



City of Westminster **Westminster Scrutiny Commission**

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Classification:	General Release
Title:	Leader's Update
Report of:	Cllr Rachael Robathan
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Leader of the Council
Policy Context:	COVID-19 Pandemic

1. Executive Summary

This report provides Westminster's Scrutiny Commission with an update on the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Council's Response.

Key Areas for Commission's Consideration

1.1. The Commission is asked to note the report.

2. COVID-19 and the Council's Response

Testing Centres

2.1. As of 22nd January we have a testing capacity of 3,000 tests per day – these are for fast response lateral flow tests (LFTs), and currently resident take up is averaging 500-750 tests daily for all three sites. Currently we also averaging 150-300 PCR tests per day in those sites. The PCR (polymerase chain reaction) tests are prioritised for people who are.

2.2. During this wave, local testing capacity for those with symptoms (using polymerase chain reaction or PCR tests) has been at three local testing sites (Greenside Community Hall – Marylebone/Church Street, Grosvenor Hall – Pimlico, and Lydford Hall - Harrow Road/Queen's Park). The centres are all operating a 7 day a week service from 08:00 – 20:00. A mobile testing site at Hyde Park is also operating twice a week. Testing capacity per site varies from 144 to 216 tests per day and capacity is meeting demand.

2.3. After a successful pilot at Harris Academy, three symptom free test sites are operational (Moberly Sports Centre, Little Venice Sports Centre and Westminster Cathedral) operating 7 days a week from 10:00 to 16:00.

2.4. Westminster's case rate, at 442 per 100,000 (7 days up to 16th January), is the fifth lowest by Local Authority in London, and currently falling. London's average for the 7 days (to 16th January is 679).

2.5. Latest data shows testing rates (i.e., those being tested) in Westminster are lower than the London average as would be expected with lower community infection rates. There continues to be spare availability at testing sites each day and communications remain key to ensuring those with symptoms and those asymptomatic, key workers and others who must be out to work, are tested.

2.6. Asymptomatic testing in schools will be overseen by the Department for Education when schools re-open following lockdown, with the Local Authority in support and testing within pilot sites in the interim.

2.7. The Council established an enhanced local contact tracing scheme in November 2020 to supplement that of the NHS national test and trace programme.

Vaccinations

2.8. The roll out of Covid-19 vaccinations commenced in late December. The vaccination programme is being organised by colleagues in the NHS with support from the Local Authority including Public Health, communications, community engagement and logistics.

2.9. Westminster has two primary care sites as part of the first wave of vaccinations for high priority groups. Care Home staff and residents are being offered vaccinations and forecast to be completed by the end of January. Frontline staff including social care workers will be offered vaccines from 1st February.

- 2.10. Due to the availability and prioritisation supporting the rollout of the ` vaccination, communications are being managed at North West London level.
- 2.11. Local work to engage with communities, to promote the benefits of the vaccine and to monitor and address any inequalities in uptake is underway. This includes regular engagement with faith groups, other community groups, and local MPs to ensure that recent reports of anti-vaccination activity in some communities does not have an impact on vaccine uptake.

Westminster Connects

- 2.12. The focus since November has been providing support for residents through a hardship fund, shielding calls and volunteers. Westminster Connects continues to work closely with VCS organisations to address food need (foodbanks and community food initiative); wellbeing calls and mentoring for young people.
- 2.13. Regular support is offered and provided to the shielding and vulnerable residents through a helpline, monthly automated calls to the shielding and vulnerable older housing tenants, support and referrals for food, shopping and wellbeing, and connections with volunteers for practical support. Westminster Connects is also facilitating the local track and trace service, to contact residents who have tested positive but who the national service has been unable to trace.
- 2.14. Both services will remain in place until the end of March 2021 and will be regularly reviewed in light of changing community need. Both services are staffed by a redeployed team from across the council.

Rough Sleeping

- 2.15. The council was successful in bidding for £1.73m for the winter plan (Oct-March) to keep people safe. This funding covers; an Assessment & Triage service to rapidly move people off the streets and into more appropriate accommodation in their home area; a staging post which is specifically for individuals on the streets who have a housing solution identified but are on a waiting list; and up to 125 placements into the private rented sector with dedicated support workers to support them through their journey to independence.

- 2.16. The Protect Programme launched in November and received funding of £996,000 from MHCLG. It supports the ongoing efforts of our work to provide accommodation for rough sleepers during the pandemic and will help areas that need additional support most during the restrictions and throughout winter and to protect some of the most vulnerable rough sleepers in our communities from COVID-19.
- 2.17. Outreach services are working with hard to house individuals, with provision in the Protect Programme who have historically been more challenging to engage or have not maintained accommodation.

Economy and Business

- 2.18. The Business Unit continues to provide up to date information to businesses on the support available and legal requirements as they unfold at each stage of the pandemic. Since 18 March 2020, the Business Unit has handled circa 4,757 individual business enquiries.
- 2.19. The Business Unit supports the Business Rates Team with the administration of the grant schemes and assist with the identification of eligible businesses. To date, the Business Rates Team has received 4,173 applications for the mandatory November Lockdown grants and paid 2,886.
- 2.20. The Business & Enterprise Service launched the first round of applications for the Additional Restrictions Grant on 14 January 2021. Up to 2,600 businesses will be eligible to apply for a £2,000 grant under the current criteria.

Movement Strategy

- 2.21. The extended pavements to support people to move in a socially distanced manner, implemented using barriers were mostly removed in September. The exceptions were Oxford Street, Regent Street and Piccadilly. 14 temporary cycle lanes were introduced which were demarcated with painted lines and signs. The temporary cycle lanes are currently all under review.
- 2.22. Support was provided to clusters of hospitality businesses through the provision of outside space for dining, using Mass barriers or street closures. Following London moving into Tier 3 and subsequently lockdown, hospitality businesses are currently not open for dining.
- 2.23. The barriers to support outdoor dining have remained in place and could operate again when the current lockdown is lifted. A conversation on sustained hospitality has started to look at what solutions should/could be provided for businesses going forwards with a view of returning to a tier system.