

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

DATE: 20 JULY 2021

REPORT OF: MR TIM OLIVER, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

LEAD OFFICER: MICHAEL COUGHLIN, DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

SUBJECT: COVID-19: SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL – UPDATE, REVIEW AND LESSONS LEARNED (UPDATED REPORT)

ORGANISATION STRATEGY PRIORITY AREA: GROWING A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY SO EVERYONE CAN BENEFIT/ TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITY/EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES



SUMMARY OF ISSUE:

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Surrey County Council has taken a leading role in the ongoing local response; ensuring our residents are protected and well-supported throughout these unprecedented times. The pandemic continues to disproportionately impact communities across Surrey and responding to this effectively and helping communities to recover is critical to tackling health inequalities across the county.

As we move into the final stage of the Government's planned roadmap for easing restrictions, this report sets out the latest Public Health information about COVID-19 and updates Cabinet on the strategic and sensitive issues arising from the extensive response and recovery work going on across Surrey. In summarising the mission, scale and reach of the council's response to date, this report highlights key lessons learned over the course of the pandemic.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Acknowledges the impact that COVID-19 has had and continues to have on Surrey, its residents and economy and the services provided by the Council.
2. Notes and endorses the actions being delivered through Surrey's Local Outbreak Control Plan, including the vaccination roll out, and the ongoing support to vulnerable residents, including through the council's Community Helpline and the COVID-19 Winter Support Grant scheme.
3. Reviews and comments on the lessons learned derived from a review by the Surrey Local Resilience Forum and County Council on the response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

The recommendations set out in this report ensure that the Cabinet are appraised of the scope, detail and learning from our response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic to date.

DETAILS:

Public Health Update

COVID-19 Response – Spring 2021 Plan

1. On 22 February 2021, the Government published a four-step plan for easing national restrictions and thus ending the national lockdown. On 14 June 2021, the Government announced that step four would be delayed until 19 July, due to the prevalence of a more transmissible 'Delta' variant, resulting in a significant rise in COVID-19 case rates. This delay allowed for an acceleration of the vaccination programme, which remains an effective means of reducing hospitalisations and deaths for the virus.

COVID-19 Surveillance

2. The County Council's Public Health team continue to hold data surveillance meetings three times a week to ensure prompt action is taken in line with Surrey's Local Outbreak Control Plan. The [Weekly Coronavirus Full Summary Report](#) (published every Friday) and [Coronavirus Short Summary Report](#) (published Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays) provide regular updates on COVID-19 rates in Surrey. Data published on 23 June 2021, at the time of writing, indicates that between 14 June 2021 and 20 June 2021, 62.3 cases per 100,000 population were recorded in Surrey. This rate is lower when compared with England, 103.1 per 100,000 population.

Local Outbreak Control Plan

3. Surrey's [Local Outbreak Control Plan](#) has been updated and re-published to reflect the COVID-19 Response – Spring 2021 plan and the revised COVID-19 Contain Framework, as well as local progress and developments. The following actions aligned to the plan which have recently taken place include:
 - **Testing**
Full details on COVID-19 testing in Surrey are available [here](#). There is also a new [NHS webpage](#) for COVID-19 testing.
 - **Symptomatic Testing**
Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, new continuous cough, loss of sense of taste or smell) can access [PCR testing](#) at regional testing sites, local testing sites, mobile testing units or through home delivery. The Surrey Testing Cell continues to assist with the provision of PCR testing upon request for specific priority groups if needed. [GPs](#) and [children's homes](#) continue to be able to order PCR testing kits if needed.
 - **Symptom-free Testing**
All adults and secondary age school children are recommended to use rapid lateral flow testing twice weekly. Plans for the extension of the local authority led Targeted Community Testing programme in Surrey were submitted to the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) on 23 June 2021. This re-submission is for the period of July to September 2021, but it is expected that the community testing programme will be extended until at least March 2022 with three-monthly re-submissions to the DHSC. Local authorities have been asked to focus on testing methods that best reach underrepresented and disproportionately impacted individuals and communities.
 - **Surge Testing**
On 18 June 2021, the Surrey Local Resilience Forum (SLRF) commenced surge testing in Banstead, Walton-on-the-hill, Tattenham Corner and Reigate town centre, with the official 'surge' period (i.e. sequencing of all PCR test results from within these

areas) continuing until 9 July 2021. This programme identified an increasing proportion of identified cases as the Delta variant, which is more transmissible than the Alpha (Kent) strain and may also be associated with an increased risk of hospitalisation for those who have not been fully vaccinated. The Surrey County Council (SCC) Public Health team will continue to work with Public Health England (PHE) to assist in the investigation and management of variants under investigation (VUI) and variants of concern (VOC) as required, with the support of the SLRF.

