

# Executive

## Covid-19 Update

Item no: 4

### - including an update from London Councils Pandemic Steering Committee

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**Summary:** This report provides an overview of London local government's continuing response to Covid-19; the framework for sub-regional and pan-London collaboration; and the overview and governance arrangements – which have recently been strengthened by the initiation of the London Councils Pandemic Steering Committee.

A verbal update will be provided on key points from the most recent weekly meeting of the London Councils Pandemic Steering Committee on 3 November 2020 (which took place after despatch of these papers).

**Recommendations:** Members of the Executive are asked to:

1. Consider and comment on key issues in the update to help steer London local government's continuing response to Covid-19.

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# Covid-19 Update

## Background

1. London local government's Covid 19 related work sits within a broader partnership response and has evolved through distinct phases to reflect the evolution of the pandemic and national and local policy responses.
2. The initial response was grounded in established ways of working that have been developed through our long-standing shared commitment to building London's resilience and protecting Londoners. The local government response was initially escalated in step with the stand-up of the formal inter-agency London Covid 19 Strategic Coordination Group (SCG) - with London local government representation represented through London Local Authority Gold.
3. As the extent and duration of the pandemic became clearer, bespoke Covid 19 local authority co-ordination arrangements were introduced, to improve capacity and release the regular on-call Gold chief executive to respond to any other incidents which might occur. The arrangements relied on sub-regional working to provide improved strength and depth to the support for individual boroughs.
4. Summer 2020 provided the opportunity for a period of reflection, and a move in strategic focus from mitigating the immediate implications of the pandemic, to transition matters and planning London's recovery and renewal. At this stage, the partnership Strategic Co-ordination Group was stood down and the following were initiated:
  - The London Transition Board – co-chaired by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, and the Mayor of London – attended by the London Councils' Chair, Deputy Chair and Vice-Chairs, representing the perspectives of London boroughs. It was originally envisaged that this Board would continue to meet monthly for the remainder of 2020. In view of the SCG being stood up again, it is now meeting on a 6-weekly cycle.
  - The London Recovery Board (LRB) - Co-Chaired by the, Chair of London Councils and the Mayor and attended by the London Councils' Deputy Chair and Vice-Chairs. The LRB was designed to plan and oversee the capital's wider long-term economic and social recovery. Through a series of social and economic working groups,

a package of recovery missions has been agreed and action plans are being developed for consideration by the Board at its meeting on 10 November 2020. This meeting will also consider the programme's cross-cutting themes including equalities.

- London Councils commissioned Mike Cooke to review of London local government's collective response to the Covid-19 pandemic between March and July of this year. Mike Cooke presented to Leaders' Committee on 13th October.

### **Strengthened Arrangements – Autumn 2020**

5. After considering Mike Cooke's recommendations on 13 October 2020, Leaders' Committee went on to agree to formally establish a **London Councils' Pandemic Steering Committee**.
6. The membership includes the Elected Officers, supported by London Councils' chief executive and the coordinating borough chief executive – with wider attendance when required by its agenda The Terms of Reference are attached as appendix A. Its core purpose is to bring political oversight and leadership to the pan-borough response to what is now a long-term situation. NB: It was agreed that other short terms emergency management situations would be responded to as before, through the established 'Gold' arrangements.
7. The new Committee met for the first time on 27 October 2020 and further details of its first meeting are set out below.
8. The Elected Officers continue to play a key part in the London Leaders Covid 19 Committee, along with the Mayor of London and senior resilience and public health officials. This Committee plays a formal role in the escalation process which was agreed with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. The Committee is regularly briefed by PHE on a range of the latest data and analysis as part of ongoing discussions around potential escalation and de-escalation strategies. Members of the Executive will be aware that much of this material is

then shared on a weekly basis with Leaders and Chief Executives via the 5.00pm call on a Monday.

9. As noted above, the SCG has been re-established and it will now focus on co-ordinating London's strategic response to both the pandemic and, at the request of government, monitor impacts arising from the end of the transition period with the European Union. The LLASC arrangements feed in to the SCG and its structures.

### **Update on Current Issues**

10. Boroughs are receiving regular briefings from London's Public Health England team, with PHE sharing the latest epidemiological data at the weekly London Councils briefings for Leaders and Chief Executives.
11. London moved into Tier 2 (High) Alert Level on the 17<sup>th</sup> October, subsequently, on Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> October, the Prime Minister indicated that he would be seeking Parliamentary approval for the introduction of an England-wide lockdown. At the time of writing, the lockdown was expected to begin on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> November and to last until at least Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December.
12. In parallel, discussions have continued between London partners and Government on the shape of a wider escalation and de-escalation process and were due to be reported at the weekly London Councils briefing meeting for Leaders and Chief Executives on 2 November 2020.
13. The first meeting of the Pandemic Steering Committee on 27 October 2020 received a verbal report from the Co-ordinating Chief Executive and went on to discuss and consider a number of key issues:

- Homelessness and rough sleeping

Rough sleepers were accommodated in empty hotels and in other short-term residencies during the initial phase of the

pandemic. London Council's is working through the SCG's structures in order to identify potential solutions to emerging issues around supporting rough sleepers this winter – including housing the current street homeless population and taking account of the stricter guidelines that PHE England has issued.

