communications resources are continuously refreshed to prevent audiences becoming desensitised to messages
- Working with hard to reach groups in high-risk settings where engagement can be challenging
- Capacity of teams to deliver the work required

### Governance and assurance

33. An assurance matrix will be developed as an easy-read tool which will support the COVID 19 Control Board/H&WB to maintain oversight of the delivery of key milestones and objectives within the Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan.

### Summary

34. Significant effort continues to be made to galvanise plans to both prevent and manage an escalation of cases and outbreaks across a wide range of settings in Northumberland whilst also mobilising to effectively manage local outbreaks within the County. This is being done largely via the five wraparound support groups for high risk/high consequence settings, with groups providing specialist input into outbreak response activities. Communication and engagement is a critical component of the outbreak prevention and control plan; continuous refinement and targeting of our communications is important in order to maintain low levels of transmission across the

County. Capacity across the system remains likely to be a challenge if we enter a phase of multiple outbreaks across diverse settings but some additional capacity is being pursued in specific areas. This continues to be a rapidly evolving situation with frequent changes in guidance which may be location specific.

### **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	Kelly Angus
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Jeff watson

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