

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

July 2020

**STATEMENT OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH, PREVENTION & SUPPORTED HOUSING
PORTFOLIO HOLDER COUNTY COUNCILLOR CAROLINE DICKINSON****Covid-19**

Since Covid-19 emerged in Wuhan, China last December it has dominated everyday life. Currently, we have very low levels of new cases and deaths across the county, following a peak in cases in early May. There have been 2,504 cases and 520 deaths recorded to date. The rate of cases in North Yorkshire is similar to England. This is the situation as we emerge from a national lockdown into a new phase of managing the pandemic.

Each public health authority has been tasked with producing a Covid-19 outbreak control plan to describe how we will prevent, identify and manage outbreaks in high-risk settings such as care homes, schools and some work places. The plan also outlines how we will support the Test and Trace service to allow people who have contracted the virus and their contacts to self-isolate so they do not transmit the virus to others. Our plan was published at the end of June 2020.

North Yorkshire County Council received a grant of £2,022,850 to provide support towards expenditure incurred in relation to the mitigation against and management of local outbreaks of Covid-19.

An important feature of local outbreak plans is a newly established member led group which has political ownership for public facing engagement and communication for the outbreak response. Our Outbreak Management Advisory Board has been set-up in accordance with government guidance and the Board has now met twice.

The group will meet every 3 weeks initially, with the ability to come together sooner, if required. The Outbreak Management Advisory Board will act as an advisory committee with a critical role being to ensure relevant representation and a joined up response to Covid-19. If there are any local outbreaks this Board will play a crucial role in managing communications within and across our communities. Any issues requiring escalation for political consideration will be escalated to the Outbreak Management Advisory Board and the criteria which would trigger the need to escalate a situation to the Board is in development.

We are managing a small number of outbreaks across the county, none of which currently have any repercussions in our communities outside of the settings involved.

Public health commissioned services

The pandemic has affected all public health services as it has for other health and social care services. We have seen a number of innovations in service delivery and many of these will continue as a legacy of the pandemic.

Several services developed digital offers that allowed some face to face functions to continue remotely. This has ensured that people have continued to access vital services for sexual health, drug and alcohol, smoking cessation, weight management as well as aspects of the Healthy Child Programme. Others like the NHS Health Checks programme were suspended and work is underway to restart the full range of public health services incorporating new models of delivery.

We have prioritised planning for recovery, in parallel with outbreak management and developing Test and Trace. The public health team are linking into each of the recovery themes the council has identified (Community Impact/ Engagement, Economic, Environment, Humanitarian and Infrastructure) and are working closely with other partners including NHS, Local Enterprise

Partnership and District and Borough councils. Some of the guiding principles include a focus on reducing health inequalities and embedding new ways of working such as greater use of digital service delivery that have been effective to maintain these going forward.

Promoting health and wellbeing during the pandemic

Stop Smoking Support – #QuitForCovid

Smoking remains the biggest cause of preventable deaths in England, with one in two smokers dying from a smoking-related disease. Current evidence indicates that smoking increases the risks of developing life threatening complications from Covid-19, alongside the already-known risks of smoking – weakened immune systems, heart disease, pneumonia, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), stroke and cancer.

A national campaign, #QuitforCovid was launched in April to highlight the benefits of quitting including:

1. Reducing the likelihood of complications from Covid-19.
2. To protect the health of others
3. To reduce the burden on the NHS

A range of communication activity has taken place to promote the messages of the campaign alongside promotion of the local specialist stop smoking service Living Well Smokefree, including print media, social media and radio interviews and coverage. A second phase of campaign is due to launch in mid-July.

Mental health

The potential impact of Covid-19 on mental health and wellbeing is well documented therefore promoting and maintaining good mental health is an important part of the public health response.

In our public health leadership role as a council, we have brought together partners and key stakeholders every two weeks. These successful meetings have provided an opportunity to monitor and review trends in mental health and work across the mental health system with partners. Partners including North Yorkshire Police, Tees Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust, NHS clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) and voluntary sector have met with council teams - Public Health, Living Well, Stronger Communities and Children and Young People's Service.

The national website Every Mind Matters has been refreshed to include Covid-19 specific content and we have proactively promoted this self-help website amongst partners and the general public. More targeted work has also taken place to improve mental health of specific workforces such as health and social care. Mental health information is included in information packs being developed as part of our workforce response.

Within the council a significant amount of work has taken place to review the mental health offer for vulnerable staff. This is wide ranging from easily accessible information to more structured training and learning and peer support groups. We participate in the Local Government Association funded behaviour insights work with the National Behavioural Insight team to use behaviour change techniques to encourage positive change including mental health self-care.

We continue to work with Public Health England (PHE) who are rolling out a number of learning webinars on mental health including mental health and older people, mental health and young people and bereavement.

