

5 January 2021

COVID-19 Briefing For All Elected Members

Key messages from Executive Leadership Team – Lorraine O’Donnell, Frank Jordan, Mark Palethorpe and Jane Burns

Dear member,

Here is today’s briefing to help keep you informed and up to date with the latest developments in relation to Covid-19.

Council continues support for local communities as national lockdown begins

Cheshire East Council is ready to support local communities, businesses and vulnerable people following the imposition of additional measures to combat the rapid rise in Covid cases.

The government last night placed all of England under a national lockdown amid growing critical pressure on hospitals.

The prime minister announced measures that included the closure of all schools until at least mid-February – except for vulnerable children and the children of key workers – and warned that ‘the weeks ahead will be the hardest yet’.

Cheshire East Council leaders say they recognise these new measures are needed in response to the rapid spread of Covid-19 – and are ready to step in with support.

The lockdown measures mean people must stay at home except to:

- Shop for basic necessities such as food;
- Work, if they cannot reasonably do so from home;
- Take exercise locally, once a day, with up to one other person outside their home;
- Meet your support bubble or childcare bubble, when necessary;
- Attend childcare or education, for those eligible; and
- To escape domestic abuse.

All non-essential shops are now closed, as of midnight on Monday. Leisure centres will remain closed as will all libraries – except for click and collect and limited support services. The council’s household waste recycling centres will remain open.

The prime minister said schools would switch to remote learning with GCSE and A-level exams unlikely to go ahead and alternative assessment to be devised.

Clinically extremely vulnerable people are being told to shield once more and await further guidance by letter.

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The national lockdown will last for at least seven weeks, with measures reviewed during February half-term week.

Council leaders said it was very regrettable to have to go into a third national lockdown, but it was clear that additional measures were needed to tackle the rise in new-variant Covid-19 cases, protect vulnerable residents, prevent hospitals being overwhelmed and to save lives.

The council has been preparing for this lockdown and has had plans in place at every stage of the government's changes in restrictions – to ensure support for our vulnerable residents, communities and businesses.

The government today announced a £4.6bn package of grants to help firms through the new lockdown. Firms in retail, hospitality and leisure will be eligible to get one-off grants of up to £9,000. The council already has a database, of those businesses who had applied for grants previously, and they will receive the payments in due course.

We recognise that the next few weeks will be tough for everyone and the council is there to help provide support.

Our People Helping People service is still in place with more than 3,900 volunteers signed up and we have 931 vulnerable residents registered for support.

Cheshire East is currently seeing infection rates of more than 350 cases per 100,000 people. This is a significant increase on the numbers seen only days ago when we moved to tier 4 and is evidence that new restrictions are necessary.

Vaccinations are now taking place across the borough. This is great news – but any optimism must be tempered by a resolve to stick to the basics – think: 'hands, face, space' and make sure that, if you have symptoms, you self-isolate and get a test.

Visit the www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/covid19 for more information about support, advice and guidance for businesses and individuals.

For more information about the national lockdown restrictions visit: www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home

Council responds to closure of schools due to lockdown

The latest national lockdown measures mean that schools and colleges across Cheshire East are now closed to most pupils except for vulnerable children and children of critical workers and are unlikely to reopen until after the February half term at the earliest.

Schools will move to remote learning and will ensure pupils and parents have a timetable outlining what to expect as soon as possible. Vulnerable children are encouraged to continue to attend school as safety measures remain in place. The reduced number of pupils should further ease any risks and enable appropriate support to be provided.

Everyone will still be able to access early-years settings, such as nurseries.

After the first lockdown, the council, working in consultation with school leaders, parents, and unions, took the bold step of delaying the reopening of schools to ensure that buildings and practices were Covid secure, the wellbeing of staff and pupils prioritised, and outbreaks managed.

The phased reopening in June gave everyone time to prepare risk assessments and work together to deliver lessons safely. The risk assessments prepared during the delayed reopening in 2020 helped schools in Cheshire East remain open safely.

Over the last few months, the council has also been working very closely with its schools to develop programmes to help learners respond to the challenges of school lockdown. These include many innovative practices, which directly help learners, including the most disadvantaged, to get the best remote learning opportunities.

In its latest message, the council also thanks schools, colleges, nurseries, children, young people and their parents for their tireless efforts in adapting to unprecedented disruption to education in more than 170 schools and colleges and more than 300 early-years providers across the borough.

The council recognises that schools and colleges are the last places it wants to close as it recognises the importance of schools for children's education and wellbeing. However, we recognise the national crisis this country faces and urge all residents to obey the new restrictions as well as maintain social distancing at all times.

Visit www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/covid19 for more information about support, advice and guidance for individuals and businesses, including those who need financial help, or who need additional support because they are shielding.

Significant expansion of Covid-19 vaccine roll-out across Cheshire

Sixteen new GP-led Covid-19 vaccination services are set to start vaccinating people across Cheshire in the first weeks of 2021.

Initially focusing on protecting those at highest risk, and with exact go-live dates subject to national vaccine supply and other key operational considerations, services are scheduled to go live this week and next week in:

- Wilmslow
- Congleton
- Knutsford
- Macclesfield
- Poynton
- Crewe (x2)
- Nantwich
- Middlewich
- Alsager

In Cheshire West, the sites are: Northwich; Chester (x3); Neston and Ellesmere Port. The new sites will complement existing GP-led vaccination sites in Winsford and Frodsham, which went live before Christmas.

A small number of pharmacy-led sites have also been identified across Cheshire that could support GP-led services where required to ensure that residents are vaccinated as quickly as possible.

Further to the hospital-based service which started vaccinating at the Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust on 8 December 2020, vaccinations also started at Mid-Cheshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust on 28 December 2020 and will start at East Cheshire NHS Trust on 6 January 2021.

As we head into the new year with the approval of a second vaccine, that is also more versatile, we will be able to expand the programme and ensure that the majority of care home staff and residents are protected in the coming weeks.

NHS organisations have also been asked to start vaccinating frontline health and care workers such as nurses, doctors and social workers.

Priority groups for vaccination are determined by government following advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

People can help the NHS deliver the Covid-19 vaccination programme effectively by following this simple guidance:

- We will contact people in the priority groups when it is their turn to receive the vaccine. People are asked not to contact the NHS to seek a vaccine before then;
- When invited for a vaccine, people should act on the invitation and make sure they attend appointments when they arrange them; and
- People should continue to wear a face covering and abide by social distancing and hand hygiene guidance as, until the vaccine has been fully rolled out, this is the most effective way to save lives.

People are reminded that those eligible for a vaccine, but not yet contacted, should remain patient. They will not miss out.

Alongside delivering a Covid-19 vaccine, GP practices across Cheshire will, of course, continue to offer routine appointments to those that need them.

People in any doubt about which local health service they need are advised to contact NHS 111 first – either by dialling 111 or online at: 111.nhs.uk

The exact locations of Covid-19 vaccination sites across Cheshire will only be officially confirmed when they start vaccinating.

For latest updates, visit the NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group's website at: www.cheshireccg.nhs.uk

PLEASE NOTE: We have been providing regular written briefings for Members and MPs since 18 March 2020. As we are increasingly moving to recovery and business as usual, we are moving to once weekly through August. We will also be looking to reinstate the quarterly Members' Bulletin after the summer recess.

Further guidance

For the latest coronavirus guidance and advice for staff and members, visit: <https://centranet.cheshireeast.gov.uk/news/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-staff.aspx>

For the latest guidance on coronavirus, visit the Public Health England website at: www.gov.uk/coronavirus

We would like to thank you all, once again, for your patience and understanding in these challenging circumstances.

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