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| Title: | Update from the Leader of the Council |
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Note: this update is provided on 24 September 2020 and, given the nature of the content, it is likely that much of the information contained within this briefing will be out of date by the time the Commission meets. This is due to the fast moving nature of the issues covered in this update.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. I last updated the Commission in July 2020. Since then the focus has remained on responding to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis to ensure that we are taking all necessary precautions to mitigate the risk of transmission and plan to manage any outbreak.
- 1.2. Work has also continued to support the Westminster economy to recover from the shock. I set out the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in an Urgent Statement to Full Council on 16 September 2020. Following Full Council, the Government announced or introduced an extension of public health measures including the "Rule of Six", the closure of hospitality businesses at 10pm, compulsory facemasks and table service in hospitality businesses and additional enforcement powers for those breaking the rules.
- 1.3. The Chancellor has also announced a further suite of economic interventions including a new jobs support scheme, an extension of the VAT cut for hospitality businesses until the end of March 2021 and an extension of the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme. The full impact of these measures on Westminster is still being assessed at the time of writing.

2. COVID-19 response

2.1. Infection rates

- 2.2. Overall, the local incident rate of cases per 100,000 within Westminster, and across London, is trending upwards over the past 4 weeks although fluctuations in the rate are observed day to day. In line with the national situation, local

residents have reported challenges in accessing testing, which does impact on the accuracy of the statistics we have access to. The Government launched the new COVID-19 Test and Trace app on 24 September and we will work with Government to promote this to Westminster residents, particularly focusing on those communities most vulnerable to the virus.

- 2.3. The Council's Outbreak Management Team continues to monitor the local situation daily and I am confident that planning has been done and we have appropriate governance in place to handle any local outbreaks which do occur.

2.4. **Outbreak Control**

- 2.5. In June, funding was provided, and all councils were asked to submit Outbreak plans by the end of June. Westminster's submitted plan has been [published on the Council website](#).

- 2.6. Wide-scale testing and contact tracing are required to help reach and maintain a steady-state of low level or no transmission of COVID-19 in the community. Westminster's Outbreak plan forms part of a national COVID-19 management strategy led by central government, consisting of testing the population, contact tracing cases and containing outbreaks and enabling further research about the virus.

2.7. **Westminster Connects**

- 2.8. The pandemic placed an unexpected pressure on the voluntary and community sector as residents were shielding, self-isolating, or were vulnerable due to the lack of wider support networks. Westminster Connects was established rapidly as part of the Council's response to COVID-19.

- 2.9. The key aim of Westminster Connects was to connect residents with the right support, predominantly provided by volunteers who were registered and managed by the Council. We had a fantastic response from residents wishing to give up their time and volunteer to support our most vulnerable residents, with over 3,300 residents registering to volunteer for Westminster Connects.

- 2.10. In June the Westminster Connects service transitioned to a longer-term operation model, which enabled the Council to maintain its support network for both shielded and non-shielded residents for the remainder of lockdown. As part of this transition, the helpline moved from being run by council staff to becoming part of the Agilisys telephony service. The helpline move was seamless, and no issues occurred. We maintained a team of redeployed staff until the end of July, which was the end of the self-isolating period for residents who were shielding.

- 2.11. From August we have developed threshold plans for Westminster Connects and shielding, which enable us to scale up the service in the event of a local increase in the cases of coronavirus. In addition, we have been developing the volunteer service with a wider range of opportunities as part of the rebranding of Westminster Connects into an ongoing volunteer force to support the needs of the community.
- 2.12. **Supporting economic recovery**
- 2.13. In June we delivered the first stage of temporary interventions designed to support the safe movement of pedestrians, cyclists and traffic. This initial phase focused on key commuting corridors and taking action to support the reopening of schools and retail. This saw 11km of new cycle lanes and 19,000sqm of extra pavement space created.
- 2.14. In July we began to roll out a second phase of temporary interventions throughout the city in order for hospitality businesses to continue to trade whilst social distancing measures remain in place. This has allowed restaurants, cafes and similar businesses to keep tables and chairs outside and serve as many customers as possibly while safely adhering to social distancing. Our specific achievements include taking action e.g. road closures or removal of parking spaces on 80 streets and issuing over 435 new tables and chairs licenses under our fast track scheme and the new national licencing regime. As a result of our temporary hospitality interventions we estimate over 500 businesses have benefited from what we have done.
- 2.15. We conducted a survey to ascertain public perception of these interventions which provided the following findings:
- Almost 75% of people asked said they would recommend outdoor dining in Westminster to their friends and family.
 - 84% of residents and visitors felt positively about the council helping local businesses to reopen.
 - 73% agreed with the temporary measures, including timed road closures, pathway extensions and the use of parking bays.
- 2.16. We were also subject to a large number of businesses and residents who asked us to extend these measures beyond the end of September. In light of the positive response to the scheme, as well as the continuing need to support our business community at this difficult time, we have decided to extend the scheme to the end of October 2020. This decision was taken following the Government's revised public health guidance and new rules governing social interaction, but we have agreed to this extension with care so as to prioritise the health of those who live in, work in and visit our city.

- 2.17. Prior to the pandemic, almost half of visitors to the West End came from outside of London. However, during lockdown, non-Londoners only accounted for a quarter of visitors. This proportion had gradually increased to just over a third at the end of August.
- 2.18. To support people returning to the West End, we launched a Sight See Crowd Free campaign to target people from outer London boroughs and the Home Counties. In the first week of the campaign, we reached almost half a million people through our targeted advertisements.
- 2.19. The campaign continues to run, despite the change to Government advice as it remains possible for people to visit London for leisure purposes and it is vital that the West End continues to benefit from domestic tourism, particularly at a time when international tourism is unlikely to return in significant numbers for some time.
- 2.20. In order to support the re-opening of the West End, we had planned a cultural festival “Inside Out” for the first weekend of October. In light of the changes to Government advice, we have decided to postpone this until a future date when restrictions are lifted and confidence begins to return. Working closely with the vast majority of the major cultural institutions in the city, we had planned a range of activity including outdoor performance and major new art installations across the city. We remain hopeful that we will be able to run a similar programme in early 2021 with the support of our cultural institutions.
- 2.21. **Council Offices**
- 2.22. From the end of June, staff were encouraged to return City Hall and Lisson Grove. Although the buildings remained open throughout lockdown for essential and frontline workers, other staff were invited back to our buildings based on a full risk assessment of the spaces we work in and the implementations of measure to make the offices COVID-secure.
- 2.23. On top of a rigorous cleaning schedule, social distancing measures and a booking system to limit how many staff can work in our buildings, we have put in additional measures such:
- One-way systems in key areas (tea points and the canteen, currently)
 - Perspex screens at reception and security
 - New floor markings
 - Hand sanitisers in reception and other key locations
- 2.24. With these mitigations in place, there are currently 330 work spaces available in City Hall and 80 in Lisson Grove.

Climate emergency programme

- 2.25. The climate emergency programme continues to gather pace.
- 2.26. On 17 September, we held our first engagement event with businesses in the city on the scale of the environmental challenge facing Westminster.
- 2.27. The Climate Action Group, which I chair and is also comprised of Cllrs Acton and Scarborough, along with senior officers, meet regularly to set and direct the strategic framework for achieving our commitments to be to be carbon neutral as a Council by 2030, as a city by 2040 and for the city to be carbon zero entirely (i.e. not using offsets) by 2050.
- 2.28. We have now undertaken a baselining exercise for our emissions which shows us that 86% of Westminster's emissions are from energy used to power and heat buildings, followed by on road transport (11%) and waste (3%), Council emissions account for just 2% of total emissions for Westminster as a whole although we are conscious of the need to show leadership in this space. Based on our proposed trajectory, the Council must reduce its emissions by at least 3,700 tonnes per annum (8.3% of the baseline) to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.
- 2.29. The next Open Forum event for residents will focus on climate and environmental issues and will take place in around a months' time – date tbc shortly.