

Cheshire West and Chester Council

Not on mute: Our response to COVID-19 in Cheshire
West and Chester (PART ONE)

Public Health Annual Report 2020

Visit: <http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/PublicHealth>

Foreword

“COVID-19 has impacted on all of our lives. It is so important for us to remember those who have died and their loved ones, recognise that many of our residents continue to face challenges in terms of physical health, mental health and financial security and reflect upon the amazing community spirit that we’ve seen in Cheshire West and Chester.”

‘Living in unprecedented times’ is a phrase that we have heard or read many times over the past 12 months. However, it is important that we don’t lose sight of what this means.

The COVID-19 Pandemic is the most significant Public Health Emergency for a century: something that we have not experienced or had to respond to before in our lifetime. For this reason, The Public Health Annual Report for 2020 had to be about COVID-19.

To coin another phrase heard regularly over the past 12 months: We have not been ‘on mute’. We have all had to respond to the challenges of COVID-19 and play our part to turn things around. I am immensely proud of all our public services and the kindness shown by our communities in helping and protecting each other during this pandemic.

Every year, Directors of Public Health (DsPH) are asked to produce an independent report: this report covers January to December 2020. In 2021, we have already achieved so much as our response and recovery to COVID-19 continues. We will have the opportunity to reflect upon this work and learning in the coming months.

As we navigate our way out of the pandemic, it remains our Public Health priority to work together with our partners and our communities. We will build upon our work and innovation to date and continue to lead the way in ensuring our residents have better life chances, better health and longer lives. This will be another part of our story together.

This written report has been produced to sit alongside our short film of the same name. In both, we have tried to capture 2020 from a Cheshire West and Chester perspective for current and future residents. Please do take the time to watch the film which is available at: <http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/CovidResponse>

It is my pleasure to introduce Not on mute: Our response to COVID-19 in Cheshire West and Chester (PART ONE).

This is the story of how our residents alongside the council, the NHS, our emergency services and our fantastic voluntary and community sector, have all worked together in Cheshire West and Chester

This is our story together.

This is our legacy together.

Welcome to our Public Health Annual Report.

Ian Ashworth, Director of Public Health

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January – December 2020

January 2020

Evidence of a new virus is reported from the Wuhan province in China. Human to human transmission is confirmed and the World Health Organisation (WHO) declare the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

As a council, we quickly begin working with our partners to prepare for any potential outbreaks and how we would protect our residents.

10 January: First COVID-19 virus genome sequence is made public, paving the way for testing and vaccine development.

February 2020

First COVID-19 related deaths outside of China are reported, outbreaks grow and travel restrictions increase.

7 February: Testing introduced in the UK.

March 2020

3 March: UK enters 'contain' phase of response.

12 March: UK moves from 'contain' to 'delay' phase of response.

13 March: 3 cases of COVID-19 are confirmed in Cheshire West and Chester (CW&C).

14 March: First COVID-19 related death in CW&C.

16 March: New social distancing measures are announced; shops begin to close.

7-day COVID-19 infection rate in Cheshire West and Chester = 2.6 per 100,000.

18 March: Schools close.

Launch of CW&C COVID-19 Volunteer Scheme.

21 March: Those most vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19 are urged to 'shield'.

23 March: National lockdown announced.

7-day COVID-19 infection rate in CW&C = 5.8 per 100,000

26 March - 28 May: Clap for Carers: A national campaign which took place every Thursday evening at 8pm.

April 2020

15 April: All symptomatic care residents & staff offered testing in England.

24 April: Highest weekly registered deaths in CW&C (57 deaths).

7-day COVID-19 infection rate in CW&C = 56.5 per 100,000.

28 April: Testing begins for those with symptoms in England.

May 2020

8-10 May: VE Day 75th Anniversary Celebrations.

10 May: Lockdown begins to be lifted.

18 May: 7-day COVID-19 infection rate in Cheshire West and Chester = 57.1 per 100,000.

22 May: CW&C Council are recognised as one of only 11 national beacon councils that helped to develop the blueprint for local outbreak responses. We establish our own outbreak management team and contact tracing service and provide people with the support to self-isolate.

23 May: Eid al-Fitr in the UK in 2020 begins on the evening of 23 May and ends on the evening of 24 May.

27 May: Targeted asymptomatic testing begins in England.

28 May: NHS contact tracing system goes live.

June 2020

1 June: Schools reopen to reception, year 1 and year 6 pupils.

7-day COVID-19 infection rate in Cheshire West and Chester = 37 per 100,000.

13 June: 'Social bubbles' allowed.

15 June: Non-essential shops & other venues reopen and compulsory face coverings on public transport.

7-day COVID-19 infection rate in Cheshire West and Chester = 15.2 per 100,000

July 2020

4 July: 7-day COVID-19 infection rate in Cheshire West and Chester = 11.7 per 100,000.

6 July: Shielding guidance is eased.

24 July: Compulsory face coverings in shops.

August 2020

8 August: Chester Pride.

19 August: Launch of CW&C Community Champions Programme. We ended the year with 367 community champions.

26 August: First update sent to Community Champion.

29 August: The first online Community Champion meeting was held.

September 2020

1 September: Schools reopen fully.

7-day COVID-19 infection rate in Cheshire West and Chester = 11.4 per 100,000.

5 September: Festival of Hope (Winsford).

5-6 September: Festival of Hope (Chester).

7 September: Universities begin to reopen in England.

14 September: Social gatherings restricted; rule of 6 introduced in England.

7-day COVID-19 infection rate in Cheshire West and Chester = 28 per 100,000.

