

Dorset Council, West Purbeck, August 2020 Report v3

Below is a statement recently issued by Sam Crowe, Director of Public Health for Dorset

Briefing note on current situation of COVID-19 cases

1. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in January 2020, there has been a rapidly changing picture in terms of the information that public health teams and the public receive about cases and the impact of COVID-19. There have been problems, not least the different way that positive test results are counted and the fact they have been coming in two separate streams.
 - Pillar 1 which our hospitals have been leading, which tests patients and NHS staff
 - Pillar 2 (from late May) where anyone in the community who has symptoms can be tested at a drive through site (like Creekmoor in Poole), mobile testing unit or postal testing kits.
2. Analysing data that comes from different sources is complicated and it has been taking a long time to get all the data streams together and validated, as they have been held by two separate systems.
3. This has at times led to confusion. For example, in early July the additional Pillar 2 positive tests were added to the national COVID-19 dashboard at Upper Tier Local Authority Level, leading to an apparent 'jump' in case numbers for local areas. At the same time 30,000 positive test results were removed from the national dashboard because they were repeat tests on the same individual.
4. Under the Dorset Local Resilience Forum's Strategic Command Group, data briefings have been produced regularly via the EpiCell showing the information public health teams can access to help with our local response to the COVID-19 pandemic and recognising the above challenges.
5. On 30 June local authority areas published their local outbreak management plans which sets out how we will respond to any outbreak in a high-risk setting, and actions we would take should cases start to rise.
6. This short briefing sets out the current datasets that are not in the public domain that Directors of Public Health and their teams are able to access to support this work and provide public assurance over the status of the pandemic in Dorset and BCP Councils.

2. Current position

1. The Director of Public Health receives information to support surveillance of COVID-19 from two main sources:
 - Public Health England South West Regional Health Protection Team
 - daily reports of positive COVID-19 cases received via communicable disease notifications. This tells us full postcode, age, gender and test route
 - a daily Alert Table showing the past 5 days' positive cases from pillar 1 and 2 tests. This information is non-identifiable but useful for comparison with other areas in the South West.
 - Public Health England National Field Epidemiology Service

- weekly reports on total number of positive cases at Upper Tier Local Authority level from pillar 1 and pillar 2 tests. This checks whether the pattern exceeds the pattern from the past 10 days
- a daily and weekly contact tracing report based on NHS Test and Trace information showing numbers of positive cases and contacts being managed, and overall cumulative totals by Upper Tier Local Authority level.

2. All of these reports are protectively marked Official Sensitive and cannot be shared with third parties. They are provided by PHE for use by the Director of Public Health to assess the risk from COVID-19, and for assurance purposes.

3. None of the datasets contain patient identifiable, confidential information. However, the datasets do contain data fields such as full postcode, age and gender. In theory, this could lead to the identification of individuals, particularly if cases are disclosed in small geographical areas.

4. It is important to understand the limitations of these datasets. For example, under this situation, the Director of Public Health cannot know who the cases are who have tested positive for COVID-19, nor would we know anything about the contacts of cases. However, should there be any COVID-19 outbreak in an important setting like a care home or school, the Director of Public Health would be notified immediately so that we can support with the management of the outbreak. Further details would be shared during the management of the outbreak on a need to know basis, but the data is held by Public Health England on their health protection system (HP Zone) and not by the upper Tier Councils. This is to protect patient confidentiality and comply with data protection law.

3. Next steps

1. There is work ongoing to develop dashboards showing Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 test results for local areas, including using post coded data to illustrate numbers and rates of positive cases at UTLA and small area level. This dashboard is in the process of being launched this week, via NHS Digital.

2. Data sharing agreements have also been signed between the Director of Public Health on behalf of BCP and Dorset Councils, and Public Health England in the past week. This will enable the team to receive personal level, confidential patient information about COVID-19 cases to support ongoing outbreak management and response.

