

Item No. 6	Classification: Open	Date: 18 March 2021	Meeting Name: Health and Wellbeing Board
Report title:		Update on Southwark Council's Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan, March 2021	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Jin Lim, Acting Director of Public Health Kirsten Watters, Consultant in Public Health (Health Protection)	

RECOMMENDATIONS

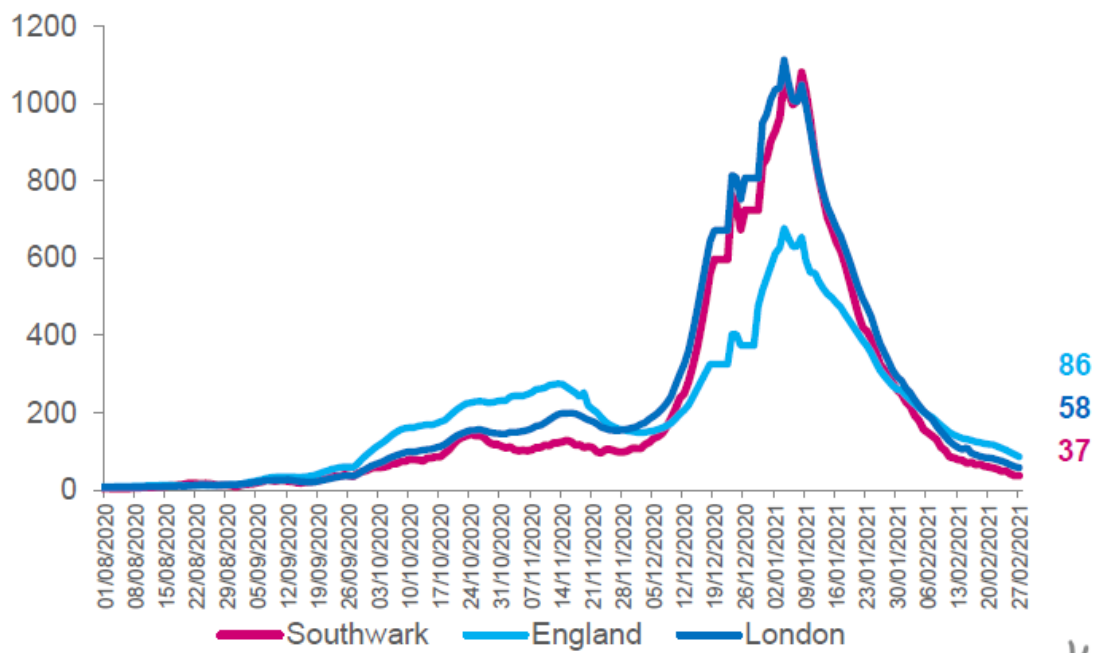
1. That the Health and Wellbeing Board note the update from the Outbreak Prevention and Control Executive (Appendix 1) on the actions taken to prevent, identify and control the novel coronavirus pandemic in Southwark, implementing Southwark's Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan (OPCP).
2. That the Health and Wellbeing Board welcome and thank the Community Health Ambassadors for their support and work with local communities.
3. That the Health and Wellbeing Board endorse the further development and strengthening of communications and engagement in order to increase vaccination uptake and tackle hesitancy and misinformation (Appendix 2).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4. Southwark Council published its Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan (OPCP) on 30 June 2020. In that document, the governance of Southwark's OPCP is established as being firstly Outbreak Prevention and Control Executive (OPCE) and ultimately both the Health and Wellbeing Board and Cabinet. This report to the Health and Wellbeing Board is the fifth update in reporting subsequent activity and progress relating to the OPCP.
5. Since the previous update presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board on 4 February 2021 both the epidemic itself and the local response have evolved.

6. February 2021 has seen the epidemic recede both locally and nationally following the second peak of infection that took place in the weeks immediately following Christmas 2020 and New Year 2021. Southwark, like the rest of London has seen consistent reductions in detected transmission with 7-day incidence falling below 100 / 100,000 population by the middle of February. At the time of reporting, there were fewer than 200 persons testing positive in Southwark each week.
7. Our local hospitals remain under significant and sustained pressure: bed occupancy for COVID-19 has fallen by approximately a half, but has only recently fallen below the levels observed in the first peak of spring 2020.
 - There have been 117 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Southwark in the week up to 27 February.
 - Southwark's 7-day incidence rate is now 37 per 100,000; a decrease of 38% on a week earlier.
 - London's 7-day incidence rate is now 58 per 100,000; a decrease of 31% on a week earlier.
 - Overall positivity is currently 2.3%; lower than London as a whole at 3.1%.
 - Across London, half the boroughs now have incidence rates below 50 per 100,000; Ealing continues to have the highest incidence rate at 108 per 100,000.
 - There are 1,861 patients with COVID-19 in hospital across London.

