

15 September 2020

Agenda Item: 4

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

COVID-19 SITUATIONAL UPDATE

Purpose of the Report

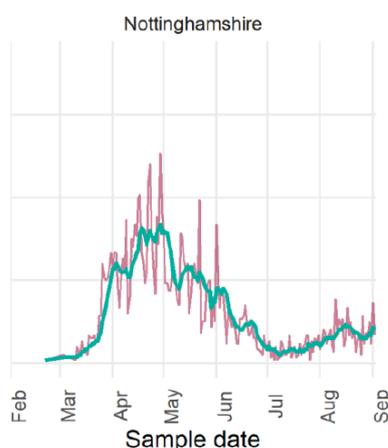
1. To provide a situational update on COVID-19 as context for considering recovery, renewal and resilience.

Information

Situation update

2. The national COVID-19 alert is currently set at Level 3 which means that COVID-19 is in general circulation across the country and there are local outbreaks. The situation in Nottinghamshire reflects this national context.
3. Since the end of June Nottinghamshire County has seen increasing incidence of COVID-19 driven by sporadic cases and outbreaks ranging in size from as few as two cases to several dozen linked cases. Some of these occur in institutional settings such as care homes, nurseries and workplaces; many arise in households or from transmission in other community settings.

Chart 1. Laboratory confirmed cases of COVID-19 for Nottinghamshire County as at 4 September (daily count, and as 7-day moving average)



4. Currently the majority of cases are amongst working age people for whom, in general, the disease and its complications are less severe than in older people. The increase is not associated with any significant increase in COVID-related NHS activity or hospitalisations. In population terms, the overall number of new cases is modest and the rate of increase is not steep. But the overall trajectory points us in a direction which, as we seek to sustain the economy and the return of pupils and students, is likely to lead to more widespread transmission in the community and, with it, the risk that it will move into older agegroups again, for whom the consequences are more severe.

Update on Local Outbreak Control Plan and its implementation

5. The emergence of local outbreaks underlines the importance of the arrangements set out in Nottinghamshire County's Local Outbreak Control Plan which was published on 1 July.
6. An exercise was conducted by the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) to promote wider awareness of the plan and identify other areas requiring further work. Recommendations arising from the exercise include the need to clarify and sustain out of hours arrangements and communication channels for the outbreak cell, mutual aid arrangements across LRF partners, and clarification of the powers available to local areas to prevent or control outbreaks. The LRF's COVID-19 Protection Board will oversee implementation of these and other recommendations, some of which are already in hand.

Recent outbreak management

7. During August, Newark & Sherwood has been the focus of action to contain an outbreak centred around Newark and associated in part with employees of the Bakkavor Desserts factory. Based on information presented at the daily outbreak cell, the Director of Public Health mobilised an incident management team which met on a daily basis to coordinate actions across Nottinghamshire County Council, Public Health England, Newark & Sherwood District Council, Nottinghamshire Police and other LRF partners.
8. Measures included extensive communications and engagement work to persuade everyone in Newark and across the county to play their part in observing government guidance about social distancing, hand washing, use of face coverings and, if they have symptoms, immediately self-isolating and booking a free test. These and other precautions are the primary preventive measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 in the community.
9. Newark & Sherwood District Council and other partners provided strong support to the multi-agency effort, with officers engaging with residents and businesses across the town and in surrounding villages through face-to-face discussion and leaflets in various languages. Mobile testing units were deployed for the public and whole workplace testing undertaken on the workforce at the Bakkavor factory. Some events in the town and at the Newark Showground were cancelled in support of this effort.
10. By the end of August, the incidence rate had declined to a more satisfactory level. Accordingly Newark and Sherwood was removed from the government's watchlist on 4/9/20.
11. More recently, incident management teams have been mobilised to address increases in cases in Broxtowe and at the Summit Park construction site in Ashfield. By the time

Committee meets, focus may also need to have been given to other areas of the county according to need.

12. The overall upward trend in cases and their widespread distribution across a number of settings and localities is a sharp reminder that keeping residents safe with our economy open requires that every individual, household, friendship group, community and business routinely adheres to all the government guidance in full.

Number 10 Taskforce Field Visit to Newark

13. Nottinghamshire County Council received a field visit sent by a Number 10 Taskforce on 29-30 August. The purpose of the visit was to see how national policy is being applied at a local level in the outbreak at Newark, how local management could be strengthened by government, and to share good practice.

14. The visit was hosted at Newark and Sherwood District Council and included interviews with the Leader of the Nottinghamshire County Council, Local Resilience Forum stakeholders, members of the Engagement Board, business representatives, officers from public health, shadowing of meetings of the outbreak cell, incident management team, and COVID-19 protection board, and site visits around the town centre, to the mobile testing unit and to the Bakkavor factory.

15. The summary report of the visit noted the robust collaboration between and within the various agencies charged with dealing with the pandemic. Other headline observations included:

- the limitations posed by the restricted availability of testing due to insufficient laboratory capacity,
- the importance of local knowledge in the determination of how best to deploy testing
- the need to tailor the standard size/format of mobile testing to adapt it to local needs
- the absence of timely and accurate performance data from test sites hampers the assessment of their effectiveness
- detailed guidance is needed about the process and resources required to take on local contact tracing
- the need to provide positive messaging about employers who are responsive in their collaboration with Directors of Public Health
- the risk posed to the resilience and recruitment of local authority teams by the lack of a national workforce plan
- the need for local areas to exercise discretion about the “battle rhythm” and frequency of their governance meetings

Contact tracing

16. The Local Outbreak Control plan also addresses arrangements for contact tracing, most of which has been undertaken by a centralised test and trace system overseen by the Department of Health & Social Care. Latterly local authorities have been informed that responsibilities for parts of this process will be transferred to them in order to improve the speed and completion of follow-up. Further details are awaited about what this will involve, timescales, and funding for these additional responsibilities. The Director of Public Health remains in close contact with district and borough chief executives whose teams possess

professional skills which are likely to be valuable in delivering an effective contact tracing across Nottinghamshire.

