



# **Response to the pandemic Task and Finish Group Report no. 1**

## Background

This report is the result of a one-off session with the Council's officers directly involved in dealing with addressing the response to the pandemic.

This is a summary of the situation at the time of the meeting in early September and as there are regular changes in addressing the effects of the pandemic, this may not reflect the current position.

Councillor Michael Heaslip

Co Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Chair of this Group.

## National and legal context

The legal context for managing outbreaks of communicable disease which present a risk to the health of the public requiring urgent investigation and management sits with

1. Public Health England (Health and Social Care Act 2012)
2. Directors of Public Health (Health and Social Care Act 2012)
3. Chief Environmental Health Officers (Public Health (Control of Infectious Disease) Act 1984)
4. NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups
5. Other responders specific responsibilities to respond to major incidents (Civil Contingencies Act 2004)
6. The Coronavirus Act 2020

Local authorities (specifically public health and environmental health) together with Public Health England have primary responsibility for the delivery and management of public health actions to be taken in relation to outbreaks of communicable disease through local health protection partnerships.

## Current response in Cumbria

The current response is set up as below (highlighted aspects only, more groups and sub-groups exist for different areas of need):

- Directors of Cumbria Health have primary responsibility for the health of their communities and this applies to Cumbria

- The Health Protection Board meets weekly and an incident management hub (including Allerdale staff) meets daily including weekends.
- Daily incident management meetings include all the district councils, Public Health England, NHS, the public health staff team at Cumbria County Council and the Director of Public Health.
- Outbreak control teams meet when required: Education Outbreak Control meeting to discuss cases linked to schools. This has been daily due to new cases in schools each day; Care Home Outbreak control also meets daily – Allerdale staff are not part of this but receive minutes and contact trace staff for their out of work contacts.

All incidents and outbreaks are discussed at the daily meetings which works extremely well and those involved feel they get the right information, guidance and advice. All districts and agencies feel these meetings are having a positive effect and members are learning a lot and feel valued with great confidence in this approach.

A daily operating group meets daily through the working week to set actions and have longer practical discussions about cases.

The Director of Public Health is required to produce an outbreak control plan. These documents can be accessed here:

Outbreak Control Plan Part 1 – Strategy, Management and Oversight

<https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/535/17941/17942/44012124112.pdf>

Outbreak Control Plan Part 2 – Operational Response

<https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/535/17941/17942/44012124238.pdf>

## **Allerdale Borough Council current response**

The meetings in response to track and trace began in May. The requirement to be involved in additional meetings has been over and above officers' regular responsibilities, which were already being impacted with regulation changes regarding food and occupational health.

Allerdale staff are involved in following up individuals identified through track and trace with direct contact (distanced as appropriate) and providing advice to food businesses, other businesses, following up incidences for example of homelessness issues as well as dealing with complaints or reports from the public and carrying out enforcement where required.

## **Conclusion and recommendation**

The Group appreciated the overview of the local response and was both satisfied with work being done and impressed with commitment and dedication of the staff involved working beyond their regular roles and hours.

The Group noted that the success of our work in controlling the outbreak is entirely dependent on the efficacy of the national testing system in identifying infected persons and speedily communicating their details to our tracing teams. There are grave concerns, across the country, as to whether the testing system is working effectively: this is something the Task Group should continue to keep in view.