October 2020

14 October: Local COVID alert levels are introduced in England. This means different restrictions for different areas, depending upon the rates of community transmission and the impact on our health services.

Alert level 2 introduced in Cheshire West and Chester.

7-day COVID-19 infection rate in Cheshire West and Chester = 184.5 per 100,000.

23 October: Wales introduces 'firebreak lockdown'.

7-day COVID-19 infection rate in Cheshire West and Chester = 216.6 per 100,000.

November 2020

5 November: Second National lockdown.

7-day COVID-19 infection rate in Cheshire West and Chester = 254.2 per 100,000.

2 December: Second National Lockdown restrictions lifted.

7-day COVID-19 infection rate in Cheshire West and Chester = 96.8 per 100,000.

Pfizer vaccine approved in UK.

December 2020

8 December: First Vaccination in CW&C at NHS Countess of Chester Hospital.

15 December: GP-led Vaccine Programme launches in Winsford. This is followed by the launch of GP-led Vaccination Programme in Frodsham later in the week.

500th COVID-19 related death registered in CW&C.

7-day COVID-19 infection rate in Cheshire West and Chester = 175.2 per 100,000.

16 December: First Asymptomatic Testing Centre Opened in CW&C in Ellesmere Port opens.

25 December: 'Christmas bubbles' allowed for one day.

26 December: CW&C moves into Tier 3 restrictions.

7-day COVID-19 infection rate in Cheshire West and Chester = 272.5 per 100,000.

30 December: AstraZeneca vaccine approved in the UK.

31 December: CW&C enter Tier 4 'Stay at Home Restrictions'.

7-day COVID-19 infection rate in Cheshire West and Chester = 481.2 per 100,000.

COVID-19 Outbreak Prevention, Management and Support

In May 2020, we became one of only 11 national beacon councils that helped to develop the blueprint for local outbreak responses.

In June 2020, we launched our COVID-19 Outbreak Prevention, Management and Support Plan, designed to protect lives and livelihoods from the impact of Covid-19. A cross-party Outbreak Board was set up, chaired by the Leader of the Council, to actively engage with our local population, answer questions and provide regular, democratic oversight of our ongoing response.

The strong partnership approach between the Council, Qwest (one of our Council Companies) and the NHS enabled a successful and effective the localised roll-out of the national Test and Trace programme. Our approach was recognised as good practice and later adopted by local authorities across the country. It has also resulted in us becoming an integral member of the Government's Local Outbreak Plan Advisory Board; a key forum for Council Leaders and ministers to support the development of local testing, tracing and outbreak control systems.

Proactive communications and support were targeted at a very early stage to communities and businesses assessed at higher risk of an outbreak. A questionnaire was developed to help us collectively determine how well prepared they were and enable the Council to co-ordinate the additional support and advice measures needed to address any gaps.

Outbreak Management Hub

In May 2020, the Council established an Outbreak Management Hub with the aim of preventing transmission of the virus in high-risk settings across the borough and to manage any outbreaks.

The Hub consists of core staff and 'affiliated' public health and regulatory services officers and this allows the Hub to respond to varying levels of demand. It works closely with the Council's Infection and Prevention Control team, public health consultants and data analysts.

Activities include:

- a. Providing proactive COVID-19 security advice and guidance to high-risk settings.
- b. Checking levels of COVID security across a range of settings.
- c. Responding quickly to reports of positive cases and outbreaks in settings to prevent transmission.
- d. Providing feeding back to national NHS Test and Trace to improve the response to the pandemic.
- e. Making referrals for enforcement.
- f. Undertaking projects to address risks and issues.

Impact

Between 6th March and 31st December 2020, the Cheshire West infection rate was below the England national average for 63% of the 301 days, and by the end of the year, the borough was in the 3rd quartile (lowest 50-75% infection rate nationally) for most of December.

Between July and September 2020, officers carried out intensive COVID-security work with over 500 high risk businesses and undertook a joint project with the Health and Safety Executive.

Case reviews have shown that officer visits have proved invaluable in highlighting weaknesses in businesses experiencing enduring transmission and we have at least two examples of companies changing their national policies as a result.

There has been positive feedback from businesses and schools about the advice and assistance given to support them to manage cases and outbreaks

COVID-19 Outbreak Management Hub Activity

1. Business and school settings assisted by the Outbreak Management Hub (September-December 2020)

Total: 479 (managing a single positive case, an exposure or a cluster; contact tracing; and/or an outbreak.)

Source: Firmstep from 1 September to 31 December 2020.

2. Service Requests & Enquiries received by the Hub (May-December 2020)

Total: 2073 service requests and enquiries

1,847 were from or related to educational establishments (including early years, schools, colleges, universities and school transport)

226 requests were from or related to businesses, care settings and members of the public.

Excludes care homes and supported living enquiries managed by the Cheshire and Wirral Partnership Infection Prevention and Control Team.

Source: Health Protection Secure inbox actioned email enquiries.

3. During 2020, 38 business settings were classified as being in outbreak (two or more confirmed cases) and were assisted by the Hub. The breakdown by setting type is as follows:

Commercial:	11
Industrial:	16
Retail and Hospitality:	10
Institutional:	1

4. Preventative Work.

From June to mid-September 2020 the majority of the work led by the Hub was proactive, preventative work, with the Hub team working collaboratively with the wider Regulatory Services team. The data below does not include activity led by Regulatory Services, working in partnership with the Hub from mid-September 2020 onwards.