- **Local Contact Tracing**

Between 3 June and 9 June 2021, the national and local contact tracing teams combined in England reached 92% of cases. Between 7 June and 13 June 2021, Surrey's Local Contact Tracing team contacted 98% of cases demonstrating that Surrey are continuing to reach more cases than the national average. The Environmental Health Officers in Surrey continue to support with face to face contact tracing for those cases that cannot be reached by telephone.

- **Schools**

Surrey County Council's Public Health and Education teams continue to provide support to education settings across Surrey. COVID-19 mitigation measures are well established in Surrey's education settings, and twice weekly symptom-free testing continues to be strongly encouraged for those eligible as well as vaccinations for staff who are eligible. In response to increasing cases within the 11-16 age group, schools have been asked by Public Health England to advise contacts of PCR positive cases, to have a PCR test themselves. National guidance and advice from local expert partners are communicated regularly and planning for end of term remains a focus, particularly transition days for year six.

- **Care Homes**

The Care Homes COVID-19 Outbreak Oversight Group continues to meet fortnightly to provide oversight of current COVID-19 outbreaks in care homes and co-ordination of system response in line with national guidance. In the event of an outbreak in a care home, window and pod visits do not now necessarily need to stop. The isolation period for a home has been reduced from 28 days to 14 days from the last positive or suspected case unless specific variants of concern have been identified when it will be extended to 28 days. From 22 June 2021, new residents admitted from the community do not need to self-isolate if they satisfy the specified requirements. Self-isolation for staff has changed from 14 days to 10 days, in line with national policy.

- **Managed Quarantine Service (MQS)**

Currently there are two hotels in Surrey under the [Managed Quarantine Service](#) (MQS) which is delivered by DHSC. Public Health and Emergency Planning colleagues are working with the DHSC and partner agencies including NHS and D&Bs to implement the MQS for anyone who has travelled from, or passed through, a country on the '[red list](#)'.

- **Community (COVID) Champions**

The Community (COVID) Champions programme continues to be delivered in nine out of eleven boroughs and districts within Surrey (planning is underway to develop a scheme in Woking). The role of Community (COVID) Champions is to share accurate, reliable, and current information on COVID-19 among their local communities. SCC Public Health team continues to produce a weekly briefing which covers local/national data and guidance, testing and vaccinations, and current COVID-19 related public health topics. The briefing is sent to the Community (COVID) Champions Coordinators in the local borough/district, who then circulate it to the champions to cascade on to their networks and local communities. Regular borough/district led webinars are held, in order allow champions to feedback any intelligence or insights they have about the

local community. SCC Public Health team are in the process of planning phase two of the programme.

COVID-19 Vaccination Roll-out

4. Full details on the COVID-19 vaccinations in Surrey are available in the [Weekly Coronavirus Full Summary Report](#) (pages 56-65). NHS England data on daily and weekly uptake of vaccinations can be found [here](#).
- **Surrey Heartlands**
Between 8 December 2020 and 13 June 2021 (data published 17 June), Surrey Heartlands Health and Care Partnership delivered a total of 1,160,015 COVID-19 vaccinations, of which 684,350 were first doses. As at 13 June 2021, 76% of the adult population (18 years and over) had received a first dose and 53% had received a second dose..
- **Frimley**
Between 8 December 2020 and 13 June 2021 (data published 17 June), Frimley Health and Care ICS administered a total of 800,491 COVID-19 vaccinations, of which 472,936 were first doses. Vaccination of cohorts 5-9 was completed by the target date of 15 April 2021, with the offer of vaccination made to everyone in these groups, and an overall uptake percentage of 81%. The offer of vaccination remains open to anyone in Cohorts 1-9 who has yet to take it up, and sites are redoubling efforts to attract remaining people in these cohorts.