Source: Southwark Covid 19 Headline statistics, 04.04.21



Weekly incidence rate per 100,000 population

Source: Southwark Covid 19 Monitoring Report 05.03.21

8. With the national vaccination programme proceeding at pace and with considerable success, the population health objective of vaccination is to firstly decouple transmission from severe illness and secondly (as emerging evidence supports) reduce transmission overall.
9. On 22 February 2021 the Prime Minister announced the roadmap out of lockdown with some key dates being:
 - **8 March** - Return to schools
 - **29 March** - Meeting outside, either with one other household or within the "rule of six", including in private gardens; outdoor sport facilities will reopen, including golf courses and tennis and basketball courts; formally organised outdoor sports can also restart
 - **12 April** - All shops allowed to open, restaurants and pub gardens will be allowed to serve customers sitting outdoors, including alcohol, gyms and spas can reopen for individuals and households; hairdressers, beauty salons and other "close contact services" can reopen
 - **17 May** - People can meet in groups of up to 30 outdoors; Six people or two households can meet indoors; Pubs, restaurants and other hospitality venues can seat customers indoors; Indoor entertainment such as museums, theatres, cinemas and children's play areas can open; Performances and large events will be subject to limits though. For indoor events they can be at half capacity or 1,000 people, and outdoors they can be at half capacity or 4,000 people - whichever is lower. For large venues (at least 40,000 capacity) up to 10,000 will be allowed to attend; Hotels, hostels and B&Bs can reopen
 - **No earlier than 21 June** - All legal limits on social contact will be removed; Nightclubs will be allowed to reopen
10. The easing of lockdown for each step will be assessed against the 4 tests:
 - The vaccine deployment programme continues successfully
 - Evidence shows the vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths in those vaccinated
 - Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS
 - The assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new Variants of Concern

PREVENT STRAND

Communications

11. While continuing to share key public health advice and reiterate the existing restrictions, the Council is now preparing for the staggered loosening of restriction from 8 March 2021, as set out in the Prime Minister's roadmap.
12. Our Spring edition of Southwark Life will be delivered week commencing 15 March 2021, and will contain information on all our COVID-19 priorities including testing, vaccines and the loosening of restrictions.
13. We are also continuing to deliver the actions set out in the COVID-19 vaccination communications and engagement strategy with the objective of encouraging all residents to take up the vaccine when it is offered to them. Activity in this period, building on a large number of engagement sessions organised in January and February, includes:
 - Let's talk about the vaccine branding developed.
 - Resident webinar held on Zoom/YouTube, for nearly 300 residents, with an expert panel including Professor Kevin Fenton and Dame Donna Kinnair.
 - Staff webinar (all staff invited) arranged to answer questions about the vaccine.
 - Training sessions for elected members arranged.
 - Case studies developed including photos and quotes from real people having the vaccine and shared on social media, and through our VCS networks/community ambassadors.
 - Out of home advertising in planning.
 - Mapping of target audiences against activity to identify gaps and plan future comms and engagement activity
14. The Council also continues to promote our testing offer in the borough, including new sites such as the asymptomatic rapid testing site at London Bridge station.
15. We have also spoken to other councils that have had to implement surge testing due to the discovery of variants of concern, and have written an outline plan for Southwark in case we need to do the same.

16. The health and wellbeing board had received a communication and engagement plan at the last meeting. Further work is planned to develop and strengthen local communication and engagement in order to increase vaccination uptake and tackle hesitancy and misinformation. The areas for further development are outlined in Appendix 2 and will inform additional investment from Southwark Partnership, NHS and partners.

