

	<b><u>Agenda Item: 8</u></b>
<b>Report to:</b>	<b>Local Covid Outbreak Engagement Board</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>23<sup>rd</sup> February 2022</b>
<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>THE LIVING SAFELY WITH COVID STRATEGY</b>
<b>Organisation:</b>	<b>Birmingham City Council</b>
<b>Presenting Officer:</b>	<b>Iheadi Onwukwe, Consultant in Public Health (Business &amp; Strategy), Test &amp; Trace Team</b>

<b>Report Type:</b>	<b>For discussion and approval</b>
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<b>1. Purpose of Report:</b>	
1.1	The Living with Covid strategy sets out our high-level approach to the on-going threat of Covid-19 and its variants, while recognising that the national policy landscape continues to evolve along with the science and understanding of the virus. It is aligned with the national Living with Covid Plan as set out by the Prime Minister on 21 February 2022.
1.2	It outlines the public health approach to living with the continuing threat of Covid in a global city and navigating the short term – March to September 2022 - to cover the period up to the Commonwealth Games. A subsequent strategy for the medium to longer term, including identifying and addressing the impact of COVID will be developed for the autumn of 2022. The iterative and adaptive implementation of the strategy evolve as the uncertainty of the covid pandemic lessons and the virus becomes more predictable.
1.3	The strategy describes the key objectives and activities to continue to engage, collaborate and strengthen the resilience of our citizens and communities, and to value and support our staff through a period of transition and change in the context of the national living with covid plan. The core objectives are
1.3.1	Maintain an enhanced public health and environmental health response until September 2022 to provide resilience for the Commonwealth Games
1.3.2	Utilise data and insight to strengthen surveillance and increase understanding of communities, risk and vaccination uptake barriers, and adapt our intervention strategies as appropriate
1.3.3	Evolve our community engagement to build on the learning from Covid and create relationships of trust and co-ownership to navigate the on-going challenges, especially in communities of global heritage
1.3.4	Mitigate the direct and indirect impacts of Covid on health and wellbeing through informing the recovery and levelling up approaches for the City

<b>2.</b>	<b>Recommendation:</b>
2.1	The Board is asked to note the direction of travel, discuss the core objectives and activities, approve, and recommend the strategy for implementation.

<b>3.</b>	<b>Report Body:</b>
<p><b>Executive Summary</b></p> <p>The Covid-19 pandemic has presented a unique challenge to the city of Birmingham and sadly after almost two years we are learning to live with Covid as an on-going threat to the health, wellbeing and stability of our city.</p> <p>The Living with Covid strategy sets out our high level approach to the on-going threat of Covid-19 and its variants, while recognising that the national policy landscape continues to evolve along with the science and understanding of the virus.</p> <p>While vaccination in the UK is going well and there is a high level of protection against serious illness and death, the global picture of protection is more uneven and until this is improved there continues to be a significant chance of new variants appearing which could take us backwards.</p> <p>The global nature of Birmingham means that like many other major world cities we are additionally vulnerable to international variants and the economic, tourist and education migration that can facilitate transmission across borders, so we must remain vigilant and proactive in our response.</p> <p>Birmingham faces unique additional challenges in 2022 as it hosts the international Commonwealth Games and welcomes athletes and guests from across the world to our city. This is a fantastic opportunity for the city and we are working with partners to ensure a safe games but it is a period for which we must maintain resilience in our response.</p> <p>The Local Outbreak and Contain Management Frameworks provide an on-going overarching framework for the response to acute surges and flares in the Covid situation in the city and this strategy sets out the background behaviours and approaches while we continue to adapt to the global pandemic.</p> <p>The core objectives of Living with Covid are:</p> <p><b>Maintain an enhanced public health and environmental health response until September 2022</b> to provide resilience for the Commonwealth Games</p> <p><b>Utilise data and insight to strengthen surveillance</b> and increase understanding of communities, risk and vaccination uptake barriers, and adapt our intervention strategies as appropriate</p> <p><b>Evolve our community engagement</b> to build on the learning from Covid and create relationships of trust and co-ownership to navigate the on-going challenges, especially in communities of global heritage</p> <p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>The first case of Covid was confirmed in Birmingham in early March 2020.</p>	

Almost two years on there have been over 272,000 confirmed cases and over 3,400 deaths with Covid on the death certificate, and these are under-estimates because of the limitations of testing access in the first year.

