

## **Advice Note to Schools and Childcare Settings 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

Following my advice note to schools of 1<sup>st</sup> June to delay wider opening until at least the 15<sup>th</sup> June, I have been carefully monitoring the local position and progress against the government's five tests of April 19<sup>th</sup> 2020 as set out in my previous note. I would like to thank headteachers, staff, school governors and childcare providers for their understanding, cooperation and hard work over the last week.

I realise that advising deferring wider reopening was disappointing and upsetting for many children and parents, but this was necessary to allow for more time to review the current local trends for Covid-19 in the borough. In addition, to assess the impact of easing of lockdown – especially with further easing likely, to ensure new local systems for track and trace were in place and fully operational- essential for swift and effective management of local outbreaks and to allow more time for schools and childcare settings to review individual risk assessments and arrangements for maintaining physical distancing, so that wider reopening could happen as safely as possible for both children and staff.

We have been carefully reviewing our position as a Council and in order to support the increase of numbers of children in schools and childcare settings, we needed to be confident of our local position against the government's five tests set out on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2020. This is especially as the current national alert level as advised by the Joint Biosecurity Centre remains at 4 which means there continues to be "a high or rising level of transmission – enforced social distancing".

Members of SAGE (Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies) and Independent SAGE and the Association of Directors of Public Health had advised caution and concern about the too rapid easing of lockdown and the increased risk of a second pandemic wave. In considering this, we have also reviewed the most recent local position. It is important to note that:

All settings have continued to remain open for vulnerable children and the children of key workers as they have been since the start of the national lockdown.

With this in mind, we have reviewed our position and can now advise that, rather than set a further date which we feel would be unhelpful given that each school and setting is different, schools and childcare settings can now be in a position to determine, based on their risk assessments and individual circumstances whether they feel confident that they can safely open to more pupils and we will fully support them should they decide to widen opening.

We ask that if individual schools and childcare settings do decide to open more widely from the 15<sup>th</sup> June, that they consider the pace at which new year groups are introduced so that plans can be amended quickly should either the Borough situation or individual setting circumstance change.

We recognise that each school and childcare setting is different especially in relation to current staffing, numbers of key worker and vulnerable children attending and the design and layout of the building and so understand that not all schools and child care settings can open more widely at the same time or to the same number of children.

In coming to this conclusion on wider reopening, I've set out below the reasons for why I consider that sufficient progress has been made against all five government tests to advise cautious wider reopening but only at the pace individual schools and childcare settings feel confident to manage safely.

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**Test 1: Protect the NHS' ability to cope**

We know the NHS in Wigan is coping with current Covid workload and hospital admissions are steadily decreasing.

**Test 2: See a sustained and consistent fall in daily death rates from Covid 19 so we are confident that we have moved beyond the peak.**

We have continued to see a welcome and steady decline in the number of deaths both in hospital and across other settings over the last three which would suggest we have moved beyond the peak we experienced in late April. Deaths in hospital now total 245 for the pandemic with 3 hospital deaths reported for the week ending 5<sup>th</sup> June which is the lowest weekly total since the end of March. There have been no (0) hospital deaths for Covid 19 for 8 out of the last 10 days.

**Test 3: Having reliable data that shows the rate of infection is decreasing to manageable levels.**

I am far more assured that significant progress has been made over the last ten days with improving access to data about community transmission of Covid 19 at a local level through work with PHE NW and The Field Epidemiology Service on the development of a local surveillance system as part of our GM Test, Track and Trace system. Significant progress too has been made to improve access to data being collected by the national parts of the testing and tracing systems although data quality from these sources remains an issue. As from Friday 12<sup>th</sup> June 2020, Directors of Public Health will start to have access to a national dashboard which will complement the local real surveillance system in GM.