Total number of Proactive Interventions by the Hub: June to mid-September 2020:

Cafes:	40
Pubs, Restaurants:	170
Community Centres:	40

Retail on-site survey (incl. supermarkets):	36
Arable/pick your own:	13
Waste Sorting:	10
Food manufacturing:	23
Canteens:	66
Licensed Houses in Multiple Occupation:	155
Total:	553

Challenges Faced

- Setting up a response team from scratch during a period of high demand was challenging.
- Staffing demand during peak times presented challenges but the flexibility of the core team, together with the additional support, enabled us to manage this.
- At peak times case demand exceeded the ability of the team to deal with all cases equally comprehensively.
- There has been a risk of duplication with other agencies due to the tiered level of the national Test and Trace response.
- The lack of a bespoke data management system meant that reporting of work activity was challenging.
- Settings failing to meaningfully engage with outbreak management teams or to do so in a timely manner has added to work pressures.

In 2021 we will:

- Focus on the delivery of projects targeting higher risk business settings.
- Focus on the implementation of a regional case management system.
- Work to ensure that working arrangements across all public health and NHS partner teams are seamless and that roles and responsibilities are clear.
- Extend customer feedback arrangements to capture customer experience more systematically.

Case Study

A case, and a related business closure, came to the attention of the Council via social media. The Hub team proactively contacted Public Health England (PHE) for further information but there were no details on the national database about an affected business. Further investigations confirmed that a business was involved, several members of staff had tested positive and the business had not kept customer records. Through local knowledge, the Council was able to trace several customers and other individuals, some of whom were advised to self-isolate for 14 days from the date of contact.

Outcome: The Council's response was proactive, rapid and effective in containing the outbreak.

Success and lessons learnt: The case demonstrates the importance of monitoring local intelligence; the role of local knowledge and it demonstrates the importance of obtaining workplace data.

"We've been able to contact the Council to ask things specific to the restaurant and the operation of the restaurant...that's been really helpful, when we've not been clear on requirements and guidelines. So, that's been great!"

- Rekha, Chester

Contact Tracing

Contact tracing is an effective public health measure for the control of COVID-19. The prompt identification and management of the contacts of COVID-19 cases enables interruption of further onward transmission. This is very important during the de-escalation of public health measures to avoid an increase in transmission and the potential for localised outbreaks.

In December 2020, local authorities were invited to support national Test & Trace by establishing Local Contact Tracing Partnerships, with the aim of increasing the number of cases who were successfully contacted.

Cheshire West and Chester Council established a team of trained contact tracers based within the council's Contact Centre (managed by Qwest Services). Where national Test and Trace were unsuccessful in making contact with a resident after 48hrs, their details were passed on to the local contact tracing team who would continue to attempt to make contact. This resulted in significantly more residents being successfully contacted and given appropriate self-isolation advice.

Community Response

The community response was established immediately and aligned to our shielding programme to:

- co-ordinate and deliver response and support to communities.
- cascade trusted information through clear and consistent channels of communication.
- identify and respond to emerging community issues and priorities and raise requests for assistance as necessary through CEMART (Cheshire Emergency Planning and Response Team) / CLT (Corporate Leadership Team).

Communications

Throughout the lockdown, effective and timely communications have been key in order to ensure that those in need knew how to ask for help and were aware of the range of support measures available to them.

Volunteers

To ensure there was capacity to meet the support needs of shielding and vulnerable residents the Council ran a volunteer campaign and recruited more than 2,000 volunteers, co-ordinated by Cheshire West Voluntary Action who were then matched as needed to community organisations who required additional capacity. We provided regular updates to volunteers on the emerging response and links to key supporting information. We inspired around 2,300 local people to play their part and sign up to volunteer across the borough - and working with our voluntary and community sector partners, helped those people to deliver vital, often life-saving, support where it was needed the most. A network of over 350 Community Champions was established, providing a crucial information and advocacy link with vulnerable and isolated residents, and a clear route for local issues and concerns to be fed back to us.

Food Support

A food group was also established to understand existing infrastructure and to develop an emergency co-ordinated response to support those who were shielding and vulnerable. This work has built on existing networks, meeting the needs as they

emerged in a strategic way and putting additional resource in place to meet identified need as necessary. This is now evolving with the ambition to become a sector led group focusing on the development of a borough wide food strategy including Welcome Network, Cheshire West Voluntary Action, local Foodbanks and community and voluntary food providers.

Financial Support

We launched a £500,000 Community Response Fund with the Westminster Foundation to support a range of community initiatives, from food provision to mental health support, with a further £83,000 raised through a crowdfunding page as we looked to engage with our communities in new ways.

We also continued to provide essential support to our local population throughout the year, including 13,800 shielding residents; wide-ranging PPE, continuity and financial support for our care homes; £70m funds distributed to 7,500 local businesses; and a range of interventions for vulnerable children and adults. These and ongoing universal services were maintained with 70% of our staff enabled to work from home - a tenfold increase on the previous year - and our entire workforce upgraded to Windows 10.

“Everybody coming together, everybody wanting to get involved... That sense of community has just been incredible”

- Helen, Farndon

Asymptomatic Testing

As part of the Government's fight against COVID-19, the Council has provided free asymptomatic testing to its residents since 16th December 2020. As one in three people with COVID-19 do not show any symptoms of the virus, these Lateral Flow Tests (LFTs) are able to identify positive cases who would otherwise spread COVID-19 unwittingly.

The Council opened its first Asymptomatic Testing Site (ATS) at the former Stanney Lane Leisure Centre in Ellesmere Port on 16th December 2020. At that time, testing was available to targeted cohorts of residents including unpaid carers as per the Department of Health and Social Health (DHSC) guidelines.

Impact

In December, 2,305 tests were completed at the Stanney Lane ATS, with 55 positive cases identified that would not otherwise have been found.

