

Joint Health Scrutiny briefing note – 22 June 2020

The public health response to COVID-19 has focused on ensuring BCP and Dorset Council, and partners in the Integrated Care System, are responding to the local outbreak effectively. The Director of Public Health links regularly with Public Health England to ensure critical Council and health services are responding in a timely and effective manner. This included public health leadership through the Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) of the Local Resilience Forum, to ensure that the multi-agency response to the Covid-19 emergency was well led, in accordance with an appropriate strategy, and adequately resourced.

The Director of Public Health and Assistant Director of Public Health Rachel Partridge attend Dorset and BCP Council's Corporate Incident Management Teams regularly to provide advice and guidance where required to Directors and members working on the response. Public Health consultants are supporting the Director to provide health protection advice working closely with Public Health England South West health protection team. This involves the tactical level groups in health and care, supporting BCP and Dorset Council's community response work, and working closely with Dorset CCG colleagues in responding to outbreaks in complex settings such as care homes. The response is 7 days a week organised on a rota basis to cover the BCP and Dorset Council area, particularly where outbreak control meetings are required at weekends.

Key activities during the pandemic phase included ensuring safe access to essential public health services such as sexual health, drug and alcohol treatment and children and young people's public health nursing. The team also developed local advice and guidance on using personal protective equipment for Council and community facing roles, and providing a significant communications effort to reinforce key Government messages. Public Health intelligence specialists stood up an epidemiology cell through the SCG to provide timely surveillance and data on the impact of the outbreak on local health services, and timescales for recovery. Public health is also leading a group with Dorset CCG to develop additional mental health and wellbeing support during and beyond the outbreak.

The Director of Public Health is developing two local outbreak management plans for the Councils, which will set out how we respond to information from the NHS Test and Trace system about potential outbreaks, and support people who test positive and their contacts to self-isolate promptly. Councils have received an allocation of approximately £3m to support these plans (£1.28, Dorset, £1.8m BCP).

The plans set out our local operating model for containing outbreaks, increasing our public health capacity to respond, and provide ongoing surveillance and information to enable local leaders to act quickly to contain the virus. The aim is to prevent the need for an escalation to national lockdown by providing local public health measures to contain COVID-19.