



Report of: Chief Executive

Meeting of:	Date:	Ward(s):
Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee	30 July 2020	All

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SUBJECT: Chief Executive COVID-19 report briefing

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report follows on from the report presented to the Policy and Performance Committee on 2nd July and provides an update on the council's continued response to the Covid-19 pandemic in Islington.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To consider the update from the Chief Executive on the recovery response to Covid-19 and the on-going mitigation.

3. Overview

- 3.1 In early July, the government announced changes to ease the lockdown restrictions further. The government provided specific guidance notes on a number of areas that have informed our decisions and actions.
- 3.2 As set out in the last update, the Council's GOLD and Silver command structures were activated to respond to government announcements and local issues quickly. These reporting structures will remain in place over the summer period to provide continued resilience.
- 3.3 The Chief Executive continues to provide regular updates covering any national, regional and local Covid-19 developments to members, both at weekly Leadership meetings and by a weekly

update circulated to all members by email.

- 3.4 The council is running a campaign to encourage residents to play their part in keeping Islington safe and well. The 'Do your bit' campaign uses key workers to ask residents to take action in a range of ways including maintaining social distance, being considerate to neighbours and reducing litter.
- 3.5 While the council's response to the pandemic has been robust, it was organised in the face of a fast-evolving emergency. So, we are making sure that we are prepared for the possibility of a second wave of Covid-19. To ensure we are able to respond as quickly and effectively as possible should that happen, over the summer period the council will carry out a learning lessons exercise to identify any opportunities to do things better and to prepare the workforce and residents. We know that our Care Homes are better prepared, but there is much more we can do. The findings of the exercise will be reported at the next Policy and Performance Committee meeting in September.
- 3.6 The Gold and Silver command structure included 11 workstreams. As the Council developed its longer-term approach, the governance has been reviewed and renamed to 'Resilience Strategic Group' and the workstreams have been streamlined. Current workstreams and areas of work that can be scaled up and down in line with Islington's Outbreak Control Plan are as follows:
- Community Response: We are Islington, food distribution and support for vulnerable groups
 - Adult Social Care Crisis Response: Hospital discharge, domiciliary care & care homes
 - Health Protection Group: Public health guidance & advice, testing and contact tracing
 - BECC Coordination: Reporting & returns on staff attendance, COVID-19 sickness, and PPE supplies
 - Homelessness: Securing and finding temporary accommodation, drug, alcohol and mental health support
 - Children and Schools Response: Key workers & vulnerable children in early years & school settings and early years and school's response to Covid-19
 - Cross cutting: Data, evidence and horizon scanning, communications, equalities, finance, redeployment of staff.
- 3.7 The Borough Emergency Control Centre (BECC) remains operational and continues to manage PPE distribution to front-line staff, care home and domiciliary care. The BECC will remain in place for the foreseeable future to manage the co-ordination of the overall response at service level, prepare contingencies for a potential second wave and report to Gold on the situational reporting from services as a whole and more regularly with critical services.
- 3.8 Whilst the majority of staff remain working from home and this remains the default position, work has started to reinstate council services where possible and re-open council buildings if safe to do so and in line with Public Health and Government guidelines. As part of this, we are currently undertaking a programme of Building Risk Assessments for all accommodation and offices in line with core Public Health Guidance regarding health, hygiene, and social distancing.
- 3.9 Individual risk assessments have been developed for staff who will return to the office environment (or who have continued working in the office environment throughout the pandemic) and managers are now completing these for staff in their services. As part of this, managers need to establish any adjustments that may be required to ensure safety at work for all, but especially those who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 for a range of reasons including age, pre-existing health conditions and ethnicity.
- 3.10 Every reasonable effort is being made to comply with social distancing guidelines and the risks mitigated where this is not possible. The council continues to follow the 2m rule in its office accommodation.