Easing of COVID-19 Restrictions

5. On Monday 12th July, the Prime Minister announced the measures to be put in place as England moves to the final Step 4 of the Roadmap on 19 July.
6. Most legal restrictions will be lifted, with the emphasis instead on new guidance and personal responsibility. The new guidance focuses on reducing risks to ourselves and those around us by practising safe behaviours (e.g. although face coverings will no longer be mandatory, the Government is now encouraging that they are worn in in enclosed and crowded spaces, such as public transport). There is also guidance for people who are clinically extremely vulnerable. On 16 August, there will be another change to the rules on self-isolating as a contact, which will alter for people who are fully vaccinated, and for under 18s. Those not fully vaccinated will still need to isolate if they are contacts, and everyone will still have to isolate if they test positive, to protect themselves and others. The Government has announced it will undertake a further review in September, examining whether to continue or strengthen public and business guidance as we approach the winter. This review will touch on face coverings and test, trace and isolate, as well as the remaining regulations.
7. Having regard to the national guidance, after careful consideration and guided by the Council's own Public Health team the Council will be taking a proportionate and cautious approach for the time being, which will remain under review in case circumstances change. This approach, in summary, will see the Council:
 - Encourage a gradual return to work settings for those who have previously been working from home
 - Issue more specific guidance reflecting the detail of the Government's position as it relates to individual services
 - Continue to mandate safe hygiene practices when working in and around SCC and other offices, venues and with customers and clients. This includes washing

- hands with soap and water and/ or using hand sanitiser regularly and covering your nose and mouth when coughing/ sneezing
- Maintain enhanced Covid-secure cleaning routines in offices
 - Maximise ventilation at sites and in offices – consider outdoor meetings e.g. walking 1:1s
 - Monitor and encourage vaccination take-up – including 2nd doses
 - Continue to advocate twice-weekly routine testing for those without symptoms
 - Require staff in higher risk categories e.g. if they are pregnant, BAME staff, Clinically Vulnerable, Clinically Extremely Vulnerable, or unvaccinated to continue to have an up-to-date Risk Assessment to work in an SCC office or work setting .

The Council's COVID-19 Ops Group

8. The SCC COVID-19 Ops Group was established from 16th March 2020, in advance of the major incident being declared by the Surrey Local Resilience Forum (SLRF) on 19th March 2020. A project management office was established to provide rigorous project management and executive support to the Ops Group chairperson. The group was initially chaired by Ruth Hutchinson (Director of Public Health), before Rachel Crossley (then Director of Strategic Commissioning) assume chairing responsibilities from April 2020 until October 2020. Katie Stewart (Executive Director for Environment Transport and Infrastructure and Corporate Lead for SCC Corporate Resilience) took over as chair of the Ops Group from October 2020 until June 2021.
9. Throughout its operation, the Ops Group met to monitor key activity, actions, and risks to support the Response. An Ops Group Brief was established to ensure key stakeholders, including the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), members and partners, were kept up to date with all relevant information and data, including the number of COVID-19 cases. Services also fed into a reporting tool to highlight any issues, escalations, and top line updates to help inform decision-making at Ops Group and CLT.
10. As a result of the Government's three tier system coming into force from 14th October, followed by a second full national lockdown on 5th November 2020, Ops Group led a key exercise in November 2020 to review the delivery of service activities. This helped understand service capacity, the implications on service delivery and whether any modifications were needed.
11. The third national lockdown on 6th January 2021 led to CLT and Cabinet focus resource on providing support to SCC critical services, as well as to the SLRF SCG key priorities, to protect the NHS and support mass vaccination and community testing programmes. To this end, Ops Group identified what services could slow, reduce, or pause some workstreams, in order to divert resource and informed stakeholders of potential impacts and risks. This work was then presented to CLT and Cabinet for a formal decision week commencing 11th January 2021.
12. The Ops Group focused on supporting the SLRF Community Testing and Mass Vaccination programmes, in the first few months of 2021. Working with service leads, it coordinated SCC staff lists to ensure that staff groups eligible for the vaccination, as per the prioritisation set by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, were provided the opportunity to receive it. A working group reporting into Ops Group was established to develop a council-wide offer for asymptomatic testing for SCC staff and guidance for services using this new capacity.
13. Risks were regularly monitored by the Ops Group, including adverse weather and the End of the EU Exit transition period (Brexit), under Operation Tarragon. Ops Group representatives were additionally involved in Operation Eagle, which was a

surveillance exercise to monitor the impacts of a COVID-19 variant of concern (at that time the South African variant), by providing surge testing in specific areas of Woking and Egham.