Training was provided to operational staff at our ATS site.

Challenges Faced

- Finding suitable premises for the first ATS that met the DHSC strict requirements for setting up a fixed testing site.
- Maintaining a stable and resilient Asymptomatic Testing Team.
- Responding to very short DHSC deadlines for proposals and data

In 2021, we will:

- Ensure that residents with no symptoms continue to have easy access to testing, whether that is getting a test at an ATS, or collecting tests to undertake at home. The Council monitors the demand across the sites daily and has planned future facilities to ensure an equitable offer for our residents.
- Open additional asymptomatic test centres in Winsford and Chester.
- Meet DHSC requirements for any future testing programmes.

Case Study

Member of the public at Stanney Oaks Testing Centre:

“I come to be tested for a couple of reasons. I have to have it done for work but also it’s good to know you’re negative because of seeing your family.”

“The test itself takes two seconds - it doesn’t hurt, it’s just a bit uncomfortable, but you’ve got to do it, it needs to be done.”

Member of the public at Stanney Oaks Testing Centre:

“I work for a local engineering company and we decided to come about once a week.”

“One concern I had when I first came here was nothing to do with the discomfort of the test, it was more to do with ‘have people who have had COVID-19 been here and can I catch it?’ But I had a look when I came in and everyone’s got the right equipment on, everyone’s spaced properly, you get told what to do and the place is spotlessly clean.”

Vaccinations

In December 2020, we saw real hope for the future in the form of COVID-19 Vaccines.

We worked together with NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) in the coordination and delivery of the COVID-19 vaccination programme locally.

Cheshire West and Chester Council is part of Cheshire West Integrated Care Partnership (CWICP) which is a collaboration of local health and care organisations and who have the same shared goal to support people to live longer, healthier lives, improve people's experience of care and to safeguard the future of the local health and care system.

Our first vaccination took place on 8th December at the Countess of Chester hospital. We launched our GP-led Vaccine Service in Winsford and Frodsham very shortly afterwards.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, CW&C Council has been providing ongoing support for the pre-planning of Primary Care Network (PCN) sites and the roll-out of all COVID-19 vaccination sites across the borough.

This crucial support has involved initial site surveys to review the logistical element of the sites, taking into account preferred routes for vehicles, traffic management and directional signage.

The protection of highway routes from utility works performs part of this process to ensure non-essential road works are delayed, in order to maintain access for residents to these vaccination sites.

During the extreme cold weather, the CW&C Council team have ensured routes and walkways to these sites have been gritted. Specific staff parking has been allocated at some sites to allow more accessible parking for patients receiving their vaccine. During the start-up of the sites, venue visits and contacts with site managers were carried out to consider any pending issues or off-site safety requirements linking to highway activity.

In 2021, we will:

- Continue to dedicate time and resources to support the vaccine roll out.
- The Council's Localities, Public Health, Equality and Diversity and Communications teams will continue to work directly with our at risk groups and minority communities to ensure they are confident in having the COVID-19 vaccine and can easily access opportunities to be vaccinated.

Communication during the COVID-19 pandemic

Effective communication has been central to the Council's response to the pandemic. Ensuring that residents, businesses, staff and councillors know what is happening, why, what action they need to take and, crucially, how they can access support through the Council and its partners.

The challenges during an unprecedented and fast-paced emergency response have been considerable. Flexibility and adaptability have been key, particularly as the situation has continued past what could have been traditionally seen as a crisis period to encompass the emergency response, a return to business as usual and then a further period of emergency response in the autumn and winter of 2020.

As one of 11 councils helping to lead the national response to Test and Trace and outbreak management and in order to share learning and escalate key issues, the Communication Team has been engaging with the national Best Practice Network on communication approaches. This also allows the Communication Team to feed into and influence national policy and communication development.

Whilst COVID-19 communications are led at a Local Authority level, Cheshire West and Chester Council's Communication Team has been leading the development of the approach to outbreak management and Test and Trace across the Cheshire region, using best practice fed down from national level. The following high-level objectives have been in place since the outset of the pandemic.

- **Awareness:** Audiences are kept up-to-date with national guidance, what that means in real terms, how that impacts locally and where they can access support through the Council and partners' reshaped delivery offers.
- **Attitude:** Audiences understand that safety guidelines are protecting them and the whole community and that the Council and partners have put measures in place to protect the entire borough. Reassurance is provided that the Council is supporting the most vulnerable and those affected by the economic impact of the crisis.
- **Action:** Audiences self-report symptoms, self-isolate, follow safety guidance and observe lockdowns. That volunteer opportunities are fully exploited, and

audiences are actively supporting the families, friends, neighbours and communities.

- Internal Communications: Internal audiences are clear on the Council's responsibilities, have a clear line of sight between their role and the response to the impact of the pandemic and know where to access support.

Specific communication objectives were also in place for key areas of the pandemic response, including Public Health, vulnerable adults and shielding, schools and children, workforce, community response, business and economy, finance, customer services, test and trace and outbreak management.

Key highlights of internal and external communications include:

- Issuing more than 200 media releases that have generated over 1,300 articles.
- Dealing with more than 200 COVID-19-related media enquiries
- Issuing over 160 bulletins to staff and Members, with 89% of staff who responded to a survey in the summer (almost 1,600) agreeing that they have been getting enough information, advice and guidance and 41% strongly agreeing.
- Publishing regular Member Briefings - the first Member briefing about COVID-19 was issued on 31 January. More than 150 Member Briefings have been issued.
- Utilising social media on key campaigns that have had over five million impressions across Facebook and Twitter
- Keeping a dedicated webpage updated in real time that has had over 600,000 page views
- Delivering a postcard with information on how to access support related to COVID-19 to 161,875 households to ensure those who are digitally excluded are kept informed
- Advertising across all the borough's major newspapers and on a local radio station to promote COVID-19 messages

Inspire Cheshire West

<https://participatenow.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/inspire-cheshire-west>

Inspire Cheshire West was launched as an interactive online space to facilitate community empowerment during the pandemic. It enables residents to share stories of how their neighbourhoods are pulling together during COVID-19, from small acts of kindness to flourishing new community initiatives.