There have been significant disparities in the impact of Covid in different communities, particularly among our ethnic communities and our most deprived communities.

Since Covid vaccination was launched in December 2020 just under 800,000 people have received their first dose of vaccine and over half have completed both doses and a booster dose.

The Council initiated an emergency response to the pandemic in spring 2020 and this remained in place until August 2021 where these were stood down however this has continued through a modified management response and the on-going enhanced public health specialist response.

The Public Health team moved to an emergency cell structure in March 2020 and then following the introduction of the Covid Outbreak Management Framework funding in summer 2020 a dedicated Covid response function was established and in place by autumn 2020. This structure has evolved as the pandemic response has evolved to expand the contact tracing capacity, isolation and welfare support as well as enhanced enforcement response.

During the pandemic the national public health agency transitioned from Public Health England to the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID).

In developing the strategy there has been a rapid internal review as well as engagement with stakeholders to reflect on what has worked well and where improvements can be made.

We recognise that the future with Covid remains uncertain, but the vaccine has proved to be effective at reducing death and hospitalisation which has allowed for many of the population level public health measures to be stood down.

However while much of the world remains unvaccinated there is a high likelihood that there will be more variants and the potential for future waves until the global vaccine coverage improves.

The Living with Covid Strategy aims to set out the public health approach to navigating the short to medium term future living with the continuing threat of Covid in a global city. It is an iterative document that we will adapt and evolve as the picture continues to develop.

## **Aim**

The Living with Covid Strategy sets out our approach to minimise the harm from covid-19 and its variants to the population of Birmingham and ensure appropriate resilience for the Commonwealth Games.

This is a short-term strategy to cover the period of the Commonwealth Games and a subsequent strategy for the longer term approach will be developed for the autumn of 2022.

## Objectives

**Maintain an enhanced public health and environmental health response until September 2022** to provide resilience for the Commonwealth Games.

**Maximise our use of data and insight to strengthen surveillance** and increase understanding of communities, risk and vaccination uptake barriers, and adapt our intervention strategies as appropriate.

**Evolve our community engagement** to build on the learning from Covid and create relationships of trust and co-ownership to navigate the on-going challenges, especially in communities of global heritage.

## Principles

We want to continue to engage and collaborate with citizens and communities and we want to value and support our staff through a period of transition and change in the context of a continually evolving pandemic.

During the period of March to September we will support the transition of our approach into the mainstream public health specialist function of the Council, including supporting those interim staff in the dedicated covid response function to move forward with their careers and ensuring there is adequate health protection capacity for any future threats. How this looks will be developed over the summer of 2022.

We are committed to treating individuals with respect and dignity.

We are committed to putting the citizen at the centre of our work.

We are committed to being transparent and authentic in our approach.

We are committed to working towards a bolder healthier future for our city.

## Maintaining our Specialist Public Health and Environmental Health Response

Public Health and Environmental Health specialist staff have been at the centre of the response to the Covid pandemic providing bespoke advice, support and interventions to protect individuals, control risk and manage outbreaks.

Presently there are 22 FTE specialist public health roles in the test and trace response function and additional 18 FTE matrix roles in environmental health and 25 FTE in the contact centre providing enhanced contact tracing telephone follow up. The contract workforce engaged in asymptomatic testing has evolved in line with the waves of the pandemic.

The local authority public health specialist team stood up a 7 day a week service providing outbreak advice and dedicated lead teams for specific areas: education, social and residential care, workplaces and large events.

During the pandemic the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) was established building from Public Health England. There are on-going discussions about the provision of the response to outbreaks moving forward and the continuing capacity and model will adapt to interface with this as it develops.

The plan is to maintain the current specialist and matrix function until September 2022 to provide resilience for health protection and Covid response during the Commonwealth Games, the cultural programme and the pre and post event period.