Suicide Prevention

We have been working closely with PHE and regional colleagues to review the impact of Covid-19 on suicides including data on all suspected cases for North Yorkshire. We have been proactively promoting messages to support mental health and self-care and working with Stronger Communities and North Yorkshire Sport to provide activity resources including; colouring activities, mental health information, exercise activities to people isolating to support them to stay mentally and physically active.

Physical activity

Covid-19 has had a profound effect on our lives, with social distancing and restrictions on movement resulting in a complete overhaul of the way many people get active.

With the implementation of guidance in England limiting people to one outdoor activity a day and only with members of their own household, during the initial phase of the lock down, the majority of sport and exercise became impossible overnight. The national Sport England website has been continually updated to provide information and advice to individuals and families to stay as physically active as possible. Within the council we have ensured all up to date information on current guidance has been available, links and access to reputable national and local support and advice. A physical activity offer has been included into the Council's Universal Plus service, enabling individuals and families to receive direct support from local specialists.

Working with North Yorkshire Sport, we have been able to co-ordinate the communications and promotion of campaigns, such as Sport England's 'Join the Movement', 'We Are Undefeatable' campaigns, and the Mental Health Foundation's 'Move more for mental health'.

The School Zone Project action plan has recently been reviewed in light of the impact of Covid-19. We have recently brought back together the partners that are significant in the planning and delivery of the School Zone Project in this project. Despite the challenges that schools and businesses have faced during the pandemic, the adaptability and commitment from all involved is very evident. Discussions are being held to plan for the use of outdoor areas for active classrooms, sport and physical activity through the summer holidays to ensure key workers can still go to work, delivery of virtual physical activity programmes in schools, continued planning and discussions to implement park and stride schemes.

The Council has been allocated £133,000, half of the possible maximum available, to finance the continuation of the social distancing measures it has been putting in place in the county's towns to support reopening businesses and to help the public to stay safe in town centres. The authority is already planning its bid for the second phase, when the larger sum of approximately £1.1m will be available, and is pushing ahead with proposals for multi-million pound bids through other channels to support walking and cycling. There are many teams within the Council contributing to this bidding process to ensure the walking and cycling infrastructure planning enables sustainable travel for the longer term.

The Discoveries on Your Doorstep project has adapted and responded to the Covid-19 crisis. The Project's original focus on "Fun, Free & Fascinating" things to do has been further developed and aligned to health/guidance messages of covid-19; schools are being supported to consider how active travel can enable safe return to school; there has been an opportunity to promote messages that support people's reconnection with nature and climate change; and the project has the ability to reduce loneliness in elderly and high risk with online contact and shared resources.

As facilitators of the Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives Strategy Steering Group, Public Health and North Yorkshire Sport have co-ordinated a review of the multi-agency 2020 action plan and with the support of the Steering Group members, refined the priorities as a response to Covid-19. Staying local, active travel and sustaining positive physical activity behaviours are prominent within the review.

Alcohol

Throughout the last few months we have used the Wake Up North Yorkshire alcohol campaign to reinforce messages on safer alcohol limits and the importance of staying healthy within the context of Covid-19.

A social distancing tab has been added to the website, containing up to date messages and advice in line with the latest announcements and advice: <http://wakeupnorthyorks.co.uk/social-distancing/>.

We have used social media ads to promote messages, with the result of over 6 million impressions and 42,000 clicks (Google Ads) and 92,000 impressions and reach of over 26,000 (Facebook). Ads have included links to NY Horizons' services, to reassure people that the service is still being delivered, and a press release went out the week beginning 18th May 2020 focusing on helping residents rethink their drink during lockdown.

We did a survey about Covid-19 and alcohol consumption to give us some local insight on North Yorkshire during lockdown. This is now closed and over 350 people replied and we are in the process of looking at the results which will help to inform the next stage of the Wake Up North Yorkshire campaign and help people who may be drinking more alcohol than usual to re-think their drink.

Screening and Immunisation programmes

Screening and Immunisations programmes are commissioned by NHS England/Improvement from a variety of providers and are overseen and monitored by Public Health England. The pandemic has had varied impacts on these programmes. Ante-natal and newborn screening has continued but most other national screening programmes have been paused and planning is underway to restart them. School closures have affected delivery of school based immunisation programmes like HPV (human papilloma virus) vaccination.

As with other NHS services, the planning to restore screening and immunisation programmes is being prioritised based on risk. Some of the challenges include the adjustments that need to be made to ensure social distancing and that there is adequate staff capacity with appropriating training and personal protective equipment (PPE).

We are working with our NHS partners and PHE to encourage people to come forward for screening and to catch up on missed vaccinations when the programme resumes in full. It is especially important that we get high coverage for seasonal flu jabs so we can reduce the impact of flu on winter pressures to our health and social care system this year.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR CAROLINE DICKINSON