

People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

9th March 2020

Present Councillor Liddle, (in the chair), Councillors Afzal, Parwaiz Akhtar, Jane Oates, Jacqueline Slater, Julie Slater, Dave Smith, Ron Whittle and Julie Gunn,

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting including the invited guests to receive a briefing on the way that the Council and its partners were dealing with the Corona virus and the preparedness of the borough to face the challenges it would have to face. The Chair informed the meeting that due to the issue of covid19 the agenda had been revised and the other issues for consideration by the committee would now be considered at a future meeting.

2. Covid 19

The Committee received a briefing from the Director of Public Health supported by health partners and providers on the current situation regarding the Covid-19 virus.

The Committee were informed that a coronavirus is a type of virus of a group, coronaviruses common across the world. Typical symptoms of coronavirus include fever and a cough that may progress to a severe pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan City, China

Generally, coronavirus can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

Given that there is currently neither a vaccine against COVID-19 nor any specific, proven, antiviral medication, most treatment will comprise managing symptoms and providing support to patients with complications.

The majority of people with COVID-19 have recovered without the need for any specific treatment and the vast majority of cases will best be managed at home, as is the case for the common cold or seasonal flu.

The Committee were updated on the actions being taken to deal with the pandemic.

1. Government action:

The committee were informed that the government states that UK is well prepared for disease outbreaks, having responded to a wide range of infectious disease outbreaks in the recent past, and having undertaken significant preparedness work for an influenza pandemic for well over one decade. Plans are regularly tested and updated locally and nationally to ensure they are fit for purpose. This experience provides the basis for an effective response to COVID-19.

Planning draws on the idea of a “reasonable worst case (RWC)” scenario. This is not a forecast of what is most likely to happen, but will ensure we are ready to respond to a range of scenarios.

[The Health Protection \(Coronavirus\) Regulations 2020](#) have been put in place to reduce the risk of further human-to-human transmission in this country by keeping individuals in isolation where public health professionals believe there is a reasonable risk an individual may have the virus.

On 10 February, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock, announced [strengthened legal powers to protect public health](#).

On 3rd March the government published its [coronavirus action plan](#) setting out;

- What we know about the virus and the disease it causes
- How the government has planned for an infectious disease outbreak, such as this
- The actions taken so far in response to the current coronavirus outbreak
- Next steps, depending upon the course the current coronavirus outbreak takes
- The role the public can play in supporting this response, now and in the future

The fundamental objectives are to deploy phased actions to **Contain, Delay, and Mitigate** the outbreak, using **Research** to inform policy development, as described below. The different phases, type and scale of actions depends upon how the outbreak unfolds over time.

- **Contain:** detect early cases, follow up close contacts, and prevent the disease taking hold in this country for as long as is reasonably possible
- **Delay:** slow the spread in this country, if it does take hold, lowering the peak impact and pushing it away from the winter season
- **Mitigate:** provide the best care possible for people who become ill, support hospitals to maintain essential services and ensure ongoing support for people ill in the community to minimise the overall impact of the disease on society, public services and on the economy.
- **Research – cross cutting:** to better understand the virus and actions that will lessen its effect; innovate responses including diagnostics, drugs and vaccines; and inform models of care

2. Local response arrangements:

the committee were then informed that local response arrangements will vary depending on the phase of the disease response. During the **Containment** Phase Public Health England (PHE) will be the key partner responsible for many of the response arrangements including the following;

- The local Health Protection Team will notify the Director of Public Health of any confirmed case of COVID-19 in Blackburn with Darwen.
- PHE will be responsible for carrying out contact tracing and taking any appropriate public health action required following a confirmed case.
- If deemed necessary, PHE may convene an incident management team meeting of key stakeholders including the DPH following the Multi-agency Outbreak Management Plan
- The Council will be key in ensuring effective communication with the public

The Lancashire Resilience Forum (LRF) has convened a multi-agency Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG). This met on 3rd March and will hold weekly meetings every

Tuesday. All category 1 responders under the Civil Contingencies Act such as police, local authorities, PHE and the NHS participate in these meetings. A Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG) for Lancashire is also being set up. The SCG is also establishing a communications cell and business continuity cell.