- Support for clinically extremely vulnerable people

The national shielding programme is not currently in operation and the Government has indicated that in future, when required, shielding should operate at a local authority level. Boroughs are collaborating to look at a minimum support offer to clinically extremely vulnerable (CEVs) should this be required. This includes an expectation of local authorities that they identify and contact all residents that require support. Support could include but not be limited to priority shopping slots, communicating with shielding residents and further support. The provision of medication and other necessities will need to be considered at borough and pan-London level.

- Test and Trace

A number of boroughs have developed local contact tracing initiatives and the learning from their initial experience will be shared through the regular weekly London Councils' briefings. This learning will also inform discussions which are taking place at a national level on options for more localised testing. A pilot in LB Brent has illustrated how local booking of testing slots can provide significant advantages, allowing access to be targeted to match the greatest need. Any consideration of a pan-London approach would need to take full account of capacity issues across the boroughs.

- Funding

London Councils has continued to actively engage with Treasurers, SLT and MHCLG officials to support boroughs to prepare and assure their assessment of the financial implications of managing the pandemic, in light of the second wave, and to analyse and understand the overall impact for London. This will help develop the case to Government around challenges for councils, particularly around loss of income (including Council Tax and business rates), as well as direct costs and undelivered savings.

- Overall package of Public Health support

At the request of the Pandemic Steering Committee, London Councils has been working with the Local Authority co-ordinating Chief Executive, GLA and the SCG to assemble a draft package of public health or 'epidemiological' asks (drawing on the themes mentioned in the bullet points above). This was due to be discussed in more detail at the Pandemic Steering Committee's meeting on 3 November 2020.

- Economic and Business support

In addition to the public health or 'epidemiological' asks noted above, London Councils officers are working with the GLA and other core partners on the SCG Business and Economic Impact Sub-Group to assemble a package of potential London asks around further business support measures – which might be appropriate in the context of the additional control measures being introduced to manage the second-wave.

Issues under discussion include, for example the impact on aviation communities and other sectors such as hospitality, the arts and culture – where staff will require retraining, skills and employment support. This work was also due to be discussed in more detail at the Pandemic Committee's meeting on 3 November 2020.

## **Conclusion**

14. The introduction of the London Councils' Pandemic Steering Committee has formalised political oversight and leadership of the pan-borough response to the pandemic.
15. The Committee has initiated a number of key workstreams, as reported above, and progress on these, and any other matters discussed at the Committee's meeting on 3 November 2020, will be reported verbally to the Executive.
16. Members of the Executive are asked to consider and comment on key issues in the update to help steer London local government's continuing response to Covid-19.

## **Financial Implications for London Councils**

This programme of work will represent a commitment of officer time across the organisation. This is currently being managed largely within existing overall budgets by a flexible deployment of overall resources.

## **Legal Implications for London Councils**

There are no direct Legal implications for London Councils as a result of this report.

## **Equalities Implications for London Councils**

Equalities implications of key elements of the response will be considered as part of the Pandemic Steering Committee's remit.

## **Background Papers**

**Appendix A:** Terms of Reference for London Councils Pandemic Steering Committee



## **Appendix A: Terms of Reference for London Councils Pandemic Steering Committee**

### **Overview**

This Committee was established following Leaders' Committee's consideration in October 2020 of lessons learned during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. Its remit is to give pan borough political leadership to the pandemic. It will:

1. Receive briefings on emerging trends and issues pertaining to the pandemic from a local and sub-regional perspective.
2. Develop and seek to agree a London local government line on key issues, taking account of a range of borough perspectives.
3. Ensure effective political oversight of the London local authority Strategic Co-ordination arrangements for COVID-19.

### **Role of the Committee**

- To receive reports and advice from the London Local Authority Strategic Co-ordinating Chief Executive (LASC) and assess the implications of available data and information.
- To provide strategic direction on any challenges/opportunities that might arise from the above in relation to the management of COVID-19 in London.
- To plan ahead to ensure longer term planning for future challenges arising from the pandemic.
- To form a London local government view of matters relating to the London *Leaders' COVID-19 Committee* as well as the *Transition and Recovery Boards*.
- To ensure the outcomes of the above are communicated appropriately at a London-wide, sub-regional and local level.

### **Membership**

- London Councils Chair,
- Deputy Chair
- 3 Vice Chairs (cross party)
- Other Relevant LC Portfolio Holders and sub-regional political leads by invitation (*based on agenda*)
- London Local Authority Strategic Co-ordinating Chief Executive (LASC) +1 to ensure coverage and continuity
- Chief Executive of London Councils