3. In addition the Director of Public Health has asked the regional Public Health England health protection team to undertake a validation exercise with NHS Test and Trace to obtain the outcome information for all of the positive COVID-19 cases in Dorset and BCP Councils over the past two weeks. This is to ensure that we can be confident in the level of contact tracing undertaken by NHS Test and Trace, and that any significant, complex cases are being escalated appropriately to the regional health protection team.

4. It is important to be clear that the DPH will not be able to share any personal level data from this exercise, but will aim to provide a short summary that sets out the completeness of follow up of cases and contacts being managed by NHS Test and Trace.

4. Summary

1. Directors of Public Health have been receiving regular data from PHE detailing the numbers of positive cases from Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 in their populations for some time.

2. They have also received a number of surveillance reports so we can see whether the local pattern of cases is in line with the recent trend, and for comparison with other areas in the South West. This means that although the Director of Public Health may know how many cases and contacts there are in their population, they could not legally know exactly who these people are. If an outbreak occurred, we would work through Public Health England to respond.

3. The situation is ever evolving as new data becomes available. Following the signing of data sharing agreements for both councils, the Director of Public Health will shortly be able to receive additional personal level confidential information on COVID-19 cases to support ongoing outbreak management and response.

Letter to the Prime Minister

Last month I included a letter from the leader of Dorset Council to the Prime Minister which asked for help in managing our visitor numbers and assistance in other areas because of how stretched we were as an authority whilst assisting the government response to the pandemic. Whilst we have had an acknowledgement, we have not had any substantive response as yet.

Update for shielded residents

As of 6th July, guidance for shielded residents has changed and whilst this may be good news it may be a cause of concern to others. Help remains available on the Dorset for You website. Alternatively a help line is open from Monday to Saturday 9am to 6 pm 01305 221000

Leisure Centres

The centres managed by Dorset Council welcomed back customers from Saturday 25 July. The news comes after the facilities closed in March due to COVID-19. Guidance published by the Government outlined measures that allowed indoor swimming pools and sports facilities to reopen.

Social distancing measures will be in place in all the centres, together with rigorous cleaning regimes. Touch-points, such as door handles and railings, and all equipment will be cleaned regularly and hand sanitising stations positioned around the buildings. Centre employees have received COVID-19 training to help them understand and implement plans for the safety of customers.

Full details of activities available, opening times and booking and payment arrangements can be found on each centre's webpage, Visit the Dorset Council website to find the nearest centre and its opening hours.

Dorset Libraries

Dorset libraries will be offering an order and collect service from July. Following the Government's recent announcement, our libraries started a phased reopening from 8 July. The initial reopening plans focused on the safety of customers and library employees and will provide existing users with an order and collect service. People will be able to order their preferred categories of books and other items to collect at an allocated time from 22 of Dorset's 23 libraries.

Books will also be available to order online on our website from 8 July by simply completing a short form about reading preferences. For those without online access, an order can be made by phoning 01305 228400.

High Sherriff Awards 2020

I know that both Dorset Council and many Town and Parish Councils are considering an award scheme for those residents who have gone above and beyond the call of duty during the Covid 19 pandemic, but I include this request for completeness.

A message below from the High Sherriff

It is customary for the High Sheriff of any county to make awards during his/her year. These are normally made to individuals and organisations that the High Sheriff has come into contact with or worked with during the Shrieval Year. These awards are an opportunity to not only recognise the exceptional work underway in the emergency services and criminal justice system, but also to celebrate the fantastic individuals and voluntary organisations who do so much to improve the social, cultural and economic fabric of Dorset life. There will undoubtedly be many to be recognised in this unprecedented year.

However, this year, the Coronavirus pandemic has brought together whole communities to work together for the safety, health and welfare of their areas. In Dorset over 175 of these groups came into being; some pre-existed but many evolved from other groups or were formed specifically as a result of the emergency. The one common thread is that a large number of that community had voluntarily rallied around to support others be it for shopping, collecting medicines or just company and a friendly voice.