14. Ops Group played a crucial role in monitoring the necessary datasets, including COVID cases, number of staff to be vaccinated= and occupancy data of SCC sites and offices. Data was shared weekly with Ops Group attendees and helped inform Ops Group as to the key issues to escalate to the SCG and CLT. This data is still reported on a weekly basis to ensure Ops Group are kept fully aware of any changes and impacts.
15. The SLRF SCG made the decision to stand down the COVID-19 major incident on 28th April 2021. In light of this, and in reviewing further the Government's Spring 2021 Roadmap, the role of Ops Group was amended to support the stand-down of the major incident and the key workstreams of PPE, Test and Trace and Death Management which have transitioned responsibility to within SCC. At present, the Ops Group is performing a monitoring function in terms of COVID-19, reviewing the most up to date data, as well as supporting new and more agile ways of working and access arrangements to the SCC estate where staff cannot work from home. The role of Ops Group and future governance arrangements are being considered as we enter a 'new normal' and supporting the Agile Office Programme.
16. In June 2020, a lessons learned exercise was completed by Ops Group to capture any learning at that time and understand what was working well and what could be improved during the period of Response. This also fed into the final lessons Learned Report and COVID-19 debrief programme, which was shared at the Corporate Resilience Group on 20th May 2021. Some of the key lessons learned identified include:
 - Establish governance, such as Ops Group, as early as reasonably practicable. The introduction of Ops Group became key in the response to the major incident, by allowing services to work together and share information in a collaborative manner. This structure should therefore be considered for any future incidents. It was also suggested to explore how decision making can be empowered at more levels so that not all decisions are required to be made by the CLT, with Ops Group acquiring some form of delegated authority.
 - There should be greater sharing of knowledge and processes between services in "peace time" to enable best practice, this should include business continuity plans. Consideration should also be given to organisation-wide contingency plans and plans that deal with prolonged incidents.
 - Establish a pool of resources whereby individuals are identified with the necessary skillset and ready to deploy as and when required. This process needs to be established formally within SCC, with CLT sign off. Transferable skills should be identified in peace time so suitable redeployment can happen at pace in a crisis. As part of any future redeployment and identification of resources, a decision must be based on a business critical need to reprioritise a particular team or function and open and honest dialogue is required with services providing any redeployees.
17. A full SLRF debrief programme for the COVID-19 response has been scheduled to understand what went well, what improvements could be made and highlight recommendations and actions to ensure lessons learned are taken forward. Between 20th May and 6th June 2021, the SLRF Cells were fully debriefed and the CMG and SCG sessions are scheduled for 2nd July and 9th July 2021 respectively, with a final report due later this summer. Final outputs from this debrief will be considered and any SCC related actions and recommendations will be shared with Ops Group and the Council's strategic Corporate Resilience Group (CRG) for ownership and responsibility going forward.

Recovery Update

18. The Recovery Coordinating Group (RCG), chaired by Surrey County Council's Deputy Chief Executive, was established on 6 April 2020 alongside the COVID-19 response with the aim of overseeing the restarting and restoring of essential services, ensuring the effective transition of services to business as usual, and capturing lessons learned. The RCG met weekly until August 2020 to oversee the majority of the restore and restart actions before moving to a monthly cycle. On 28 April 2021 the Surrey COVID-19 Major Incident and Strategic Coordinating Group was stood down and responsibility for overseeing the remaining responsibilities transition to business as usual was handed over to the RCG.
19. The RCG focussed on several recovery themes that did not fall under the responsibility of a single organisation. Each of these work areas was led by a partner agency:
 - Surrey Heartlands, working with Frimley ICS, led work around health and social care and reported on issues including back log and hidden demand, digital appointments and increased need for mental health support.
 - Economy and retail, led by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council focussed on monitoring trade on the high streets, tracking unemployment and furlough levels as well as the distribution of discretionary grants to local businesses.
 - Place, led by Elmbridge Borough Council, initially oversaw the restarting of services following the first lockdown as well as homelessness before working closely with the economy and retail area around town centres and infrastructure. This area of work also provided assurance around travel and transport including bus and rail usage and encouraging active travel.
 - Community, voluntary and faith sector recovery was led by Surrey Community Action and focussed on supporting the viability of the sector going forward as well as working to harness the increased amount of volunteering and enhanced community spirit developed as a result of the pandemic.
20. Theme leads provided regular updates giving the RCG the assurance it required to ensure services were restarting in a timely and safe manner whilst at the same time identifying longer term actions to be taken forward by existing organisations and partnerships. This approach enabled cross cutting themes to be identified and addressed, whilst ensuring the most appropriate organisation/partnership took responsibility for progressing the action in the longer term within existing governance structures.
21. Whilst recognising that COVID-19 has had a profound impact on our health, economy and society some of the actions and processes put in place to support our residents have had a longer-term beneficial impact. The RCG worked hard to capture these with the aim of building forward better:
 - The development of the Community Impact Assessment and Local Recovery Index to measure the impact that the pandemic has had on residents and the economy and to measure how Surrey is recovering from the pandemic will lead to a wider piece of work on a social progress index for the county led by the Health and Wellbeing Board.
 - Improved digital solutions were accelerated across all sectors including the move to providing services online, digital self-help and signposting, as well as virtual working and online training. Aligned to this much work was carried out to improve access for those who were digitally excluded.
 - The benefits of data sharing across organisation boundaries has been widely recognised and will be built on to better support vulnerable residents.