- 3.11 All council' buildings will be working at a considerable reduced capacity. To maintain this and to keep everyone safe, the majority of staff will continue to work from home, work on shift rota, and have staggered start and finish times to limit contact between workers.
- 3.12 The Council's Digital Services team have developed an approach for dealing with Track and Trace and they are also evaluating options for an office desk booking system. This Track & Trace data will then be used to assist the NHS Test and Trace if needed to help contact clusters or outbreaks. The council has improved and continues to develop its online offer to enable council services to be accessed online. Alternative contact channels such as the option to video call for appointments is now widely offered to residents.
- 3.13 Equipment requirements e.g. hand sanitiser, and signage have been purchased and social distancing measures are being rolled out across the main council buildings with further work underway on the other council sites. The roll out of equipment is being overseen by the BECC who are managing spend and procurement activities and ensuring Health and Safety procedures are followed.
- 3.14 Following the Government announcement that wearing a face covering will be compulsory in shops and supermarkets from July 24th in a bid to halt the spread of Coronavirus, GOLD have taken the decision to purchase reusable face coverings for use by staff where required, such as staff who will be entering shops or residents' homes.
- 3.15 Staff are receiving regular updates on the latest national guidance and support for staff in the workplace via the council's intranet, "izzi", and through weekly bulletins. Managers are receiving targeted information through 'Managers Update' to ensure they have access to the most update to date guidance and advice.
- 3.16 Monthly staff surveys have been sent to all staff since the start of the pandemic to track employee wellbeing, check in on health and temperature check how the workforce is adjusting to the "new normal" such as home working.
- 3.17 **The June survey results showed:**
- 29% of people feel ok and hopeful, 20% feel okay and positive and 7% of people are feeling very worried or upset with 65% stating they feel broadly okay.
- 3.18 There are no significant differences in how people are feeling across directorates, ethnicities, genders and between carers and non-carers. However, there is a significantly higher prevalence of feeling very worried and upset amongst LGBTQIA employees compared to heterosexual employees, and amongst staff who have a long-term illness or disability compared to those who don't.
- 3.19 Focus groups are being arranged with LGBTQIA and disabled staff to discuss to see if there is any targeted support we can put in place and updates on this will be shared when available.
- 3.20 We Are Islington continues to offer assistance for anyone who is vulnerable or self-isolating - including food drops, medicine collection and other practical support. The service also responds to a range of other Covid-19 related enquiries including parking, council tax etc, as well as being responsible for checking the well-being of shielded residents identified as vulnerable by the NHS, ensuring their basic needs are met. It also brings together a range of Council and community services under a 'single umbrella' of support, connecting residents with volunteers and a range of services organised in partnership with local charities, community organisations and mutual aid groups.
- 3.21 Since 21 March 2020, We Are Islington has received and dealt with over 11,060 calls and emails. This includes support for more than 2,620 local people in need of food, nearly 500 asking for medicine and 7520 in need of financial support. In addition, around 250 requests for wellbeing support have been made to the helpline, which has also helped with four reports of domestic violence.

- 3.22 In addition, the service has also supported over 7,000 shielded residents, as well as making proactive contact with other vulnerable residents known to the Council including 680 Leasehold and Freehold residents and 50 residents at Crowfield House.
- 3.23 Whilst the demand for services is reducing as the lockdown is eased, We Are Islington will continue to provide support for vulnerable residents and those identified as in need as part of the rest and trace system for the remainder of the year and remains vigilant and ready to respond to any future needs that may arise.

4 Health Impact

- 4.1 In Islington the number of new cases per day has continued to follow an overall declining trend since mid-April and since May 20 has plateaued to an average of between 0 and 1 new cases per day. There were 6 new cases reported between 6 - 12 July 2020. This is in line with regional and national trends.
- 4.2 The number of deaths in Islington peaked during the week of the 4th - 10th April at 42 deaths and has fallen steadily since. Locally and regionally deaths from Covid-19 are now at very low levels and non-Covid-19 deaths are now what would be expected for this time of the year.
- 4.3 Nationally, the latest R (reproduction rate) is 0.7-0.9, with a slightly higher estimated regional R for London of 0.8-1.1. A rate greater than 1 indicates an exponential increase in number of infections, however low case numbers and a high degree of variability in transmission across London means this estimate is insufficiently robust to inform policy decisions.

