

# Leaders

## Covid-19 Update

Item no: 4

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

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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 our overview and governance arrangements – which have recently been strengthened by the instigation 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 1 December 2020.

**Recommendations:** Leaders are asked to 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 together with 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 detailed action plans are being developed for consideration by the Board at its January 2021 meeting. Our leading members, who have been playing a central role in this work, are keen to find more formalised support for the programme, working across City Hall, London Councils and other key partners. Discussions have taken place with the GLA on the possible shape of this support and how it might be resourced.

- London Councils commissioned Mike Cooke to review 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. Members will be aware that 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 it is required by the 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 this a long-running state of affairs. 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 27th October 2020 and has continued to meet on a weekly basis.
8. The Elected Officers also play a key part in the London Leaders Covid-19 Committee, along with the Mayor of London and senior resilience and public health officials. The Committee is regularly briefed by PHE on 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. At the time of drafting the SCG has been focussing on both co-ordinating London's strategic response to the pandemic and, at the request of Government, monitoring impacts arising from the end of the transition period with the European Union. Renewed arrangements for co-ordination at a sub-regional and pan-London level, known as London Local Authority Strategic Co-ordination (LLASC) measures, work at chief executive level feed into the SCG as well as the London Councils' Pandemic Steering Committee.

## **10. Update on Current Issues**

11. 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.
12. London was subject to a national lockdown from Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> November and, at the time of drafting was set to end on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> of December.
13. Government announced on the 26<sup>th</sup> November that London would be categorised as Tier 2 under a revised tiering system– with effect from the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December. It was announced that Decisions on which area goes into which tier are primarily based on 5 key epidemiological indicators:
- case detection rates in all age groups
  - case detection rates in the over-60s
  - the rate at which cases are rising or falling
  - positivity rate (the number of positive cases detected as a percentage of tests taken)
  - pressure on the NHS, including current and projected occupancy
14. In the background, discussions continue between London partners and Government on:
- The shape of wider escalation and de-escalation process.
  - Local -funding requirements

- Influencing the broader national policy response, to underpin boroughs' work to mitigate and adapt to evolving challenges in the best interest of London's residents and businesses.

Recent meetings of the Pandemic Steering Committee discussed and considered a number of key issues, including:

- *Targeted Testing & the 'Protect Programme'*

In anticipation of the end of the national lockdown, testing has continued to be a priority for boroughs and resilience partners. The Steering Committee was briefed on scenarios for the wider testing programme including asymptomatic testing. Leaders were sighted on both the possible benefits and limitations of asymptomatic testing, including how this may affect the number of 'positive' cases in London.

- *Homelessness*

London Councils continues to work through the SCG's structures in order to identify potential solutions to emerging issues around supporting rough sleepers this winter. It has been reported that at least 900 people are still rough sleeping in London. Leaders will be aware that the Government has announced further funding under the 'Protect Programme' of which London is expected to receive between £5-7m which will be shared between boroughs and the GLA. Whilst the support is likely to be welcomed by boroughs, concerns remain about the duration of funding, which is expected to end in March. Work continues to seek additional funding.

- *Food Support*

Dame Louise Casey attended the Pandemic Steering Committee to discuss her work on Food Support. She reported that food insecurity has been exacerbated since the outbreak of the pandemic and has continued to be an area of concern for local areas. Winter pressures could make Food Support an even greater concern. Dame Louise

outlined ways in which support could be added at a cross-borough level, including fundraising and signposting for the public.

- *Communications*

London Councils, alongside the GLA and the NHS, has played a core part in the 'Keep London Safe' campaign, including developing Covid-19 Christmas messaging. It was recognised that boroughs have their own individual Christmas messaging and that different messaging might work better in different areas.

## **Conclusion**

15. The London Councils' Pandemic Steering Committee has continued to provide a formal channel for political oversight and leadership of the pan-borough response to the pandemic.
16. Since its outset, the Committee has initiated a number of key workstreams, and progress on these, and any other matters discussed at the Committee's meeting on the 2 December 2020 will be reported verbally to the Executive.
17. Leaders are asked to consider and continue to comment on key issues in the update to help steer London local government's continuing response to Covid-19.

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## **Financial Implications for London Councils**

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

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### **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