

BRIEFING NOTE

Update on COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and the Council's response

7 May 2020

Current update



At Durham County Council, we continue to work with our partners to protect our communities and meet the challenges coronavirus presents to the region.

As of 9am on 5 May, there have been 1,383,842 tests for coronavirus in the UK and 194,990 people tested positive.

As of 5pm on 4 May, of those tested positive for coronavirus in the UK, 29,427 have sadly died. This new figure includes deaths in all settings, not just in hospitals. The equivalent figure under the old measure would have been 24,735.

What is the public health response?

All Government response and guidance across many sectors can be accessed online at: www.gov.uk/coronavirus

All health-related information and advice can be accessed on the NHS website: www.nhs.uk/coronavirus

In the North East, regional command and control arrangements have been established. These are being led by NHS England and based upon the established North East Pandemic Influenza Framework which includes coronavirus. Well established close working arrangements are in place between Durham County Council and PHE for health protection outbreaks and will continue during this outbreak.

The council is a key partner on the County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum (LRF), which brings organisations including the emergency services, local authorities, utility providers and other partners together to respond to the pandemic. The LRF continues to work with Northumbria and Cleveland LRFs to co-ordinate activities across the region to ensure effective planning across all agencies for Covid-19. Each LRF has set up a Strategic Co-ordinating Group, known as a Gold Command Group, and they are also meeting as a cross region group.

Local communications and updates are being channelled through a single point of entry www.durham.gov.uk/coronavirus. It is important that we use this link as all elements of our coronavirus response are continually updated and will provide you and the public with the most up-to-date information that is available.

What can you do to protect yourself and others?

The most effective way of protecting yourself and others from coronavirus is to practice good hand hygiene. Washing your hands regularly and thoroughly with soap and water throughout the day and try not to touch your face with your hands.

Please follow the Government's current advice to:

- Stay at home
- Only go outside for food, health reasons, essential work or for exercise (once per day only)
- Stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

The Government is expected to make an announcement on Sunday about how the next phase of the national response to coronavirus will be managed. We will provide a further update following this announcement but until then it is important we continue to follow the current advice.

We understand the impact this could have on our residents' mental wellbeing and we are increasing support and advice in relation to personal wellbeing and mental health. This support also includes businesses and individuals with financial worries, with information about the mental health support available here: <https://businessdurham.co.uk/news-events-county-durham/covid-19-information>

What is Durham County Council doing?

Since January, we have been promoting Public Health England advice and adopting the guidance across our service areas. Our leadership team continues to meet daily (virtually) to provide direction to the council's response, with regular input from Cabinet.

We are also working closely with our colleagues in the **County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum** to ensure our work is aligned and this includes ensuring that communications with the public are fully joined up.

Below is a summary of the progress we have made since the last briefing note on 30 March:

County Durham Together



County Durham Together, our virtual hub run in partnership with a wide range of community and voluntary sector organisations, continues to support the most vulnerable at this difficult time. A number of our employees have been temporarily redeployed while the pandemic is ongoing and many of these are supporting the hub. We would like to thank all of them for their hard work and commitment as well as the many workers and volunteers from the community and voluntary sector who are supporting what is a major initiative to help our most vulnerable during the coronavirus pandemic.

As well as contacting 16,000 residents identified as being most at risk from coronavirus to advise them how to get help, we have also sent information to a further 75,000 households where we believe residents may also require support.

The County Durham Together hub is open Monday to Friday, from 9am to 5pm, and Saturdays and Sundays from 10am to 3pm. For more details, visit www.durham.gov.uk/covid19help

Residents can also source a wide range of help and support by visiting www.durhamlocate.org.uk, our online directory of community and voluntary organisations across the county.

It is also important during these difficult times that we all help one another so, along with our partners in County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum, we're also calling on people to be good neighbours during the pandemic – whether it's buying a few extra items during your next visit to the supermarket, or simply stopping for a chat over the garden fence, little gestures can make a huge difference to the lives of others, particularly the vulnerable. And for those who are shielding or self-isolating, it's equally important that you accept help from family friends and neighbours, where possible and in line with social distancing measures.

Volunteering unit

We have also now launched a new volunteering unit, which is providing a central location where organisations that need additional help or practical resources can register their need. The aim is to help manage offers of support from businesses and individuals who have volunteered their services and resources. Staff will be able to match them to groups across the county's voluntary and community sector who have requested help in a number of different areas, whether that is extra staff, equipment, premises, vehicles, IT support or communications and marketing skills.

To find out more, visit www.durham.gov.uk/volunteerunit or call 03000 260 260.