The NHS has also stepped up its response arrangements. On 3rd March the NHS has declared COVID-19 a level 4 incident. The Council is working with the Pennine CCGs and East Lancashire Hospitals Trust to ensure joined up planning and response arrangements.

Plans for the Councils annual corporate emergency planning/business continuity exercise, already scheduled for 26th March, are being updated to further support and develop our local response.

The committee were informed of the role the public were encouraged to take in supporting the response.

An effective response to COVID-19 requires the active participation of all partners, including a well-informed public. Everyone can help support our response by:

- Maintaining good hand, respiratory and personal hygiene
 - Wash hands often with soap and water following [NHS guidelines on good hand hygiene](#)
 - Use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
 - Avoid close contact with people who are sick
 - If you feel unwell, stay at home, do not attend work or school
 - Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, throw the tissue in a bin. See [Catch it, Bin it, Kill it](#)
 - Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces at home and work
- Reducing the impact and spread of misinformation by sharing and using information from trusted sources, such as those set out in Appendix 1 of this document
- Checking and following the latest Foreign and Commonwealth travel advice when travelling and planning to travel
- Ensuring that vaccinations are up to date as this will help reduce the pressure on the NHS through reducing vaccine-preventable diseases
- Checking on elderly or vulnerable family, friends and neighbours
- If you are worried about your symptoms, please call NHS 111. **Do not go directly to your GP or other healthcare environment**
- Being understanding of the pressures the health and social care systems may be under, and receptive to changes that may be needed to the provision of care
- Accepting that the current advice for managing COVID-19 for most people will be self-isolation at home and simple over the counter medicines
- Checking for new advice as the situation changes.

Members were informed that the situation was changing on a daily basis and was being led by the government and Public Health England. The guidance coming out was shaping the Councils direction and advice. Key partners of the Council had been invited to attend the briefing to enable a full discussion to take place and a sharing of information and advice. These partners included the Hospital Trust and The CCG who were on the front line in treatment of people with the virus. The wider partners who attended included the Hive Business Group, Lancashire Council of Mosques, the Shopping Mall, Blackburn Bid etc These partners were key to the day to day life of the borough.

The Committee looked at the potential impact of the virus and the current advice and guidance. They also examined the way in which the council was disseminating information and advice and how we as an authority were working with partners to keep the community safe. The Committee looked at the key messages that were being shared and put forward a number of recommendations that seek to ensure that the citizens of the borough were as aware of the issue as possible.

RESOLVED-

- 1 That the Director of Public Health and partners be thanked for the briefing on the Covid-19 issue.
2. That the Council seek to ensure that the residents of the borough are as well informed as possible on the information given out by Public Health England and that this information be delivered in as population friendly way as possible taking account of cultural and social need. The Committee would recommend that the information and advice be up front on the Council website and include information on symptoms, preventative measures such as washing hands over 5 times a day with soap and what to do and who to ring if you have any symptoms. All available help line numbers to be included on the Council's web front page.
3. That all members and key partners be kept up to date either through briefing sessions or guidance on a regular basis and on the emerging information that is issued.
4. That the potential issues for that could arise for care of the vulnerable residents be noted at this stage and that members be kept informed of the developing guidance on the situation

3. Work of the Executive Member for Adults Neighbourhoods and Prevention

The Committee received a detailed presentation on the work of the Executive Member for Adults and Neighbourhoods and Prevention and performance against the key priorities of the Council as agreed at the Policy Council. The difficulties in meeting demand were outlined together with the resource implications that the portfolio and the council as a whole faced. The Executive Member undertook to give regular updates to the committee on progress towards achieving the key objectives.

RESOLVED-

That the presentation of the progress towards key objectives for the portfolio be noted and the Executive Member be requested to report back to the committee on a regular basis on the issue.

Chair at the meeting at which the minutes were signed.....

Date.....