Community Health Ambassadors

17. There are currently 66 local residents and workers who have completed induction training and are now registered as Community Health Ambassadors in our Southwark network.
18. Ambassadors receive regular updates on COVID-19 prevention and guidance through a weekly newsletter, online ambassador network meetings and the network's WhatsApp group, as well as having access to an online catalogue of COVID-19 resources on different topics and in different languages and formats.
19. Ambassadors have signed up from across all areas of the borough, and the Network has especially strong connections and influence in the Peckham and Nunhead area. There is a spread of ambassadors across ethnic groups, with 41 (68%) of ambassadors who have provided ethnic background information, identifying themselves from BAME groups. Ongoing recruitment of additional ambassadors is targeted to support priority and underrepresented groups.
20. From monthly monitoring survey data, 212 messages were sent out on average per ambassador in January, with printed and direct messages being the most common message types.
21. Appendix 3 provides further information on the community ambassadors programme.

Other prevention work

22. Eighteen VCS COVID-19 prevention small grants applications were reviewed at the end of December 2020. Seven successful projects have been selected for a grant award and are in the process of being awarded to the recipient organisations.
23. Successful recipients include faith groups, a performing arts organisation, a Tenants and Residents Association, and organisations supporting different vulnerable populations. Funded activities include research into the barriers faced by communities, spreading awareness and prevention messages in different formats and languages, and support services for digitally excluded residents.

24. Engagement around the vaccine has also been taking place, with a free online community event on 1st March '*Let's talk about the vaccine*', for residents to hear more about the COVID-19 vaccine and have their questions answered. The event is particularly aimed at discussing and addressing the key concerns that may be contributing to lower take-up of the vaccine in London, and featured an expert panel drawn from the local community as well as Professor Kevin Fenton, Regional Director of Public Health.
25. A training programme is also being rolled out to equip key stakeholders with all the facts and information they need to discuss the vaccine with residents. Training a range of key stakeholders will support the conversation to extend into more vulnerable communities.

Enforcement

26. Enforcement continues to be challenging with improving weather, the messaging on the easing of lock down and the effective roll out of the vaccination programme. Despite the ongoing communications on the importance of adhering to national guidance in line with the government's proposals for the easing of lock down plans, there are increasing incidences of poor social distancing, very crowded public spaces and social gatherings. Recent weekends have seen particular problems at Borough Market and its vicinity with visitors travelling in from other parts of London for socialising, considerable numbers of fines having to be issued by the police and enforcement action taken by the Council.

IDENTIFY STRAND (INCORPORATING INTELLIGENCE)

27. The proportion of tests that are positive (test positivity) continues to decline, trailing the favourable downward trend observed in incidence rate. Approximately 3.6% of individuals who test via the symptomatic (PCR) testing pathway receive a positive result. The number of tests carried out by Southwark residents has declined since early January, to mirror the pattern across London. This is likely as a result of 'stay at home' instructions and a decline in community transmission.
28. Project EAGLE is the London-wide containment plan for emerging Variants of Concern (VoC). Over recent months a number of mutations have emerged which confer competitive advantages including increased transmissibility (such as the "Kent" variant) or possible reduced susceptibility to current vaccine technology (such as the "South African" and "Brazilian" variants). Project EAGLE is designed to identify and assertively respond to variants detected in the community. Plans are underway within Southwark Council to facilitate components of Project EAGLE including locally-targeted asymptomatic testing should the need arise.

29. The development of testing capacity and infrastructure continues at pace with the introduction of rapid lateral flow device (LFD) tests forming an increasing proportion of all testing undertaken.
30. Mass rapid asymptomatic testing using LFDs operates in Southwark to identify those at risk of unwittingly spreading the virus. The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) estimate that 1 in 3 people with COVID-19 are asymptomatic. Southwark's Housing & Modernisation team continue to support mass testing which has seen the appointment of *Trojan* as provider but this was in the anticipation of a 6-week duration. There are now discussions to decide how best to support the programme given its newly announced extension to at least 30 June 2021.
31. In addition to the Damilola Taylor Centre testing site, Peckham, key workers and those unable to work from home are able to test at the new London Bridge Station test site which opened on 25 February 2021 and two pharmacies in the north of the borough. As seen across London, rapid test numbers are broadly plateauing: in week commencing 25 February 2021 a total of 2981 tests were reported in Southwark.
32. We continue to progress the local plans to complement larger community testing sites with a network of high street pharmacies and other appropriate work settings, opening incrementally. On a national level, employers of 50+ staff are able to apply to offer at-work testing and DHSC plan to roll-out widespread home testing in the coming weeks, starting with the households of school staff and pupils.
33. Test and Trace Southwark (TTS) has received lower and more manageable referral volumes. Performance has markedly improved operating around the 40-50% success rate for the local component of contact tracing (of cases), with the overall system performance exceeding the 80% mark.
34. Further call handling capacity has been trained and the service is now stable to maintain current operational capacity over the next several months into the summer of 2021. Planning is underway to deliver the service through to March 2022.
35. Seven-day service resumed on 9 January 2021 and the referral to hyperlocal follow-up has resumed.
36. A monitoring and evaluation strategy, along with quality improvement reviews to the OPCR have taken place over the period January to February 2021. A cycle of continuous improvement to all our pandemic response work is underway.

