

COVID-19 Local Outbreak Management Plan Devon County Council Members' Protocol

Introduction

Alongside all upper tier authorities, Devon County Council has published its COVID-19 [Local Outbreak Management Plan](#).

The Plan is a blueprint for managing any coronavirus outbreaks in Devon to protect residents, communities and businesses and support the most vulnerable. It sets out measures to prevent any further outbreaks in Devon as well as action to respond to outbreaks and contain the spread of coronavirus.

Devon County Council has also been designated one of England's 11 Beacon Councils by Government to lead the implementation of the new Local Outbreak Management Plans and to share good practice.

Devon and Torbay Health COVID-19 Health Protection Board

The Board is responsible for the management of the Local Outbreak Management Plan and for coordinating resources and partner agencies to provide a swift response to managing an outbreak of the virus, including local testing and tracing arrangements.

It is chaired by Devon's Director of Public Health, Dr Virginia Pearson, with the Director of Public Health for Torbay, Dr Caroline Dimond, and Devon's Deputy Director of Public Health, Steve Brown, as vice-chairs.

Team Devon – Local Outbreak Engagement Board

Team Devon will monitor how the Plan is delivered within the community and will liaise directly with Government ministers. Team Devon is also responsible for communicating and engaging with residents, businesses and communities and is chaired by Council Leader John Hart.

As with the Health Protection Board, Membership includes several partner agencies.

What is classed as an outbreak?

An outbreak is generally defined as two or more cases connected in time to a specific place such as a care home, school, factory or workplace – not a household.

What happens if there is an outbreak in Devon?

The Devon COVID-19 Tactical Management Group (TMG) and key appropriate service lead e.g. Adult Social Care if the case is in a care home and education if it is in a school, are notified by Public Health England of all confirmed cases in Devon.

If an outbreak is identified the actions will be agreed between the Local Health Protection Team (PHE) and Devon TMG. The precise action taken will depend upon the complexity of the outbreak. It is likely that if an outbreak is detected, an Outbreak Control Team is set up to identify and agree early intervention measures to stop the spread before it escalates further into the community.

The Plan sets out a toolkit of infection control measures including advising on hygiene practices, implementing public health measures, providing focused testing right through to localised lockdown (in conjunction with Public Health England). The action that is taken will depend on the severity of the outbreak and the most appropriate measures.

Communication cascade

In the event of a confirmed outbreak in Devon, Dr Virginia Pearson will inform Councillor John Hart, Phil Norrey, Councillor Roger Croad, the relevant Chief Officer and the local Members(s).

Devon's Communications Task Group chaired by Devon's Head of Communications and Media, Tony Parker, will also be informed and actions in the Communications Strategy (see attached) will be implemented immediately.

Communication principles

- The Leader of the County Council has ultimate responsibility for overseeing and approving all communications and engagement.
- All communications and public engagement will be routed through the COVID-19 Communications Task Group.
- Communications and public engagement will be led by the science and informed by accurate data.
- Communications and public engagement will be timely to ensure affected communities, workplaces, stakeholders and the wider public are provided with trusted, authoritative information.
- The needs of vulnerable residents and minority groups will be considered and reflected in bespoke communications and engagement where necessary.
- All communications and public engagement will have regard to the Government's Code of recommended Practice on local Authority Publicity.

Local Members' Role

Local Members have a fundamental role to play in helping to stop the spread of infection, in keeping communities informed and reassured, and in communicating timely information and advice which will be led by the science and data.

Trust and confidence in the County Council to manage any outbreaks alongside our partner agencies is crucial.

Misinformation and rumour can spread quickly so it is vital that authoritative, timely, consistent and open and honest information is shared with residents as widely as possible.

The local knowledge and connections that Members have will be crucial in the event of any local outbreaks.

However, it is clear from the Government guidance that the key messages of the Team Devon Local Outbreak Engagement Board should emulate from the Leader of the Council. We would ask that Members do not issue press releases, statements or letters for publication relating to an outbreak without speaking to the Leader of the Council and notification to the Communications Task Group.

Likewise, the Council will be working hard on promoting accurate information relating to prevention and protection messages, therefore it is very important that local Members work with the Communications Task Group to ensure an accurate response.

One of the key threads of the Team Devon Local Outbreak Engagement Board is to avoid misinformation therefore it is crucial that any local Member communication is accurate and led by both scientific evidence and data.

Local Members have two key roles in this process, the first to use local networks to disseminate any key messages and the second to report back any local intelligence to the Public Health Team relating to an outbreak or rising numbers of cases.

Members will be expected to take forward any prevention communications and share them widely within their networks and communities. Local Members will also be asked to ensure that the communications have been provided in a format that is widely accessible for any hard to reach groups or minority communities within their ward.

In the event of an outbreak, local Members will be made aware of the position and may be asked to join the Leader in any press statements or communications, as outlined below, but much will depend on the nature and type of outbreaks and in which community, sector and / or business setting.

If an infection affects more than one ward, then those local Members will be asked to work together, with the Communications Task Group to ensure coherent and accurate information across those areas.

There will be a steady flow of information in relation to prevention and any safety campaigns, but the frequency of updates in relation to an outbreak will very much be incidence specific.

Media releases/spokespeople

As per the agreed Council Communications protocol, quotes from local Members will be included in media releases and on the Newscentre as appropriate, alongside quotes from Cllr Hart, Dr Pearson and partner agencies as necessary.

Cllr Hart and Dr Pearson, alongside Phil Norrey, will be the main spokespeople in response to any outbreaks but there may be occasion where the local Member is asked for an interview. Such requests should only be undertaken with the agreement of the Communications Task Group.

Social media

The power of social media to reach communities will be of utmost importance during an outbreak. However, the power of social media to also rapidly spread rumours and misinformation should not be overlooked.

Communication from the Council's social media accounts will be led and facilitated by the Communications Task group to ensure consistent and accurate messages. Members are encouraged to share these corporate messages through their social media accounts.

Please see the [Social Media Guide](#) for Members.

Questions

If Members have any questions about the Protocol or Communications Strategy please contact [Tony Parker](#), Head of Communications and Media, or [Paula Miles](#), Head of Internal and Change Communications or [Karen Strahan](#), Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager.