

Support for local leadership

Peer offer on testing, contact tracing and outbreak management

27 July 2020



Introduction

In June 2020 local government and directors of public health have been identified as critical in managing the next phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. Upper tier councils have been tasked by Government to:

- establish a member led Local Outbreak Control Board (this could be an existing group such as the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB))
- establish a director of public health led COVID-19 Health Protection Board (this may be new or already exist)
- develop a Local Outbreak Control Plan.

The purpose of this document is to support council leaders, the chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board, and chief executive officers to use as a checklist to establish if they are working in a way that would support planning for a local outbreak.

This checklist of questions is a peer support exercise, developed by the Local Government Association (LGA) recognising that, as this pandemic is unlikely to be short-lived, councils and their partners can all learn from each other through experience and expertise. Across councils a system of mutual assurance can develop by sharing best practice.

The questions should be used to facilitate discussions with the range of councils in a local area to ensure local democratic accountability. A specific discussion should take place with the Local Resilience Forum(s) in order to avoid any duplication.

This will allow assessment of strengths and areas for improvement for now and during the recovery phase. Leaders can look to the 11 Good Practice Networks for peer support, as well as from areas that gain experience as the outbreaks occur.

The key outcome is a well-organised local system that works in tandem with Public Health England health protection teams, other relevant partners, councils and councillors clear in their roles and responsibilities and able to communicate effectively with their local population to respond to the action needed for managing a local outbreak.

Emergency planning – now everyone’s business

Emergency planning under the Civil Contingency Act 2004 is a well-established function. Over the years many local resilience issues and health outbreaks have been dealt with at local levels by dedicated teams of trained public health professionals eg the council’s public health team working alongside PHE Health Protection Teams.

COVID-19 and the pandemic and its potential to be with us for the foreseeable future means this is now everyone business, and not just the remit of specialists.

There is increasing knowledge about how COVID-19 affects individuals and communities, and system leaders working in their communities will need to ensure their thinking and decisions take account of a range of potential scenarios for example a successful and early vaccine, a severe second spike of cases that may be locally or regionally focused and different phases of recovery across the country.

The guidance in June 2020 states that each local council will have:

- a member led Local Outbreak Engagement Board (this is new but could be an existing group such as the HWB)
- a director of public health led COVID-19 Health Protection Board (this may be new or already exist)
- a Local Outbreak Control Plan.

The local council will be expected to have a tailored outbreak control plan focusing on identifying and containing potential outbreaks in such places as schools, care homes and workplaces, and will work closely with the NHS, Public Health England and other local partners to achieve this.

The LGA has produced two documents relevant for elected members at all tiers of local government:

- A councillor’s workbook on the role of leaders and cabinet members during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Emergency response structures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many of these elected members will be critical to the engagement needed with local populations when managing a local outbreak.

Top tip 1

Make these documents available to all local elected members across your geography and also use this as part of developing a network to understand key contacts for communications.

Top tip 2

Ask the Director of Public Health or one of their team to do a virtual session on your local arrangements so that local councillors get to know the DPH, the role and support of Public Health England and what is in place locally and who some of the key people are.

The remainder of this document will support you to assess your current situation by providing questions on

- your leadership and governance and where you are now
- your current communication processes and how they need to adapt to respond to a local outbreak
- analytical support and information
- your relationships and partnerships
- recovery and Health and Wellbeing Board

SELF-ASSESSMENT – testing, contact tracing and outbreak management

This document is your self-assessment. We offer virtual facilitated sessions, tailored to support you reach a common understanding of your local position and what you need to do next. This support will be delivered by peers and associates who have experience of the accountabilities and challenges you face.

1. Leadership and governance

Managing a local outbreak or outbreaks and operating the Local Resilience Forums with their associated structures for a prolonged period of time will be a test for local partnerships.

These questions are here to help you assess your local situation and establish how your governance can support managing a local outbreak effectively. You may also gain experience you could share to support others.

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1. Have you started discussions about how you want to set up the Engagement Board?

 2. If using an existing Board such as the HWB have you reviewed its terms of reference? Or what are your local arrangements?

 3. How does it link to your Local Resilience Forum groups – are you clear on the interfaces and accountability?

 4. Where will the local council get its assurance from on the robustness of testing, contact tracing and local outbreak planning? For example, have you had your plan peer reviewed by a neighbouring / other council or DPH?

 5. Do you have a DPH led outbreak control board – is it coterminous with your council. If not have you discussed the interface and accountability? Are relevant partners such as PHE and the NHS represented on it?

 6. Have you discussed how your outbreak leadership structures link with other key functions and duties eg, adult social care and care homes?

 7. How are you developing corporate ownership of this agenda? For example, Cabinet, Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny

 8. The Association of Directors of Public Health, Faculty of Public Health, Local Government Association, Public Health England, Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, UK Chief Environmental Health Officers group have provided guidance on producing outbreak control plans. Do you know the process by which yours is being produced, updated and communicated?

 9. How clear are the roles and responsibilities of the council and the DPH in a local outbreak, while protocols are still in development? What about roles and responsibilities with multiple outbreaks? How is your local testing and contact tracing plan developing to meet needs? How are you planning for winter?

 10. How well do you understand risk in your area? How robust are the plans to manage your local risks eg high risk settings such as workplaces, care homes and in the community?
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11. Have you discussed with the DPH the capacity that will be needed for effective outbreak control? This includes not only the front-line management of the disease through for example mobile testing units, supporting contact tracing and vulnerable adults, but also other council responsibilities and capacity. How robust is your Resource Plan?

 12. What is your understanding of your links to the central and regional architecture?

 13. What is your understanding of mutual aid arrangements regionally and how strong is your cross-boundary collaboration?
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In the **Resources** section you will find a link to **Guiding Principles for Effective Management of COVID-19 at a Local Level** produced in partnership by LGA, ADPH, PHE, Faculty of Public Health and SOLACE.

2. Communication and public confidence

The key purpose of the Local Outbreak Engagement Board is to provide political oversight of local delivery of the NHS Test and Trace Service, and to lead the engagement with local communities and be the public face of the local response in the event of an outbreak.

As identified in the introduction it is important that all tiers of local government in your locality understand the principles of public protection. They will play a key role in supporting the communication with their localities and will know individuals who are influential. Appendix A is a suggested list of stakeholders to engage with.

Good pandemic planning always uses tests and scenarios. On communications a good test would be to prepare the equivalent of the current daily press conference for your area, and to run scenarios that other parts of the country have experienced.

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1. Have you discussed and identified with partner organisations who would be your spokes people for media relationships?

 2. Have you developed a process to get partner sign off for press statements? In early lessons from some areas this took too long, could you discuss how you will get rapid sign off?

 3. Have you identified other local experts or influential leaders and members of local communities by geography, interest or faith for example who could help with important messages, direct communication, engagement events? For example; Faith group leaders; mosques, African and Caribbean churches, Interfaith groups, translated resources

 4. Have you discussed the capacity and capability of you communications teams to manage a local outbreak? Including engagement with local, regional and community online radio and podcasts as well as local print media

 5. Have they mapped the key media outlets nationally and locally and are they linked to surrounding areas communications team?

 6. Would you be able to run local campaigns at pace?

 7. How prepared are you to engage the community via social media? eg targeted live Q&A on Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, multi-lingual live streamed channels, online ward forums
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8. What about hard to reach groups? would you know how to contact people who do not use, or have access to digital media?

 9. Do you have mechanisms to communicate at pace with vulnerable groups?

 10. Do you have a mechanism to aggregate frequently asked questions (FAQs) across your partnerships?

 11. How effective is your communication with neighbouring authorities?

 12. Has support to the workforce been discussed in relation to the management of a local outbreak? How are they being engaged and communicated with?
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3. Analytical support and information

Alongside your Local Outbreak Engagement Board you will have a COVID-19 Health Protection Board. This is to be led by the Director of Public Health. The Board will be the key focus for the management and local oversight of the Outbreak Control Plan. Plans will set out how vulnerable people are being supported to self-isolate, as well as plans to manage complex cases in high-risk places, locations and communities, in particular care homes and schools.

You will be able to draw on the expertise and support of Public Health England, and it may be beneficial to have boards that cross local council areas, and that is for local determination.

You will already have a large amount of information on your population from your JSNA and other key sources about likely vulnerable citizens or populations so prevention can also be considered.

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1. Is your director of public health supported and clear on how they (and you) will get daily information for you to manage a local outbreak? How are you working through the issues around receipt of real time local testing data?

 2. How effectively is the council's public health team linking with Public Health England's local Health Protection teams and regional epidemiology colleagues to support the translation of surveillance data and information?

 3. It is certain that a national sitrep will be developed. Is there any work that could be prepared now across your local partners organisations to develop a common leadership understanding of your local data?

 4. Do you know what is happening in your neighbouring areas/region and in councils with similar population/economic/health profiles? This may be helpful to you if you are asked why you are having an outbreak. Are you getting the support and information on this?

 5. Do you have any particular issues and risks that make you different more likely to have an outbreak (s) where you could be doing additional preventative action now?

