

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF COUNCIL 16 MARCH 2021

Covid rates

The district's infection rate continues to decrease, but more slowly than England as a whole. At the time of writing we are in the top ten most infected places in the country. Although there is now a national roadmap to lifting restrictions which gives us all hope, we must all remain vigilant to keep each other safe. That means staying at home as much as possible, washing hands frequently, wearing a face mask where appropriate and keeping 2 metres distanced from others.

Mindful that we still have a way to go before everyone is vaccinated, we will continue to work round the clock to support our residents to keep safe. This means helping them to get tested, to receive self-isolation payments and to access food when they need it, amongst all the many other council services we all rely on.

Recent in-depth research by the national Joint Biosecurity Centre into three regions, including Bradford, identified a number of factors that, combined, are causing sustained community transmission. They include deprivation, employment and household composition.

We have asked Government for a number of areas of support to help us keep the virus at bay:

1. Increase local flexibility in testing delivery

- Provide rapid lateral flow tests (LFT) available for all members of the population to regularly test themselves at home if they want them. Continued support for door-to door PCR testing of asymptomatic individuals.
- Investment in campaigns to encourage regular COVID-19 testing as a 'normal' thing to do.

2. Enhanced support for contact tracing

- The Council is already successfully doing contact tracing for positive cases that the national test and trace system struggles to get in touch with. We would like national permission to be able to trace contacts, as well as positive cases, that the national team cannot reach.

3. Improved financial support to enable effective self-isolation

- Widening financial support for more people on low pay who don't currently qualify for financial support. This reduces the stigma associated with claiming support and help employees where there is no sick pay scheme in place.

4. Improved practical support for self-isolation

- Discretionary funding to meet other needs identified 'on the doorstep' by COVID Support Workers, such as food and shopping, removing the stigma of referral to food banks.

5. Support to deliver the vaccine programme to maximise its impact in our district

- Greater flexibility from Government to prioritise Bradford district for vaccine supplies given our stubborn infection levels.

Vaccinations

Thanks must go to our great local NHS teams for the roll-out of the vaccinations in Bradford district and Craven. Over 170,000 adults have now received their vaccine and this looks to be making a real difference to the over 60's levels of hospitalisation. I continue to be concerned about younger residents however who end up in hospital.

There were lower vaccine supplies in the last two weeks of February, but we are promised more from mid March. We also continue to press for better data from the NHS on supply and distribution as the data is still patchy. Thanks to all councillors for encouraging residents to have the vaccine. Conspiracy theories and bogus clips online do unfortunately persist, so we need to continue with the positive and reassuring messaging in our communities to combat fake news and encourage take-up of the vaccine.

Northern Powerhouse Rail

We are at a crucial time with the Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) decision as we continue to push government to commit to delivering it in full including a Bradford city centre stop. The Transport for the North (TfN) board met on 18th February and said that it has reluctantly agreed to delay the submission of its business case for the Northern Powerhouse Rail at the request of government. The Department of Transport said it wants to publish its Integrated Rail Plan first, setting out how NPR will link in with other infrastructure projects. TfN had been due to publish its business case next month, so obviously any delay from government is of concern especially in light of the recent announcement that it is cutting TfN's core funding by £4m in 2021/22. TfN says the delay won't necessarily set back the planned schedule for construction of NPR. We continue to lobby hard with partners in making the case for NPR. I'm writing to the Transport Minister Grant Shapps to again re-state the case for NPR in Bradford and request urgent assurances that our transformational transport plans will not be watered down.

West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Leeds has a new Leader, Cllr James Lewis, we welcome him and wish Cllr Judith Blake all the very best in her new role.

Out of the £38 million gainshare we have secured through devolution in 2020-21:

- £13.5m has been allocated by the CA to spend on skills and employment
- £5m has been allocated to spend on local economic recovery
- We are working on programmes to support potential entrepreneurs to grow businesses and create jobs, and to develop programmes for zero carbon and health innovation. This will take up the remaining £7m.
- The capital proportion of the gainshare is being reserved for the Transforming Cities Fund top-up.

We are also progressing spend of other devolved money including the Adult Education Budget and funding to bring forward new homes on brownfield sites. We are developing our overarching investment strategy for the devolution monies. We have agreed priorities of creating good jobs, skills, infrastructure, zero carbon and transport, with overarching goals of clean, inclusive growth and tackling inequalities.

We are currently consulting on the Connectivity Plan, which sets out the vision for mass transit, rail, bus, cycling and walking in West Yorkshire by 2040, including developing a pipeline of schemes. This will support our bid to Government for a share of the £4.2bn transport fund that Govt has made available to places with devolution deals.

QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER

Councillor Poulsen

The rollout of vaccines both nationally and locally has been amazing and gives everyone hope particularly the most vulnerable across the District, can the leader update us on the vaccinations for care staff in the District and the percentage who have now been vaccinated and how it compares across West Yorkshire and nationally?

Councillor Susan Hinchliffe

Those figures are obviously local NHS figures, but when I last saw the data for care staff and this is across the whole sector, it's not council care staff it was something like 76% I believe, it was quite high. There are some latest figures which just came out this week it may be higher now but I'm sure we'll be able to share those figures with you, in fact Cllr Hargreaves who is on the Outbreak Control Board will be in regular receipt of those numbers and obviously he's leading for you on that subject so I'm sure we can share those with you too.