CONTROL STRAND (INCORPORATING VACCINATION)

37. The Acute Response Team (ART) has operated since February 2020, with a seven-day consultant-led service operating 0900-1700hrs every day. The publichealth@southwark.gov.uk is a monitored group inbox that serves as the single point of contact to all coronavirus-related enquiries. The team meets every weekday at 1600hrs to manage situations and respond to enquiries from across Southwark Council and organisations across the borough.
38. The volume of enquiries has fallen since the peak of the second wave but there continues to be demand from a range of hostels, care and educational institutions. It is anticipated that enquiry volumes will rise as lockdown eases.
39. The ART continues to provide support internally too for the Council. The team is working closely with the Health and Safety team and HR departments to support safe working practices within the organisation.
40. The NHS-led vaccination programme has begun in Southwark with local delivery initially via the Acute Trusts and both Primary Care Networks (PCNs). Roll-out of the programme started in December 2020 and those in the first four JCVI priority groups were offered their first dose of vaccination by the 15 February 2021. Roll out has now been extended to priority groups five and six, and work to extend access and develop further sites is underway.
41. A COVID Vaccination Strategy has been developed to support the programme, with the aim to improve coverage and reduce inequalities. Improvement work will be conducted under five workstreams, including: excluded populations, communications and engagement; addressing vaccine hesitancy, data & intelligence and staff development.

OUTLOOK

42. The epidemic is receding locally. The roadmap out of lockdown is a positive sign that spring and early summer 2021 is likely to see material relaxations of the many constraints that have negatively impacted health, wellbeing and our local economy. However, it is critical that the gradual approach is respected and that positive messages do not distract from the reality that the recovery remains precarious and must be informed by the four tests outlined in para 10.
43. The Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan is currently being refreshed. The key components of the plan must continue to address the challenges posed by the opening up of the economy and the widening of social activities:

- Ensuring good provision of both PCR tests for symptomatic as well as LFT for asymptomatic
 - Ongoing contact tracing
 - Responsive outbreak control
 - Communication and community engagement to support adherence to guidance and enforcement measures where necessary
 - Good vaccination rates with clear actions to tackle gaps and concerns
 - Alertness to and preparedness for the implications of the emerging variants and the ongoing mutation of the virus.
44. We do not expect the need for continued OPCP operations to relent in the medium-term. Even with at-scale vaccine roll-out by summer 2021, continued sporadic outbreaks of disease will likely continue into the winter of 2021/22.

Community impact statement

45. The OPCP involves close collaboration with a range of VCS partners and explicitly recognises the differential impacts of the pandemic on different groups.

Resource implications

46. In the same way that the pandemic has created new resource pressures across the public sector, the work driven by the OPCP has created unprecedented staffing and financial pressures across Public Health, Regulatory Services, Communities and Communications.
47. Ensuring the health and wellbeing of staff who have committed above and beyond their duties for more than a year is a priority. At the same time, qualified public health consultant leadership is highly constrained, with demand far outstripping supply at a national level. A sustainable approach that safeguards health and wellbeing is essential as we project the pandemic response into the next financial year and beyond.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Southwark Outbreak Prevention Control Plan	Public health First Floor, Hub 1 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	publichealth@southwark.gov.uk
http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=365&MId=6771&Ver=4		
Covid 19 and the impact on health inequalities	Public health First Floor, Hub 1 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	publichealth@southwark.gov.uk
http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=365&MId=6771&Ver=4		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Update report from the Outbreak Prevention Control Executive
Appendix 2	Further development areas – vaccination comms. and engagement
Appendix 3	Community health ambassadors

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Caroline Bruce, Strategic Director of Environment and Leisure		
Report Author	Richard Pinder, Consultant in Public Health Medicine		
Version	Final		
Dated	07 March 2021		
Key Decision?	No		
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER			
Officer Title		Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Democracy		No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance		No	No
Cabinet Member		No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team			10 March 2021