4.4 Suppression of the virus

- 4.5 In order to continue to contain and suppress the virus, effective and system wide arrangements need to be adopted and maintained. We have been working to implement the full range of preventative and social distancing measures in our services, those of our partners, businesses, organisations and communities and ensure sustained adoption of and adherence to the necessary behaviours across all these settings. This continues to be a council wide focus both internally and externally, and resources are being disseminated to give guidance and clarity on necessary measures. As the pandemic moves through this phase we expect to continue to see an easing of lockdown measures including increased opening of businesses, travel at home and abroad, socialising between households, and the end to shielding.
- 4.6 This environment will present more challenges in relation to social distancing behaviour and existing health risks and inequalities. This includes increased risk of community transmission, with the potential to coincide with previously highlighted seasonal changes such as the impact of the usual seasonal flu, the shift in behaviour to more time being spent inside, and an increased risk of social isolation in winter. A greater than usual focus on flu vaccination will be required during this period.

4.7 Entering new phases of lockdown

- 4.8 Although levels of Covid-19 infections and deaths are very low in Islington, the easing of lockdown does come with a risk of a resurgence of Covid-19. Successful easing, particularly in settings where some social distancing measures are not possible or that involve larger groups of people, will be dependent on continued monitoring and an evolving understanding of cases and outbreaks in Islington's population, as well as the more general progression of the epidemic in subsequent phases.
- 4.9 This continues to be important to monitor and understand both on a local and regional level. Local access to data is improving. Cumulatively over time, as of 12th of July, there have been a total of 18 situations in higher risk settings in Islington:- 15 in care homes, 2 in a custodial setting and 1 in a work place setting. In the most recent week of available data (Week 28, w/c 6th July), there were been no new situations, outbreaks or clusters of concern reported in higher risk settings in Islington.

4.10 Outbreak control

- 4.11 The rapid identification, response to and management of local outbreaks remains crucial to the control and suppression of COVID-19 during this phase, as life begins to return to a more normal footing. Islington Council, along with all upper tier Local Authorities, has developed an Outbreak Control Plan, which sets out the systems we have established, in collaboration with our partners, to enable us to prevent and contain the spread of the virus and to investigate, manage and control local outbreaks, with a focus on our part in the testing and tracing system.
- 4.12 A peer review of outbreak plans with other North Central London boroughs and Public Health England, supported by London ADPH, is currently being undertaken to ensure local plans are robust and to share best practice. Engaging our communities in this work, and tailoring our local arrangements, communication and support to respond to the needs of our local population continues to be essential to the effectiveness of local Outbreak Control. Key to this is improving local awareness and understanding of NHS Test and Trace, including when and how to get a test. A Test and Trace Communications and Engagement group has been established to oversee the implementation of this local COVID-19 communications and engagement plan.

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 The estimated in-year shortfall remains very uncertain, as the situation is continually changing based on Government guidance and emerging actual cost data. The monthly budget monitoring report to the Executive on 16 July 2020 provides an of these estimates and considers the 2020/21 budget position in detail.
- 5.2 However, since that report was produced, we have been notified of a further grant allocation. The total grant received is now £18.5m.
- 5.3 Any shortfall not funded by central government would weaken the Council's balance sheet and reserves, which would need to be replenished in future financial years.

6 Workforce Impacts

- 6.1 Public Health analysts continue to report on staff working from home, on site, or unable to and will continue to provide these updates for the foreseeable future to enable us to meet internal and London-wide reporting responsibilities.
- 6.2 Workforce overview
- 6.3 The percent of staff reported as unable to work reached a high point of 23% on 3 April and 7 April, but has been decreasing subsequently, reaching a low point of 11.5% on 5 May and 3 June. As of July 14th, the latest data available, the proportion of staff unable to work has increased to 12.4% unable to work.
- 6.4 The percent of staff reported as working on site was around a quarter (25%) of staff in early April but has subsequently increased to just over a third of staff working on site in June. As of July 14th the number of staff working on site is similar to June at about 30%.
- 6.5 The percent of staff reported as working from home has been between 50% and 60% of staff between 2 April and 19 June. As of July 14th the picture remains similar to the previous 2 months with 55% staff reported to be working from home.
- 6.6 On average, 78% of critical services reported performing as normal (1) between 2 April and 19 June, this has decreased to approximately 70% as of July 14th.
- 6.7 As of July 14th the impact of non-critical services is similar to that as between April and June with an average of 57% of services reporting performing as normal (1) and 34% of services reporting performing at a reduce service (2) between 2 April and 19 June.

According to the most recently reported figures on 14th July, 193 members of staff have been tested for Covid-19.