- Communication channels were enhanced enabling us to more effectively reach out to our more vulnerable communities.
- Relationships were built and stronger partnerships developed which led to enhanced collaborative working across the public and voluntary sector.
- Residents felt empowered to come together to support each other resulting in more resilient communities which can be further developed as part of Surrey County Council's empowering communities work.
- The profile and interest in volunteering was greatly increased which is hoped will be sustained and further built on.
- There has been an increased use and appreciation of local green spaces, which has had a positive impact on health and wellbeing. Surrey has also been selected as one of seven 'test and learn' sites for green social prescribing which looks to provide wellbeing support through nature-based activities.
- There have been fundamental changes in working practices with many employees not returning to the office for more than 1-3 days per week, which will improve employees' work/life balance, but will also have knock on impacts on the local economy and public transport patronage.
- Organisations' business continuity and health and safety plans have been fully tested thereby providing the opportunity for them to be updated and amended where required.

22. Many areas of Surrey's response and recovery work has been considered best practice by MHCLG and partners across the south east. Work is ongoing to share and further capture learning through the Surrey LRF debrief as well as through national research being carried out by Manchester University who are working with a number of local resilience forums across the country.

23. Following final reports and assurances from theme leads that all elements of work from both response and recovery have either stopped or transitioned to business as usual, the RCG stood down on 16 June 2021. Partners across Surrey have been reassured that partnership working will continue and have noted that stand up plans remain in place for new pressures. Going forward any partner can request either a cell stand up plan to be activated or a major incident declared should it be required if cases rise significantly.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

24. Risk implications are stated throughout the report and COVID-19 related risks are managed through the Strategic Coordination Group governance structure.

SECTION 151 OFFICER COMMENTARY

25. Although significant progress has been made over the last twelve months to improve the Council's financial position, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2021/22 remains uncertain. The public health crisis has resulted in increased costs which may not be fully funded. With uncertainty about the ongoing impact of this and no clarity on the extent to which both central and local funding sources might be affected in the medium term, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority in order to ensure stable provision of services in the medium term.

26. The financial implications of the pandemic continue to be monitored closely and reported regularly through the budget monitoring report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS – MONITORING OFFICER

27. The various initiatives described in the report have been the subject of specific legal advice and support in formulating and implementing the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure they are in accordance with the Council's powers, duties and responsibilities. There are no further specific legal implications arising in the report.

EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY

28. This report focuses on lessons learned from the response and recovery efforts from the COVID-19 pandemic. It highlights actions and processes that will enable the council and partners to better support residents who are more at risk of being left behind, including:

- a. Production of data and insight tools, such as the social progress index, which will shine a spotlight on inequalities across the county for partners to develop targeted responses to;
- b. Making improvements to support residents who are digitally excluded, such as some older people and some people on lower incomes;
- c. More data sharing between partners to provide coordinated support to some of Surrey's most vulnerable residents;
- d. Tailoring our communications, and using the right channels, to ensure we can work with our partners to reach out and communicate with all residents;
- e. Strengthening of partnership working between the public, voluntary, community and faith sector and communities to develop a network of support for some of Surrey's most vulnerable residents during the pandemic;
- f. Piloting of green social prescribing that has the potential to support some residents who are experiencing health inequalities to access green spaces and improve their overall health and wellbeing;
- g. Maintaining changes to working practices, such as increased home working, that provides some benefits for workers with additional demands at home, such as caring responsibilities.

29. We will continue to work with partners to apply these approaches and practices as Surrey emerges from the pandemic so we can build forward better by eliminating discrimination, enhancing equal opportunities and fostering good relations within and between local communities and organisations so no-one is left behind.

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