The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) No. 3 Regulations 2020

17. As an upper tier local authority, Nottinghamshire County Council has powers vested in it to give a Direction which imposes prohibitions, requirements or restrictions in relation to individual premises, events and public outdoor places. These powers are the subject of a detailed paper to be brought to the Adult Social Care & Public Health Committee on the 14 September.

Second wave

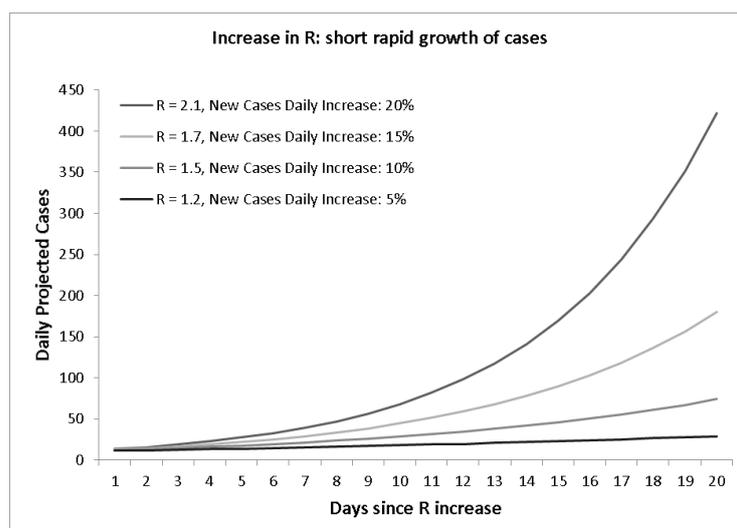
18. Forecasting the course of the epidemic is the focus of national and international research. Earlier modelling work was framed in terms of the suppression of a first wave using the blanket implementation of control measures followed by a general resurgence (a second wave) after those controls are lifted.

19. Since May, increased emphasis has been given to how Local Outbreak Control Plans can quickly target control measures to address localised outbreaks in order to allow a progressive relaxation of the universal lockdown measures which were in place through the spring. In the context of the imperative to reopen our schools and economy, an upswing in cases in several European countries who appear to be a month or so 'ahead' of the UK, and with the approach of winter when conditions tend to increase respiratory infections, attention has returned to the prospects of a general resurgence in the UK in general or in Nottinghamshire more particularly.

20. The scale and timing of any second wave remains unclear. In the absence of a reliable forecast, it will be important instead to test arrangements against a series of planning scenarios. At present, there is little information by which to gauge the absolute likelihood of a particular scenario, other than to say that Nottinghamshire County Council is ready to take any necessary and proportionate actions to arrest any sharp increase at an early enough stage to protect our schools, economy, and the most vulnerable.

21. Chart 2 is provided as a reminder of the impact on the number of new cases if we were to leave a growth in new cases unchecked.

Chart 2. Growth in new cases under four scenarios



Seasonal flu planning for the COVID-19 pandemic

22. Flu is very different to a common cold and confines even the fittest of people to bed. For older people or those with long-term health conditions, the effects of flu can be much more serious, and in some cases even fatal.
23. Flu immunisation is effective in preventing disease in working-age adults, and is the single best way to protect against catching or spreading flu. It is also of benefit in helping to limit transmission to the wider public and, in times of increased pressure on health and social care services – and especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic - helps to reduce the overall burden of ill-health and demand for healthcare.
24. Therefore, Nottinghamshire County Council will promote uptake of a free flu immunisation to its frontline workforce and to the general public who are eligible as part of a widescale national effort to increase the uptake of flu immunisation, protect our residents from avoidable illness and complications, and reduce pressure on services in a time of national crisis.
25. Uptake by the authority has improved year on year and last year achieved a recorded uptake of 41% amongst its frontline workers. Communication to frontline workers will include a staff information video, and nurse-led myth-busting sessions. Arrangements for employees have been streamlined to include in-house clinics or use of voucher to access immunisation at local pharmacies at employees' convenience. The Voucher scheme has also been streamlined to relieve line managers of administrative burden. These in-house arrangements will complement those of the NHS to ensure that care home staff as well as residents have access to free flu immunisation.

Other Options Considered

26. No other options to consider.

Reason for Recommendation

27. The Nottinghamshire County COVID-19 Engagement Board provides oversight of local outbreak control arrangements.

Statutory and Policy Implications

28. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

29. There are no financial implications contained within this report.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1) That the Committee considers the contents of the report and identifies any possible measures to recommend to the Nottinghamshire County COVID-19 Engagement Board.

Report of Jonathan Gribbin, The Director of Public Health

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Constitutional Comments (AK 24/08/2020)

- 2) The report recommendations fall within the RRR Committee terms of reference.

Financial Comments (DG 25/08/2020)

- 3) There are no direct financial implications within this report. £3.8m has been allocated from the Revenue grant determination (Ringfenced) – Local Authority Covid-19 Test and Trace Service Support Grant to support this activity.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- 'None'

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- 'All'