7 Welfare Response: Universal Credit

7.1 The increase in residents claiming universal credit during the COVID19 period has started to level off in recent weeks. There are now 27,965 live claims for universal credit across the two Islington job centres, with the split being 16288 at Barnsbury job centre and 11,677 at Finsbury job centre. This is an increase in universal credit claims of 109% on the pre-COVID19 figure on 11 March 2020 of 13,356 universal credit claims in Islington.

7.2 There were 22,800 Islington residents furloughed and 7,900 residents on the self-employment income support scheme on the 31 May 2020.

7.3 The Government has provided local authorities in England with £500m of grant funding to support economically vulnerable people and households in their local area. Islington's slice of the grant funding is £3,879,455. The Government's expectation is that billing authorities will provide all recipients of working age local council tax support during the financial year 2020/21 with a further reduction in their annual council tax bill of up to £150, using discretionary powers to reduce the liability of council tax payers in addition to our formal local council tax support scheme design.

7.4 We have implemented the COVID19 hardship fund, providing all working age local council tax support recipients during 2020/21 with an up to £150 additional rebate on their council tax bill. As at the 17 July 2020 we have allocated £2,309,744.15 of the grant money as a rebate to Islington residents council tax bills. During the remainder of 2020/21 all new working age claimants of council tax support will receive the up to £150 rebate on their council tax bills.

7.5 The Residents Support Scheme has continued to help residents with the unprecedented challenges of COVID19. Those facing financial hardship have been able to access extended crisis support through the Residents Support Scheme. During the COVID19 period, 985 crisis awards have been made, totalling £146k of support to Islington residents facing severe financial hardship up to 17 July 2020. The crisis award includes information and signposting for residents to help improve their situation.

7.6 A benefit take-up campaign has been launched to encourage residents to claim benefit income they are entitled to. Communication has gone out across our media channels to promote claiming of pension credit and to raise awareness of the change to free TV licences from 1 August 2020. We have analysed our own benefits data to identify and write to 444 residents who are potentially entitled to pension credit. If all 444 residents could claim pension credit, our data suggests the potential additional income would be worth £1,339,488 annually to these residents, plus within this group, 143 residents would be entitled to a free tv licence worth a saving of over £22k. Further follow up communication is planned with this group.

7.7 We continue to engage with residents that have moved on to universal credit but are not in receipt of council tax support. The communication with this group encourages a claim for council tax support to ensure they receive this benefit if they are entitled.

7.8 The actions described in our welfare response forms part of our economic well-being offer, providing financial assistance that will help residents move towards financial stability, ensuring a basic and stable income to meet everyday living costs.

8 Employment Support

8.1 The impact of the depressed labour market on young people can be seen in recent unemployment data, with the number of 18-24 year olds claiming out of work benefits increasing from 825 in March 2020 to 1,920 in June.

8.2 Youth Employment and Progress teams are leading work to ensure there is responsive support in place for those leaving education or transitioning from secondary school to further education or

training. The service is planning for a phased return to face to face work in August, to support those who are most at risk of becoming NEET. Intensive efforts are underway with schools and City and Islington College to ensure young people at risk have a place in place for Sept.

8.3 The new targeted employability and skills programme for NEET 18-25yr olds comes into operation from September. Furthermore, the youth employment network convened by the council is looking at ways in which it can scale-up its collective reach.

8.4 The government has recently announced plans for a number of new initiatives to tackle the increase in youth unemployment. Employers will be incentivised to offer apprenticeships and traineeships, while the 'Kickstart' programme will fund jobs for up to 6 months at national minimum wage for 16-24 year olds. While we are awaiting further detail on these initiatives, we have begun conversations with local businesses to explore options for a local model that would benefit young people, while still providing the pre and post-employment support that many young people need. Colleagues in HR are also looking at opportunities to enhance the existing council apprenticeship and pre-employment offer.

8.5 Following Islington Job Centres' successful promotion of the iWork offer to new UC claimants, targeted communications have been sent to Council housing tenants who have recently claimed universal credit with a good response for residents.

8.6 A targeted approach is underway to support recent rough sleepers, currently housed in local hotels, in partnership with Central London Forward. There is a further focus to connect BAME residents with local employment services, events and initiatives, including a newly established BAME employment network.