In order to do this we will:

- Maintain our outbreak health protection response function until outbreak management is no longer required
- Continue to provide specialist support to specific settings around covid risk reduction as required
- Work jointly with UKHSA to develop skills and capability to allow for mutual aid surge to the response during the Games period.
- Develop knowledge and skills to respond to other infectious and non-infectious threats
- Revise and update health protection response guidelines in line with evolving national guidelines and science
- Work with partners to improve ongoing infection control and risk reduction practice for infectious disease prevention

### **Maximise our use of data and insight**

The data and surveillance function for Covid has developed significantly as there has been greater access to intelligence from testing, cases, deaths and vaccine uptake. This has allowed us to gain greater understanding of disparities and inequalities for some communities, particularly based on place, age, gender and ethnicity. We have however had limited insight into other aspects such as faith, disability, sexual orientation, occupation, or shared experiences such as addiction or homelessness.

Alongside this we have evolved more insightful qualitative approaches to capturing and understanding of issues, concerns and barriers affecting different communities.

There is a dedicated data and governance function as part of the specialist public health covid response structure and this will continue until September 2022 to provide enhanced surveillance during the Commonwealth Games.

During the initial period we will:

- Maintain surveillance of covid cases, hospitalisation and deaths to inform the local response and the wider work on covid recovery
- Support the NHS vaccination programme through data and insight work based on the vaccination data available and wider covid context
- Undertake specific deep dive exploration of defined aspects of covid disparities and inequalities
- Develop the wider learning and reflection on data and surveillance to apply to the commonwealth games period

- Support UKHSA Games surveillance where required
- Utilise the skills and learning around data visualisation and communication to inform the wider public health work, especially in relation to population health management
- Develop the learning from the use of qualitative data during covid to inform the wider public health approach
- Develop the learning around governance to inform the wider public health approach

### **Evolve our community engagement**

Through the pandemic there has been a significant focus on community engagement and collaboration, this has included commissioning of 19 community engagement partners working with over 30 different targeted communities, the recruitment of over 860 covid community champions and the partnership working with over 30 different faith leaders.

Alongside this there has been rapid growth in our approach to utilising social media and exploration and development of a public health presence on new platforms including Instagram and TikTok. We have co-facilitated direct engagement sessions in different languages and on different platforms, working with partners to go to spaces that citizens feel most comfortable in to engage with them, to listen to their concerns and challenges and to answer their questions. This approach has been built on with the NHS to support the vaccination programme.

While the vaccination programme has gone well in Birmingham there remains significant work to do and we anticipate this being a significant strand of work up until the summer of 2022.

We have learnt much through this engagement and have tried various approaches, some more successful than others.

During the period of this strategy we will:

- Build on the learning from the engagement during covid to develop sustainable models for engagement with citizens and communities for public health
- Offer opportunities for covid champions to develop further skills to become community facilitators or community researchers or to deepen their knowledge into Bolder Healthier Birmingham Champions
- Work with communities and community partners to test new models of collaboration and co-production to support vaccination, risk reduction and health and wellbeing
- Continue to develop our approach to engaging and working with communities of experience and communities of identity to create sustainable models for the future
- Continue to develop, refine and implement interventions addressing low vaccine uptake in Birmingham

## Resources

The continuation of the specialist function is funded through the Covid Outbreak Management Framework Funding that was specifically profiled to continue the function until the end of September 2022 to ensure resilience for the Commonwealth Games.

## Governance

The delivery of this strategy will be overseen by the Local Outbreak Engagement Board.

### 4. Uncertainty / Complexity:

Identified	Likelihood	Impact	Actions taken
Evolution in the Variants of Concern and the COVID pandemic	Uncertain	Uncertain	Principles of adaptive management incorporated into the strategy
<b>5. Risk Analysis</b>			
Identified	Likelihood	Impact	Actions taken
Persistent low vaccine uptake (1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> and Booster doses) in a significant number of Wards compared to England averages	Medium	Medium	Innovative, targeted and bespoke approaches to engage the different communities are being deployed

### 6. Annexes

#### 5.1 Living with Covid-19 Strategy – Summary Statistics 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021

The following people have been involved in the preparation of this board paper:

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