



Coronavirus (COVID-19) Stakeholder Briefing

Friday 13 March, 2020

Dear Stakeholder,

You will probably already be aware that the [government yesterday announced that we are moving out of the contain phase and into delay](#), in response to the ongoing coronavirus outbreak.

The need for this response is reflected in the national figures today, which show a rise in numbers in the UK of 208 to 798, and sadly 10 deaths. However, as the Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty said yesterday, this is likely to be significantly higher, and could be as many as 10,000 nationally.

The UK Chief Medical Officers have now raised the risk to the UK from moderate to high. The current advice remains that the most important thing individuals can still do to protect themselves remains washing their hands more often, for at least 20 seconds, with soap and water and making sure you cough or sneeze into a tissue, put it in a bin and wash your hands.

Anyone who shows certain symptoms is now being asked to [self-isolate for 7 days](#), regardless of whether they have travelled to affected areas. This means people should stay at home and avoid all but essential contact with others for 7 days from the point of displaying mild symptoms, to slow the spread of infection.

The symptoms are:

- a high temperature (37.8 degrees and above)
- a new, persistent cough

Routine testing will no longer take place for people who are self-isolating and have no additional complications and people do not need to call NHS 111 to go into self-isolation. Anyone whose symptoms worsen during home isolation or are no better after 7 days should contact NHS 111 online at 111.nhs.uk.

Public Health England's focus will be around the most complex cases, and where there are clusters of significant numbers of people.

These changes to national policy are fast paced but reflect the nature of the response, and Devon County Council is staying up to date with and responding to the latest advice and information as it becomes available.

Schools

The Government has taken the decision at a national level, based on scientific advice, that schools in general do not need to close across the board at this stage. Devon County Council is communicating daily to schools, and relaying the national advice as well as supporting schools in dealing with media and HR issues. Individually, schools are taking advice about closures from Public Health England, as the need arises and



there may be an increasing need for schools to consider their situation, in light of large numbers of pupils or staff absent through self-isolation.

Children's service providers

We are communicating regularly with providers and ensuring they are updating their business continuity plans. We are working with providers and partners in health to ensure support continues for the most vulnerable children. If providers begin to face staff shortages, we will work with them to develop flexible solutions. However, this could be a significant risk particularly for children whose disability is further impacted by complex health needs.

Adult Social care

Devon County Council's adult social care function has formed an Incident Management Team to coordinate the services' response to COVID-19 across the council, with our NHS partners and with our care providers.

The team is leading on work to inform, coordinate and support the Council's business continuity planning, for social care services we provide and commission. The team is looking specifically at risk assessment, service prioritisation and redeployment of resources as necessary.

The Council is developing contingency arrangements to respond to changing demand for services by maintaining and developing capacity working with its independent and voluntary sector residential and domiciliary providers and people in local communities.

Of particular note right now, locally and nationally, is a growing number of care home providers in Devon that are restricting visits and/or stopped taking new admissions including on discharge from hospital. We are in dialogue with those homes in particular and supporting others in order to ensure continued service.

As the situation progresses, we anticipate growing workforce challenges given projected increases in staff absence at the same time when our capacity will be most needed, not least to relieve pressure on the NHS.

It is important that national funding is made available to support provider sustainability and underwrite service sufficiency at a time when businesses in the sector may be vulnerable and that where appropriate there is flexibility regarding regulation to enable different models of delivery appropriate to the circumstance.

The Council's approach is to work together with its local NHS and local authority partners as a whole system, with intensive work underway to coordinate our collective response to the challenge of Coronavirus COVID-19 in Devon.

Communities

We have written to local community organisations to offer support in co-ordinating a community approach and response to this evolving situation. We are asking for groups to share their plans, identify those most at risk as well as the impact on local services and facilities and collate information on which local organisations are available to support them.



We are also looking to provide a community toolkit which groups can use to promote messages and collate information and resources to support the most vulnerable and to seek support for dissemination of messages to local parishes and communities, with the potential for a helpline or mailbox to support the network.

By the end of next week we are hoping to launch a “100% Devon” campaign which is designed to promote common values in Devon’s communities. Whilst this would be COVID-19 specific we hope it will provide some useful context to accompany more targeted messages in the days to come. We are also increasing our social media messaging in line with our ‘Show You Care’ principles and to actively encourage people to check on more vulnerable community members while adopting the social distancing guidelines.

Devon County Council’s leadership team will be continuing to review its business continuity arrangements to reflect the most recent guidance, and a workshop next week will help focus on the practical and resource implications of these plans, and develop further resilience planning.

Community events and gatherings

In line with guidance from the Chief Medical Officer, we have not made any universal decisions regarding community events, conferences or mass gatherings. They will continue to be reviewed on an individual basis to ascertain their viability until further guidance is available.

Resources

New resources to reflect the new guidance are being developed and shared with partners and local communities. These can be downloaded directly from Public Health England’s [Campaign Resource Centre](#).

As I am sure you will appreciate, this situation is rapidly changing and we will continue to update residents and businesses [through our website](#). Our customer service centre and public facing staff have been provided with guidance to ensure people are directed to the right sources of information and advice.

Yours sincerely

Dr Virginia Pearson
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