Support for residents and businesses

We continue to work hard to support the county's business and have now handed over nearly 8,100 grants totalling just over £91 million – just under 91 per cent of the overall sum we estimated would be paid out. These figures are the highest of any local authority in the North East in terms of the percentage of grants paid, and the 12th highest nationally. In terms of the number of grants paid to date, we are third nationally. If you are aware of anyone you think may be eligible for support, please encourage them to get in touch. More information is available at www.durham.gov.uk/covid19business.

We also continue to provide additional support to eligible residents through our Council Tax Reduction Scheme, with nearly 8,300 households now having benefitted from a combined saving of £2.2 million. More information can be found at www.durham.gov.uk/covid19money.

By working extremely hard, council teams have already managed to help many of those eligible for support but we are aware that there may be others who have not yet been in contact with us, that's why we have sent letters and leaflets containing information about the wide variety of support available through the council and its partners to every home in the county. It's important that everyone knows how they can get the help they need – whether it's financial support for small businesses or mental health advice for those struggling in these unprecedented times – and the only way of making sure every single resident has this information is to contact them directly.

Additional Area Action Partnership Funding

In order to help the county's many community and voluntary groups to continue providing support during the pandemic, we have given an additional £100,000 to each of our 14 Area Action Partnerships (AAP). This is a total of £1.4 million. To date, we have received 122 requests for support and offers have been issued to 92 projects with a total value of more than £365,375.

We have also given members more flexibility as to how they allocate money from their neighbourhood budgets and have since received 21 applications for support, 17 of which have been agreed with a combined value of £117,700. Among the beneficiaries so far is Willow Burn Hospice in Lanchester, which was awarded £10,000 by Mid-Durham AAP to help it to continue to operate during the outbreak.

In addition to this, we have provided a further £100,000 for countywide projects, meaning a total of £3.9 million has been made available to support our communities.

Support for care homes

We are working extremely closely with our partners across both the county and the region to support staff and service users in the social care sector.

We are monitoring PPE stocks and supporting care homes that are having difficulty sourcing supplies and have also developed a fast track recruitment process to assist adult social care providers.

In addition, working alongside our partners in the NHS, we are increasing the funding and support available to care home managers and staff to help with issues such as infection prevention and control, staff training and access to resources.

We will continue to monitor the impact of the pandemic on social care services in the short, medium and long term.

Schools

The majority of schools in County Durham remain open to care for the children of key workers and those with additional needs. Ninety per cent of schools continued to provide or offered childcare over the Easter holidays. Schools also continue to serve free meals to eligible pupils, both as a hot or cold meal in school for those still attending, or as a food parcel.

Coronavirus testing

Along with the National Testing Programme and its mobile testing service being run by the military, we have been working with our local NHS trust to put measures in place in County Durham. For our own employees and members, NHS staff and care home staff with symptoms, testing is available via the local hospitals. Household members can be tested through the national programme. A local multi-agency testing group has been established by the Director of Public Health to coordinate testing and prepare for contact tracing. This links closely to a regional strategic group that has been established.

Council services update

Teams across the council are working extremely hard to ensure that essential services are maintained, and we have received many letters and emails from the public thanking staff for their dedication and commitment.

Now that the initial phase of adapting services to deal with the pandemic has passed and we have had time to review our operations, we are in a position where we can begin to reinstate some services. Garden waste collections resumed on Saturday 2 May after initially being postponed so that we could maintain refuse and recycling services. By moving garden waste collections to Saturdays and Mondays we are able to deliver this much valued service to residents. We have

also resumed work on some highways and building projects. This follows us having paused our services to take time to ensure that any work we do carry out can be done in line with national social distancing guidance and appropriate PPE if required. We are also currently reviewing our Household Waste and Recycling Centres.

This gradual reinstatement of services represents the beginning of the recovery phase of our response to the coronavirus pandemic and, while we will continue to re-establish services, this will be done in a carefully planned way and work will only resume where it is safe to do so.

Many of our services are managing to continue supporting residents by moving online and, during the past few weeks, we have seen many innovations in this area. Our Technogym app, which offers people a helping hand to stay fit while confined to their home, has proved incredibly popular as have online storytelling sessions organised through our Library Online service. The Gala Theatre has also teamed up with Durham University to launch an online theatre festival showcasing the county's creativity during lockdown.

Government guidance

- For the latest Government information on Coronavirus, visit www.gov.uk/coronavirus
- For information about support for businesses and employees, visit www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses
- For information about the support available for the self-employed, visit www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-a-grant-through-the-coronavirus-covid-19-self-employment-income-support-scheme

Council meetings

Council meetings are currently on hold, but preparations are underway to enable us to hold meetings remotely.

We will continue to keep colleagues, members, key stakeholders and partners, and residents up to date with our response to coronavirus and changes to our services.

Information is available on the council's website at www.durham.gov.uk and social media channels www.facebook.com/DurhamCouncil, www.twitter.com/DurhamCouncil, www.instagram.com/durham_county_council/ and www.linkedin.com/company/durham-county-council