The site was set up by the Council using its Participate Now online engagement hub. It allows residents to say thank you to people who have made a difference to them and share ideas for how to make the most of staying at home, from tips on boosting health and wellbeing and keeping children entertained, to practical suggestions on looking after the garden and rustling up tasty meals that make the most of the food shop. There is also a gallery where households can upload their rainbow pictures, which have become an enduring symbol of hope during throughout the crisis.

Teams from the Council have also been encouraged to share their ideas on the site, with several services, including museums, libraries, recycling and countryside rangers, providing fun ideas for crafts, activities, cookery and wellbeing. This mix of contributions from residents and Council staff is also an example of how the Council and its communities are working together in a more equal partnership to get through the challenges presented by COVID-19.

In its first two weeks of operation, the site received more than 1,500 unique visitors and 116 separate stories and ideas were posted. These have ranged from celebrating and publicising local networks of volunteers providing support such as shopping and dog walking for their community, to the 4-year-old who set up a Kindness Bakery to make cakes for his neighbourhood to pick up for free every day.

Community Champions

- Over 350 Community Champions had joined the project by the end of 2020. These were a mix of both individuals and organisations from across Cheshire West and Chester.
- More than 30 updates were sent to Community Champions during that period.
- Five online events were held for Community Champions, with at least 30 people attending each event. The majority of the events focused on COVID-19 and the current guidance, others had wider themes, for example mental health and wellbeing.

Community Champions have been helping the Council share important, trusted information with their networks during the COVID-19 pandemic whilst providing useful feedback from their communities to the Council teams.

Regular updates have been sent to Community Champions with useful information about COVID-19 and other topics for them to pass on to their networks. A bank of resources, such as social media graphics, flyers and videos, have also been added to the Council website for Champions to download and share.

The project is all about two-way interaction so live online events have taken place. These have included presentations from a panel and an opportunity for Champions to let the Council know about any concerns in their communities.

Any feedback from Champions, whether it be through the events or an online form, has been followed up and used as part of the Council's ongoing COVID-19 response.

In the longer term, Champions can continue playing an important role sharing trusted information with communities and more online events will focus on a particular theme, such as carers and employment support.

Gus, one of the Community Champions, said: "I'm 74 and the work I do is keeping my mind in good trim... I have more than 750 Twitter followers so I share all COVID-19 information from the Council and NHS on there, Facebook and LinkedIn and my stuff gets well and truly out to everyone I know... I also regularly share information with around 90 members of the West Cheshire Mental Health Forum."

Gill, another resident involved with the project, said: “It’s about one-to-one contact rather than impersonal messages... We’ve all had to change the way we live and what we can and can’t do... I’ve been happy to play a part in getting COVID-19 messages personally to the people I know and volunteer with. They, in turn, have passed them on to others they know.”

Recording Life in Lockdown and Preserving a Record of the Council's Response

One of the core functions of Cheshire Archives is to preserve and make accessible the key decision-making records of the Council: its 'corporate memory'. We also aim to identify, collect and care for records that reflect and document the lives of Cheshire communities' past and present. This has led to our involvement with two projects documenting how Cheshire West and Chester Council has responded to COVID-19 and the impact on everyday life.

The 'Life in Lockdown: Your Stories Shared' project sought to collect images of life in lockdown and to create a lasting memory of this unique period, including a visual time capsule of everyday life.

Cheshire Archives holds a large collection of historic photographs of people, places and events which tell the story of our local communities. We asked for images from people that reflected the experiences of their local community during the pandemic. People were pleased to contribute and happy for us to share their images. 50 of the best images will be selected for the Cheshire Image Bank (<https://www.cheshireimagebank.org.uk/>) for all to see and they will form a visual record of these unprecedented times.

The aim of the second project was to create a record of how Cheshire West and Chester Council responded to the challenges presented by COVID-19, ensuring that the Council has something to look back on for future planning and for the community to use and learn from in years to come.

Key decision-making records such as agendas and minutes created by committees and Cabinet continue to be transferred through a newly established process. The pandemic has resulted in the Council working in very different ways and it was felt that the usual transfer process would not capture these new ways of working.

Early on in the pandemic Council Officers were quickly configured into 'cells' each with their own terms of reference in order to deal with the challenges presented by the pandemic. It was felt important to record the decisions made by senior officers and reflect these in the archive. Throughout the pandemic, relevant documents have

been transferred to a designated digital preservation area for COVID-19 records managed by the Archives service.

The project has had several challenges besides dealing with the capture and access to born-digital records. The 'cells' have adapted to the needs of the Council and community over time and have been closed or created to deal with arising issues such as Track and Trace and vaccinations. The 'active' business nature of the records and the fact that they are being revised and updated over time means that there is a continued requirement to ensure that we save a complete and accurate record for future generations.

Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health and Wellbeing

Following the first national COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020 it became clear that there had been a significant impact on mental health and wellbeing across the UK. The Public Health team quickly began reviewing the evidence to identify at risk groups to enable a targeted approach to prevention and early intervention mental health and wellbeing services.

The review identified several populations at risk of worsening mental health and wellbeing including:

- Young workers and low earners
- Children and young people
- Socially isolated individuals, particularly older people or single parent households
- Bereaved people (whether by COVID-19, or any other reason)
- People from certain occupational groups including NHS, care homes and schools
- People from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic backgrounds'
- Those who are digitally excluded
- Survivors of COVID-19
- People living with an existing mental illness
- Owners and managers of small and medium sized businesses.

"I do remember...almost a sense of doom coming over us because we suddenly thought, what does the future hold?" - Richard, Chester

"I was sad because I... miss[ed] my friends" - Evie, Manley

Following the identification of these at-risk groups an action plan was developed to put in place a range of support including:

- Mapping and promotion of all Bereavement services.
- Offering additional support to unpaid carers.

- Promoting the 5 ways to wellbeing with school staff by providing access to free online exercise classes via the Brio Step Away Programme and free twice weekly online mindfulness sessions.
- Delivering mental health support to secondary school senior leadership teams.
- Promoting the 5 ways to wellbeing to at-risk populations including children and young people through a community engagement project.
- Working with care home staff to understand how the Council can support them to promote and protect their mental health and wellbeing.
- Providing a sustainable approach to mental health support for SME businesses through online webinars for owners and managers.
- A significant amount of planning for this work has been completed in 2020. Many of the projects are being supported through funding from the Council Leader's Mental Health Champion budget.

In 2021 we will:

- Deliver services to ensure those who live, work and study in West Cheshire are supported during future waves of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under-represented Groups

The Equality and Diversity Team has placed great importance on mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on under-represented groups throughout the pandemic, seeking to put in place appropriate support and interventions. People with disabilities and people from ethnic minority backgrounds were recognised as priorities, especially as data emerged showing the adverse impact of COVID-19 on these groups in infection and mortality rates.

During the first lockdown from 23 March 2020, particular efforts were made to support the most vulnerable people, including many from under-represented groups. Arrangements were made to assist those who were shielding, with new initiatives quickly developed with local partners. These included the provision of tablets to enable Deaf people to communicate remotely via sign language, arranging for priority delivery slots with supermarkets, and piloting a food delivery service for disabled people with one chain that was later rolled out nationally. For ethnic minorities, initiatives included translating key information into the languages spoken by our residents, working with community and faith groups to develop support structures, and even arranging befrienders for isolated people who spoke the same language.

As the approach moved to mass testing, again the Equality & Diversity Team led on the work for the most vulnerable. Research was commissioned from Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Race and Equality Centre (CHAWREC) into the experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people in the borough which generated useful findings on how best to ensure messages reach people as well as a better understanding of the challenges faced. As testing centres were set up, our Senior Access Officer and specialist partners from organisations such as Deafness Support Network gave advice to ensure they were accessible. Again translated materials were used for residents whose first language is not English, and English classes, which have continued via Zoom when buildings have been shut, have covered issues such as 'staying safe during COVID-19' and 'lockdown do's and don'ts'.

With the roll out of the vaccine, the targeted interventions have continued, particularly around vaccine confidence, with data showing lower take up amongst some BAME and disabled communities. In the lead up to Christmas, we have

worked with trusted community leaders to publicise key public health messages, including vaccination.

“We couldn’t do our normal activities in the normal way and a lot of the service users who come here, couldn’t come here. You know, I did find it difficult”

- Michael, Little Sutton, with Paula, a keyworker from Vivo Care Choices Ltd.

Many videos have been shared, from a wide range of people, and posters, case studies and social media messages have been developed. A webinar was delivered by a range of health professionals and the Director of Public Health to provide accurate and up to date information on vaccination, tackling issues concerning communities such as vaccine safety, fertility, and addressing what the vaccine means for communities. In partnership with the Council, CHAWREC has recruited a team of ‘Community Connectors’ from relevant minority communities to undertake work with local BAME communities around vaccine hesitancy to encourage them to have the vaccine. Dedicated work from CHAWREC’s Arabic speakers has been successful in encouraging refugees and asylum seekers to be tested and have the vaccine. The work with Community Connectors engagement with BAME residents should also help addressing health inequalities within those communities.

Case Study

TK Al-Jorani is a Co-Chair of Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Race and Equality Centre (CHAWREC) and has been a long-serving volunteer and trustee. As an Arabic speaker, he is a key part of the team supporting the refugee families from Syria living in our borough and volunteers to provide support to Arabic speakers Asylum Seekers. He had his COVID-19 vaccination in December 2020, early in the programme and used this as an opportunity to tackle the lack of vaccine confidence amongst the refugee families and asylum seekers. He circulated his photo getting the vaccination on WhatsApp so they could see he had it done himself. He then spent time speaking to the families about how important it was to have the vaccine. All the families agreed to take the vaccine and a couple of them also agreed to share their photo to encourage others to take it. TK and two members of our refugee community, Ibrahim and Falak, now feature on posters and marketing materials for the Council’s vaccination campaign.

“People couldn’t go to their loved ones, people couldn’t socialise. It was a really hard time you know...”

- Monchab Ali, Saltney

Arts and Culture

West Cheshire Museums are approaching the end of the first year of the Curating Change: Museums Development Plan 2020 to 2025. Curating Change puts communities at the heart of everything we do with a focus on Youth Voice, developing significant dialogue within our communities and offering inclusive, accessible, welcoming opportunities. During 2020, we have been able to progress key areas of work to achieve these priorities.

Mid-Cheshire College

We worked closely with Warrington & Vale Royal College to arrange for students' projects to be displayed at the Lion Salt Works. At the height of the pandemic we worked with the Cheshire and Warrington Growth Hub to develop an online careers conference aimed at key stage 4 and 5 students across Cheshire. We were delighted to provide contributions from museum staff who supported with webinars, question and answer sessions and online resources.

“We commissioned a street artist to paint the Winsford Subway and create a mural down there that could bring the community together and represented Lockdown 2020”

- Thomas, Winsford

Hope Streets

Summer 2020 finished with a bang, as Phase 2 of the Hope Streets project closed with the Cheshire Festival of Hope. Two groups of Young Producers, based in Chester and Winsford, programmed their own Festivals around the themes of hope and heritage. In Chester, the Young Producers created a digital festival for young curious minds, which included Colour Within the Lines: Living in Lockdown; a cartoon creating a window into the lives of young people. They also included talks covering diverse topics such as disability awareness and being a young activist, as well as workshops and a virtual open mic night. The Winsford Young Producers wanted to bring hope to their town and leave a lasting legacy. They commissioned a range of exciting installations including a short film, a pop-up cardboard gallery and a permanent street art installation. The Festivals received over 4,650 online visitors, as well as countless more visitors to the artworks in Winsford.

The Hope Streets project then entered Phase 3, with a focus on embedding youth voices further within West Cheshire Museums and creating organisational change. To help with this, a group of Young Directors was formed and a manifesto produced to show what young people feel is important for museums to be doing in the 21st century. This next stage also looks to involve more community partners and produce long-lasting opportunities for young people within West Cheshire Museums.

In 2021 we will:

- Progress the Hope Streets Young Directors request for 'Safe Spaces' in the manifesto for West Cheshire Museums. This will become a 'badge' which the Museums service will trial before promoting across venues, bars, cafés etc.
- Work jointly with Chester Pride on a 'Safe Space' project, host small exhibitions and be part of the Pride Rainbow Trail.

Old Friends New Friends

We have worked with care homes and day centres across the borough on the Old Friends New Friends project. This has involved working with older people at the centres, encouraging them to complete profiles about themselves which have then been sent to selected Primary Schools. Year 1 pupils have worked hard to create images / portraits based on the profile using a variety of materials, the creations will be sent back to the older people with a covering letter.

Additional Information

In addition to responding to COVID-19, we also continued to respond to other factors and health inequalities that could impact on the quality of life of our residents. Three examples are included below:

Example 1: Improving the lives of older people in Cheshire West and Chester

In 2018, Cheshire West and Chester joined the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities and the UK Network for Age-friendly Communities. The Age-friendly Cheshire West Partnership was then established, with the aim to continually improve the lives of older people living in the Borough. To support this, a baseline assessment was undertaken by staff from the Centre for Ageing and Mental Health at the University of Chester. We wanted to understand baseline levels of age-friendliness and identify areas for development and improvement.

Residents aged 50 years and over were invited to take a survey as well as the University team conducting desk-top research to identify age-friendly activity already taking place in the Borough. The survey was based on the eight WHO age-friendly domains. Respondents were also asked to select three items to be prioritised by Age-friendly Cheshire West moving forwards.

Five thousand paper copies of the survey were posted to households and individuals could also complete the survey online. 1,112 surveys are included in the assessment (969 returned paper copies and 143 completed online). 13.5% of respondents were aged between 50 and 59, 29.6% were in their sixties, and 56.7% respondents were aged 70 years or older. The majority of respondents (61.7%) lived with at least one other person. Only 0.3% of respondents indicated they had an ethnic background other than white.

In 2021, we will:

- Publish the results of the Age-Friendly Cheshire West Baseline Assessment.
- Agree priority actions for Age-friendly Cheshire West Partnership informed by the evidence within the baseline assessment.

Example 2: Avian Flu

On 2nd November 2020, we were advised of an avian flu outbreak near Frodsham.

On 2nd and 3rd November this was confirmed as the highly pathogenic H5N8 strain. 13,5000 birds were culled at the farm by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and a 3km Protection Zone and a 10km Surveillance Zone were put in place around the infected site to limit the risk of spread.

There are strict movement and biosecurity measures placed within the Zones and these need to be communicated to the keepers of the birds and a record need to be made of the locations of any birds and other susceptible mammals and livestock. The risk to human health and food safety were both described as very low.

There is a risk to birds for both High Pathogenic and Low Pathogenic Avian Flu - the pathogenicity indicating the severity of the disease if a bird contracts the virus.

There is no statutory requirement to register a flock of less than 50 birds and, hence, no database which would provide information on the number of birds in an area which may be at risk.

The placing of a Protection Zone requires that the Local Authority act under the guidance of the APHA and carry out door to door contact with all addresses within the 3km Protection Zone. This is required in order to determine the presence of poultry and/or other captive birds within the area. Records must be kept of all addresses visited and, where no one is present, a letter is left requesting contact to be made.

Where birds are located, an officer needs to complete specific documents for submission to the APHA who will determine if a further visit is required by an APHA vet. Advisory documents are also left relating to biosecurity and movement controls.

Due to the emergency nature of the disease outbreak, proactive visits are required to begin as soon as possible.

Our response

- More than 40 volunteers recruited, trained and deployed.
- More than 2500 addresses visited.

- Volunteers were sought across several service areas of the Council to assist the 3 Animal Health Officers within Regulatory Services. Almost 40 volunteers were recruited and trained as well as 14 fire & rescue officers. All volunteers were trained remotely and allocated specific areas with the Zone.
- Volunteers worked over the weekend and through the next week, from the temporary Hub set up in Castle Park, Frodsham.

Challenges

- The logistics of training and deploying officers at short notice and ensuring that all addresses in the areas were visited and reported on within the parameters set by the APHA was logistically difficult and required the team to visit more than 2500 addresses and effectively record these visits.
- The main issues encountered during the exercise related to the time delay between notification of the disease outbreak and clarification of the expectations and documentation required by APHA.
- When maps of the areas were received, the team needed access to printing and so that we had reference mapping, individual maps for volunteers and enough require documentation to record outcomes.
- Once mobilised the difficulty was ensuring the record of visits reflected the work done and, in particular, that records clearly related to the mapped areas supplied by APHA.
- None of this was made easier by COVID-19 considerations or by the lack of daylight hours in November.

Impact

The outbreak was managed and required actions were completed over an 11-day period. This involved not only undertaking visits and collating and submitting necessary data but responding to queries (356 incoming emails and 259 phone calls).

Example 3: Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme

In Summer 2020 Edsential Community Investment Company and partners (Cheshire West and Chester Council, Cheshire West Voluntary Action and The Welcome Network) were one of 17 areas across the country who were successful in securing funding from the Department for Education (DfE) to pilot the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme.

The aim of the HAF programme was to enable children and young people eligible for free school meals to access healthy food and take part in fun activities over the summer holiday period. Holiday provision needed to be the equivalent of at least four hours a day for four days of the week for four weeks of the summer holiday period (4x4x4 provision). The focus of the HAF programme was on children and young people eligible for benefits-related free school meals (FSM).

The delivery aims of the HAF Programme set out by the DfE are that they wish for children and young people attending holiday provision to:

- Eat more healthily
- Be more active
- Take part in engaging and enriching activities
- Be safe and not isolated
- Have greater knowledge of health and nutrition
- Be more engaged with school and other services
- Have greater knowledge and awareness of holiday club provision

Data collected from January 2019 school census for Cheshire West and Chester showed that:

- Primary Schools: 3,874 pupils are eligible for and claiming FSM (13.4%)
- Secondary Schools: 2,403 pupils are eligible for and claiming FSM (11.8%)
- Special Schools: 387 pupils are eligible for and claiming FSM (39.2%)
- Pupil Referral Units: 14 pupils are eligible for and claiming FSM (34.1%)

The national average for FSM is 15.8% for primary schools and 14.1% for secondary.

The biggest challenge faced for summer 2020 was the COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainty for providers of what they would be able to deliver, whether face-to-face delivery would be possible and the numbers of children and young people that would be able to attend provision. Planning for provision was difficult as this needed to be done a couple of months ahead and it was difficult to predict what COVID-19 restrictions would still be in place for the summer holiday period. However, providers rose to this challenge and provision was innovative and included both a mixture of face-to-face provision and online delivery.

Comments from Children and young people and families:

- “Can I come on Monday as well it is so much fun?!”
- “because there’s a lot of shouting at home. I’m loving the calmness of being in school”
- “We loved making the fruit kebabs and our lunch”
- “Had great fun playing cricket and tennis today”

In 2021 we will:

- Roll out the HAF Programme to all upper tier Local Authorities and will be expanded to include the Easter and Christmas holiday periods in addition to summer. In Cheshire West and Chester, Edsential will continue to lead the programme on behalf of the Council with additional capacity funded within the Early Help and Prevention Service.

Looking Forward: Recommendations for Action

1. Our future local health protection response

- We will continue to deliver an enhanced Infection Prevention and Control Service as part of a sustainable and resilient Health Protection Plan for the borough.

2. Support for our residents who continue to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19

- We will continue to develop and deliver support for those who have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.
- We will continue to strengthen close working relationships with the Poverty Truth Advisory Board
- We will continue to work with under-represented groups to ensure their voices are heard and their stories are told.

3. COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

- We will continue to enable our residents to benefit from COVID-19 vaccinations by ensuring opportunities to be vaccinated can be accessed as easily as possible
- We will continue to provide communications and support to increase vaccine uptake.
- We will continue to work with our residents to allay concerns and vaccine hesitancy.

4. Enhanced Data and Intelligence Systems

- We will continue to maximise data and intelligence available to us as part of a Population Health Programme.

5. Understanding of the Long Term Impact of COVID-19

- We will continue to develop our knowledge and understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on the following; physical and mental health (including Long COVID), COVID-19 related deaths and the emerging challenges due to the impact of the local and national economy.

Acknowledgments

Lead Author / Producer: Rachel Zammit, Public Health Programme Lead.

Thank you to everyone who has played a part in responding to COVID-19 in Cheshire West and Chester.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the Public Health Annual Report and helped to tell our local story and experience of living through the pandemic during 2020.

This written report has been produced to sit alongside our short film of the same name. Please do take the time to watch the film which is available at:

<http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/CovidResponse>

- Cheshire West and Cheshire Council
- ABDA Limited
- Age-friendly Cheshire West
- Cheshire West Integrated Care Partnership
- Cheshire West Voluntary Action (CWVA)
- Chester Mosque & Islamic Centre
- Chester Pride
- Chester Zoo
- Chester Shah Jalal Jame Mosque and Islamic Centre
- Cine Window Winsford
- Community Champions
- Countess of Chester Hospital
- Deafness Support Network
- Doc1ument Videography
- Edsential Community Investment Company
- Hanky Panky Pancakes Ltd
- NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group
- Northgate Church
- NPORS Limited
- OPAL Services (Rural West Cheshire)
- Public Health England (PHE)

- purple-planet.com
- QWEST Services
- Soul Kitchen Chester
- The Sector Leadership Group
- The Welcome Network
- TMC
- University of Chester
- Vivo Care Choices Ltd
- Welton Media
- Westminster Foundation