 6. How linked into the central and regional architecture are you? This includes regional convenors, JBC Regional Lead and Regional PHE – to support data analysis, understanding, outbreak management and escalation
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7. What is your understanding of the relationship with the wider region for mutual aid and cross boundary action – are there sub/ regional and regional arrangements in place that you can lean into? Is there are Regional Forum that reviews current situation / issues / outbreaks? Is there collaboration?
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4. Relationships and partnerships

You will already have an active Local Resilience Forum with wider partners such as the police, and there is good evidence an effective system has good partnership relationships particularly at senior levels of organisations. Managing local outbreaks will test these, and communication is really important.

Nationally groups are being established such as the National Advisory Board for the NHS Test and Trace service, and existing groups such as the Joint Biosecurity Centre will play a prominent role in local decision-making. Sharing practice via the 11 Good Practice Networks and usual political mechanisms will be important so that national leaders know what is needed for effective local outbreak control.

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1. Have you discussed who will manage the relationships with MPs and government, and other key stakeholders?
 2. Are there any local relationships you need to pay due care and attention to?
 3. As well as the emergency planning partners working with you on managing the outbreak, are there others who can support eg chamber of commerce for economic and local business?
 4. Are there new relationships to develop for the local outbreak and beyond – deputies of organisations, citizens groups, and student populations?
 5. Do you know who your key contacts in neighbouring local councils if your outbreak plans have to adapt to wider geographies?
 6. Is your leadership succession planning clear if a senior politician or officer became unwell? Do you know the arrangements for your partners?
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5. Recovery and Health and Wellbeing Board

Good public protection planning always puts in place recovery and restoration planning at the same times as managing the outbreak. Your structures: the LRF, Outbreak Control Engagement Board, and the Public Protection Board will need to agree accountabilities for Recovery and restoration planning.

Although this may seem early in a checklist, it is important to begin the conversations, and also look at a lessons learned exercise. This is so that experience can be shared locally and nationally

We already know that the national COVID-19 pandemic has had population impact on

- BAME communities
- widening inequalities
- safeguarding
- lack of mental wellbeing and mental ill health

- vulnerable children and adults
- take up of healthcare and screening and vaccinations.

In most places the Health and Wellbeing Board will play a crucial leadership role as the Statutory Board for recovery and restoration planning and action.

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1. How focused is your Health and Wellbeing Board on the short- and medium-term challenges of COVID-19, and outbreaks and the on-going consequences for the council and partners?
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2. Has the Health and Wellbeing Board considered calling a special virtual meeting?
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3. Your Health and Wellbeing Board will have its existing strategy and work programme. Have you considered how this needs to change due to the likely impact of COVID-19 on the wider determinants of health eg obesity, unemployment, drugs and alcohol?
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4. Does it need support to refresh its purpose and actions? The LGA Health and Wellbeing reset tool could support this.
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Resources

Testing, Contact Tracing and Outbreak Management Knowledge Hub

Provides information specifically targeted at councils in relation to testing, contact tracing and outbreak management. It is the site for: minutes from the Local Outbreak Plan Advisory Board - sharing of resources through the document library - best practice examples - information on the LGA's support offer - webinars - forum discussions for shared learning -

<https://khub.net/group/lga-containment-covid-19>

Guiding Principles for Effective Management of COVID-19 at a Local Level

This document is intended to outline principles for the design of COVID-19 Local Outbreak Plans led by the director of public health at upper tier local authority level, working with all key professions and sectors, with outline responsibilities for each defined.

The COVID-19 Local Outbreak Plans are intended to: build on existing plans to manage outbreaks in specific settings, ensure the challenges of COVID-19 are understood, consider the impact on local communities and ensure the wider system capacity supports Directors of Public Health.

Local councils and partners will utilise local governance and partnership arrangements to ensure Local Outbreak Plans are developed and delivered to meet local needs. This document was produced by a working group of the following agencies: Association of Directors of Public Health, Faculty of Public Health, Local Government Association, Public Health England, Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, UK Chief Environmental Health Officers group.

<https://www.adph.org.uk/2020/06/guiding-principles-for-effective-management-of-covid-19-at-a-local-level/>

HWB Reset Tool

A simple tool to support HWBs move into the next stage of COVID-19, with an offer of free virtual support eg facilitated discussion/workshop.

<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/HWB%20reset%20tool%20WEB.pdf>

Appendix A

Examples of stakeholders

- key influencers
- key partnerships
- lead public sector organisations
- Public Health England
- local media
- MPs and Peers
- emergency services
- education providers
- business owners and associations
- trade associations
- local community groups
- 3rd/voluntary sector
- representatives of vulnerable groups
- transport providers
- clinicians and health workers
- LA and NHS staff
- digital communities
- town and parish councils
- local influencers