8.7 We continue to work proactively with employers and the Proud to Care Recruitment campaign, placing residents in work in the Health and Adult Social care sector. In total our partnership work with our Social Care commissioners and the GP Federation has generated 65 job offers for local residents, with 50 of these being secured since June 1st, and more vacancies still coming through. We are particularly pleased that so many local GP surgeries are now beginning to look for help with recruiting non clinical staff.

8.8 The Islington Working bulletin continues to be sent out twice-weekly to over 4,400 recipients and offers an up to date snapshot of employment events or initiatives, as well as vacancies currently available.

8.9 The iWork construction team have been working closely with contractors and partners to ensure that none of the 56 residents currently apprenticed in the sector, will lose their jobs or drop out due to the impact of the Covid19 lockdown.

9 **Legal Implications:**

9.1 The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 provide for the Council to give Directions relating to individual premises, events and public outdoor events. A Direction may be given only if the authority considers that all the following 3 conditions are met : that the Direction responds to a serious and imminent threat to public health; that the Direction is necessary; and that it is proportionate.

10 **Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon Islington by 2030:**

10.1 The aim is to reduce the Islington's carbon emissions to net zero by 2030 meaning that a net zero carbon strategy is the single most important one in terms of environmental implications. During the lockdown period we have seen some positive impacts with respect to net zero carbon:

- 10.2 Islington's first people-friendly street has been created in St Peter's Ward to allow more space to walk safely, cycle as part of everyday life, use buggies or wheelchairs and cross roads. A number of inexpensive measures will stop rat-running through the area's streets while keeping access for cyclists, emergency vehicles, trades vehicles, and local people who need cars.
- 10.3 Work is underway with Camden Council to create temporary cycle lanes along York Way between Hungerford Road and Wharfdale Road which has been as a high-priority cycle route during the coronavirus crisis.
- 10.4 The social distancing measure around schools has now been removed and is being replaced with an accelerated rollout of the school street programme with a further 26 schools set to benefit by the end of the year.
- 10.5 The Environment and Regeneration department are working with TFL to transform Old Street and Clerkenwell Road to create a corridor which give priority to people walking, cycling and using public transport.
- 10.6 We will be reviewing the social distancing requirements in light of the governments changes in the licensing regulations for licensed premises.

11 **Resident Impact Assessment:**

- 11.1 The evidence is clear that the impact of Covid-19, and the negative health, financial and social impacts are not felt equally across Islington or nationally. Preventing and reducing further disproportionate impacts, ensuring we protect the health of our BAME residents and staff, and preventing further exacerbation of existing health, social and economic inequalities, will require a clear and consistent focus on the equity impacts of the interventions and measures we take in this phase, as well as requiring targeted action and work to support and protect the most impacted groups.
- 11.2 Locally it appears that there is variation between population groups in terms of awareness and understanding of key public health messages and actions, that myths and misinformation gain traction, and that some communities experience or exhibit higher levels of mistrust, fear or anxiety. Strategic communication planning is crucial to remove barriers to accessing accurate information for all residents across the borough.
- 11.3 Challenging inequality will remain a key priority for the council and we are establishing a new corporate programme in this space with a key focus on improving race equality and responding to the disproportionate impacts of Covid-19.
- 11.4 This new programme, which will report into the member-led Race Equality Working Group, will develop and oversee delivery of a clear programme of action across every Council department and beyond, so that in our role as an employer, a strategic leader and as a service provider we are leading the way in ensuring a fairer future for Islington.

12. **Conclusion**

- 12.1 The Council continues to respond robustly to the scale of the crisis and has moved to support the Islington community and workforce to return to a new form of normality. There will be a continued focus to support communities most affected by the pandemic and address the inequalities that have been exposed throughout the crisis.
- 12.2 The Council will continue to work in partnership with communities, staff and key partners to actively rebuild a Fairer Islington for all, and will undertake a lesson learned review to capture the learning, to manage any local outbreaks if they occur and continue to deliver within the budget and health detail set out in this report.

Signed by:

Date 21 July 2020

Report Author: Linzi Roberts-Egan
Tel:
Email:

Financial Implications Author: Steve Key
Tel:
Email:

Legal Implications Author: Peter Fehler
Tel:
Email:
