

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council's scrutiny function is well positioned to respond to local challenges and has an important role to provide direct insight and support to the Executive on a range of key matters. Improving outcomes for residents remains at the forefront of all work priorities, with scrutiny members being well placed to provide essential feedback on the lived experience of individuals and communities based on the impacts of Covid-19 and the local response.
- 1.2 Scrutiny panel meetings resumed in June for the 2020/21 municipal year. In addition to work programme development, a request was made by the Scrutiny Chairs for all panel members to take time outside of the meeting to note experiences on impacts and the response to Covid-19 in Tameside and subsequent recovery measures.
- 1.3 The table below summarises the feedback and insight from scrutiny panel members, received in June 2020. Key points have been separated into the following categories:
 - Responding to Covid-19
 - Health Systems
 - Economy
 - Children and Families
 - Vulnerabilities (elderly/shielded, BAME, homelessness, domestic abuse)
 - Future consideration
- 1.4 It is acknowledged that some points lack a certain level of detail and they are to be received as direct and timely feedback from communities. Key messages aim to inform future planning associated with the response and recovery to Covid-19 in Tameside. Scrutiny Chairs therefore consider it appropriate that the overarching insight and perception of communities should be shared with the Council's Executive at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.5 At this stage, there is no requirement for the Executive to respond to the report and it is hoped that the learning points can be shared with relevant service areas. Scrutiny work programmes for 2020/21 will pick up a number of measures in place to improve Covid-19 related outcomes.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Panels feel that it is important to provide some additional context in terms of Tameside's starting position, pre Covid-19, based on a range of health and economic risk factors that will ultimately determine how severe and long-standing impacts associated with the pandemic are likely to be.
- 2.2 It is nationally recognised that while all efforts have been made to respond to Covid-19 as a health crisis and serious threat to life, it is now coming to light that future challenges have the likelihood to be profound and far-reaching for the resilience of households and communities. This relates directly to some of the expected and delayed external factors such as uncertainty of future employment, housing, education and timely access to healthcare and support.
- 2.3 As a Council, we have continued to maintain an effective level of local intelligence, insight and performance monitoring. The strength of local partnerships and cooperative working allows us to be best placed to draw on a wealth of information that will ultimately support a local recovery plan.

Identifying future risks

- 2.4 The summary of information and data below is aimed to provide a collective and clear picture on areas of future concern, which allows for a level of comparison to be made when taking account of:
 - Health inequalities and the future demand on services

- Access to future employment and associated rise in the local claimant level
- Delivering safe environments for residents to work and travel
- Equality impacts and the mitigation of risk for outcomes associated with Covid-19

What we know

- 2.5 As a borough we continue to face significant challenges related to health outcomes, skill levels and employment. Covid-19 has presented an unparalleled level of pressure to front line services and the local response has been commendable. Our communities have continued to show a level of compassion and determination needed to ensure we can get through this together. This is evidenced by the speed in which the Humanitarian Hub was established and the coordination between public sector bodies and voluntary agencies.
- 2.6 When collating feedback from communities it has been important to reflect on some of the local challenges, with attention drawn to the following areas (3 July 2020):
- A total of 1,952 households have been supported with food parcels and 446 with prescriptions. Residents in need of support is reducing on a daily and weekly basis.
 - The number of GP appointments made in April 2020 was at its lowest level in 2 years; with an associated reduction in GP referrals.
 - A sharp drop in A&E attendances, levels are starting to rise.
 - Reporting a proportionately high number of deaths in care homes (44% higher than same period in 2019). Over 80 deaths related to Covid-19.
 - A reduction in referrals made to Children's Services linked to most pupils not being in school.
 - Tameside has a high proportion of small and medium size businesses, with £42.8 million paid in business support grants.
 - There has been a noticeable shortfall in Council Tax recovery compared with expected levels.
 - At the end of May 2020 - 27,700 residents had been reported as furloughed (3rd highest in GM). Potential for redundancy, with a knock on effect for employment support, welfare rights and debt advice.

3. FEEDBACK AND LEARNING FROM COMMUNITIES (JUNE 2020)

Responding to Covid-19
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council's response and speed in which the Humanitarian Hub was established, along with support from volunteers and businesses has been a real accomplishment and something to be proud of. • The crisis has helped generate a resurgence and increased levels of solidarity and sense of community. • Positive outcomes and innovations, such as online support groups offering help and advice to residents. • Agencies and communities have responded well with regards to food provision and delivering medication to some of our most vulnerable and isolated residents. • Enhanced cooperation and partnerships have had a positive impact on community spirit and cohesion. • A positive message based on the sharing of best practice and finding workable solutions to problems.

Health Systems

- There are a number of future concerns linked to a range of possible impacts that Covid-19 and lockdown measures will have on the mental health and wellbeing of residents.
- A consensus that assessing and supporting the mental health of residents must remain in place as a future priority for the commissioning of health services. To overlook this would be detrimental to both the health and economic recovery of the borough.
- Concerns were raised with regards to the avoidance of Primary Care, reduction in routine appointments and cancer referrals. It is accepted that while Covid-19 has somewhat alleviated aspects of non-urgent demand, the future pressure on key services due to delayed diagnosis is likely to have significant implications on health outcomes for residents.
- Some work may be required in order to understand the equality impacts of Covid-19. Emerging evidence reported nationally has presented an understandable cause for concern within BAME communities and those undertaking key worker roles. It is also unclear as to how the future assessment of risk for disproportionately affected groups can be planned and delivered at a local level. This includes safety measures for all work places and public transport.
- With a significant number of older and vulnerable residents having been shielded for at least 3 months, there will be a need to consider issues associated with loneliness, social isolation. In addition to any ongoing worries around future access to food and medication should a second phase emerge.

Economy

- General feedback from the business community has been positive with regards to the local response and measures put in place for guidance, support, eligibility and access to grants/funding.
- Concerns that the impact Covid-19 has had on the mental health and wellbeing of residents has potential to spread further. This may create a direct and adverse link with an expected rise in unemployment following closure of the government's furlough scheme and economic recovery for the borough.
- Residents have concerns about uncertainty connected with the relaxation of lockdown measures, in particular around the insecurity of employment, housing, financial support and debt.
- Some residents may find themselves without support (gaps in the governments systems and approach). What options have been made available to those who may not have been eligible for the furlough scheme and/or small business grants.
- Hardship projections with regards to future unemployment and claimant levels.

Children and Families

- There has been a positive response from local schools, with continued pastoral support, wellbeing checks and food support where needed.
- Concerns of parents associated with children returning to school – information being received and the need for consistency and oversight in messages relayed from schools.
- Broader understanding and expectations to the way youth workers and social workers will interact with children and families online in lieu of face-to-face working for the foreseeable future.

Vulnerabilities

- To review the need for a collaborative approach to assess and remove any potential barriers (physical or psychological), in supporting our elderly, shielded and vulnerable residents to become more socially mobile as lockdown restrictions start to ease further.
- Care homes will require vital and continued support from the Council and partners.
- The Council has responded well to residents presenting as homeless and those with immediate housing needs. This may require periodic review to ensure interventions have been sustainable and to monitor new cases based on future financial impacts of Covid-19.
- Some older residents have expressed confusion about the details of being shielded and the implication of future changes to reconnecting individuals and households.
- Impacts of a rise in the level of alcohol being consumed at home during lockdown, with the hope that this will start to reduce – possible link to increases in domestic abuse.
- There has been a short-term spike in issues related to fly tipping and the disposal of waste. Communities are pleased with the Council's response and support positive messages to highlight impacts this places on the Council and costs to remove. Also to promote the reporting of issues via the app.
- To share any critical learning points from the Council's work with charities and community groups to ensure support is reaching the people who need it most.

Future Consideration

- A need to plan for the challenges we are likely to face going forward and particularly how we work to mitigate the problems that lockdown has imposed.
- Creating a phased plan that looks at how we rebuild confidence, particularly for vulnerable and elderly people who have been shielded; for parents and school staff in order to get children back to school.
- Building on air quality initiatives to seize on a real opportunity to reduce car journeys and invest in sustainable walking and cycling solutions. To include practical issues related to public transport and getting residents back to work. Making alternative journey a viable option, more appealing and easier to access.
- To champion all walking and cycling initiatives. Tameside's corridor for cycling is a bold and ambitious plan to make our borough more cycle friendly.
- A need to assess impacts and feasibility of foodbanks being able to continue responding to increased levels of demand. To develop a sustainable approach to future social and economic support (including food).
- The future financial hardship and wider impacts on all community groups and charities.
- Continue publishing positive images and good news stories on the response of public services and communities to Covid-19.
- A possible need for more area specific communications that addresses resident perceptions of covid-safe spaces.