In these circumstances, it would difficult to pick out any one individual. I have therefore decided in Dorset to create the High Sheriff's Community Award to groups. As lockdown eases and we are allowed to meet in groups once again (suitably spaced out) I very much look forward to being able to get out and about in the county, hearing of the experiences of those who have given so much and presenting both the Community Award as well as the traditional High Sheriff Award.

So, if you would like to make a nomination for either award, please let me know. I anticipate not a great deal will happen just yet, but once we are able to meet in groups, albeit suitably space out, then I can get out and about, meet people listen to their stories and make presentations.

George Streatfield, High Sherriff of Dorset 2020-2021 Tel 01308 422770 / 07970 770750

Banning disposable BBQs

Dorset Council is seeking agreement to bring in measures prohibiting or controlling the use of disposable barbecues and other fire-related activities in the area.

In recent years, there have been a number of incidents of fire damage across Dorset as a result of disposable barbecues, bonfires close to heathland and dry wooded areas, the release of sky lanterns and other social activities. The most serious of these incidents was the recent fire at Wareham Forest which affected 180 hectares of heathland and was declared a major incident by the Fire and Rescue Service.

Dorset Council's Cabinet has requested that council officers work closely with Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service, and other key stakeholders, to look at a range of enforcement options, and other alternatives to control or prohibit barbecues and other fire-related activities. It is incredibly

difficult to enact local legislation on this so we are also working with our MPs to try to persuade them of the need for national action on this very serious problem.

New Coastal Partnership

A new coastal partnership has been established between BCP Council and Dorset Council. The Dorset Coastal Engineering Partnership will provide an effective and co-ordinated approach in the delivery of schemes to help protect residents and communities from coastal flooding and erosion.

As well as designing and delivering large government funded projects, the main functions of the new partnership will be to set long term strategies for managing the shoreline, maintain coastal assets and influence the industry through sound research and innovative techniques. The Partnership will work closely with the Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (WRFCC). They will consider the co-ordination of proposed schemes and how the costs and benefits of any investment can be spread between geographical areas, communities and sectors.

The new Dorset Coastal Engineering Partnership area stretches from Lyme Regis in the west to Chewton Bunny in the east.

Virtual Council Meetings

Although there has been a campaign by government to get people to return to work, we have been advised that this is not to be the case for Councils and that we should continue to work virtually for the moment. This is disappointing as we were planning on holding “hybrid” meetings from September with some Councillors in attendance and some who are still shielding attending over the internet. We are taking advice and will be looking to restart as soon as we can. In any case the legislation for holding virtual meetings has a “sunset clause” that stipulates we can not do this after March of next year.

The financial impact of Covid 19 on housing

Citizens Advice and Shelter are joining forces to help local people cope with the financial impact of the Coronavirus crisis. One of the effects of the ongoing crisis is that some Dorset residents are experiencing pressure on their finances. Many individuals and families have seen their incomes reduce over the past few months and this has had the impact of increasing rent and mortgage arrears for these residents; many of whom were already experiencing very tight budgets.

Whilst there is currently a hold on actual court repossession action, the concern is that this problem is building up and without early action, people’s homes could be under threat. With good advice and support, those experiencing difficulties can maximise their income and manage any rent or mortgage arrears in a way that keeps them in their home. Kate Parker from Shelter Dorset commented: "It's about getting the right help early on. We really encourage people to seek support from our specialist housing team before it reaches a crisis point."

Daniel Cadisch, Chief Officer from Citizens Advice Central Dorset said: "Our network of volunteers and paid staff across the whole of the wider Dorset area is there to help right now. We have remained open via phone and online services throughout the whole crisis. The partnership work with Shelter allows us to help keep people in their homes by getting the right specialist help in place."

For help contact:

Dorset Adviceline: 0344 411 1444

Shelter: 0808 800 4444

Surgery

We are not holding face to face meetings now. However, we would be delighted to ring and talk to you. Please ring or email us with the subject matter so that we can prepare ourselves. Peter's email address is peterwharf@hotmail.com telephone 07986600799 and Laura's is cllr.laura.miller@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk telephone 07814 569563.

Peter Wharf & Laura Miller, Dorset Councillors for West Purbeck