Currently, the total number of confirmed cases in Wigan is 1219 which is a rate of 374 per 100,000 population (higher than GM at 364 and NW at 360 ). Wigan has now moved from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> highest in GM similar to Salford (374) and Rochdale (377). Wigan has had no (0) new confirmed cases in 5 out of the last 9 days. Wigan's exceedence level rating is Green meaning that the recent numbers of confirmed cases aren't unusually high. The new data produced by the PHE Field Epidemiology Service shows that there are no (0) Wigan Middle Super Output areas in the top 5% for new cases in GM. We are working on developing publicly accessible data for Greater Manchester and in the first instance, I will be sharing a Daily Tracker for Wigan with schools and childcare settings to help inform planning and risk assessments for wider reopening now and working towards start of the autumn term.

However, I should point out that the recent publication on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> June by PHE and Cambridge University of national and regional R or Reproductive number which is based on the number of people, someone who is a confirmed case of Covid 19 might infect needs to be kept consistently below 1 in order for the numbers of cases to reduce shows there is no room for complacency on the need to continue to observe effective public health measures like physical distancing and infection prevention control such as hand and respiratory hygiene. This has seen rises across all regions as lockdown easing occurs and is estimated at **1.01** in the NW (R cannot reliably be calculated below a NW level). It is also likely given the way in which PHE and Cambridge University model, which is based on deaths, that the deaths in care homes across the whole NW will have also contributed to the increase in regional R.

Easing of lockdown measures have both an individual and cumulative impact on R and there may be requirements from the government for local geographical lockdowns to contain the spread of the virus...we are awaiting further details from the government and the new Joint Biosecurity Centre which is still being established as to what form this might take and the practicality and social and economic impact of such a measure.

**Test 4: Be confident that the range of operational challenges including testing capacity and PPE availability are in hand with supply able to meet future demand.**

I continue to remain confident that in relation to PPE, down to the excellent work of the Council with local suppliers and manufacturers and the sterling work on the establishment of a GM PPE procurement and supply chain by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority that PPE supplies in the borough are significantly more resilient and that we are able to support schools and childcare settings which need to access additional PPE supplies.

The national Track and Trace national programme partially launched on Thurs 28<sup>th</sup> May and will not be fully operational until the end of June which remains a concern and its performance remains variable to

date. However significant progress has been made to resolve the coordination and intelligence flows between the various national testing programmes and Directors of Public Health have now started to receive contract tracing activity data from the National Contact Tracing Service. In addition, Greater Manchester's own integrated tier one system based on the approach used in Germany which I've been co-leading the development of ( jointly run by GM local authorities, the GM health and social care partnership and PHE NW – the only instance of an integrated tier system in England) has gone fully operational from Monday 8<sup>th</sup> June initially Mon-Fri 9-5 but moving to a 7 day operation 8 to 8 from week two with a trained and clinically supervised workforce of contract tracers and is already acting as effective triage between the national parts of Test, Track and Trace and the local boroughs all of which have also mobilised their own Track, Trace, Isolate and Support arrangements. Significant work has also been undertaken across GM to work through the arrangements for managing local outbreaks in complex settings like care homes and schools. Greater Manchester through Tameside Council is now one of the 11 national beacon sites for Track and Trace and is now able to influence and contribute to the national system development.

**Test 5: Be confident that any adjustments to the current measures will not risk a second peak of infections which overwhelms the NHS**

See my comments on the R number above and the recently published position statement from the Association of Directors of Public Health [www.ADPH.org.uk/2020/05/adph-presidential-blog-a-time-for-steady-leadership-careful-preparation-and-measured-steps](http://www.ADPH.org.uk/2020/05/adph-presidential-blog-a-time-for-steady-leadership-careful-preparation-and-measured-steps) . I remain concerned that the overall easing of lockdown in England is still proceeding too quickly and that we should seek to increase the numbers of children in schools and childcare settings cautiously at a pace that individual schools and childcare settings feel confident to manage so it is as safe as is possible for children and staff.

I will continue to monitor what is a fast-evolving situation very closely and keep my advice to you under constant review.

Yours sincerely



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