

Children & Adults, Public Health & Voluntary Sector Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Date:	12 June 2023
Classification:	General Release
Title:	Independent review of pandemic response
Report of:	Director of Public Health
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Adult Social Care, Public Health and Voluntary Sector
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	Fairer Westminster
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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council commissioned an independent review of its COVID-19 pandemic response, in line with its Fairer Westminster ambitions to provide excellent public health services and reduce poverty and inequality.
- 1.2 The report concludes that there is evidence that systems and processes worked as well as they could have during the unprecedented global pandemic. It states that these will be helpful for shaping local emergency preparation and response efforts to future infection outbreaks or disasters.
- 1.3 The report provides key recommendations in relation to effective cross-functional working relationships with the NHS, best practice in data management within local primary care services, resident engagement, and the protection of workforce, vulnerable residents, and Global Majority groups.

2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

- 2.1 The Committee's Members have received the independent report (see Appendix) noting Professor Manthorpe's observations regarding the local pandemic response, including efforts to address low COVID-19 vaccination uptake, and implications for future work. Professor Manthorpe is attending the Committee to answer questions, and the Committee's observations are

intended to help direct officers in responding to the report.

3. Background

- 3.1 An independent review of the Council's pandemic response was commissioned to ensure system-wide learning is identified for shaping future outbreak management and emergency preparedness.
- 3.2 The report helps identify the root causes of low vaccination rates and also provides an independent review of the Council and other local providers' pandemic response.
- 3.3 The report identifies long-term challenges in establishing accurate vaccine uptake given Westminster's relatively high population transience and reliance on international/independent health care. It notes there is substantial evidence that the Council, in partnership with other organisations, has been addressing (and continues to) both vaccine hesitancy and vaccine refusal.
- 3.4 It concludes that there is evidence of systems and processes that worked as well as they could have during the unprecedented global pandemic. It states that these will be helpful for shaping local emergency preparation and response efforts to future infection outbreaks or disasters.
- 3.5 The report highlights that:
 - The Council's responses clearly built on many long-standing initiatives and ways of working, such as community engagement and effective working practices with its neighbours and local NHS partners.
 - Positive relationships with new NHS structures seem to help maintain the focus on improving the quality of patient registration data. The Council might wish to request progress reports about this work. This could provide greater confidence when deciding how to prioritise and allocate resources to address inequalities.
 - The Council played a major role in London-wide activities during the pandemic, and it benefitted from London's pooled expertise in planning and responding. Many of these activities are detailed in this report and are operational- and governance-related in nature. While they might not attract publicity, they are crucial to managing high-level risks and could contribute to 'stress testing' systems in the future.
 - Continued work on community engagement and communications, as well as deeper analysis of residents' experiences of inequality, could help shape the Council's work and deliver its vision for a Fairer Westminster.

3.6 Key recommendations are provided and include:

- Giving attention to strengthening cross functional working relationships with NHS and regional partners;
- Ensuring best practice in data management within local primary care services, including recording ethnicity details;
- Reviewing lessons learned from resident communication and engagement and the efforts made to protect volunteers and staff, vulnerable residents and those who are homeless, and Global Majority groups.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact Jeffrey Lake - jlake@westminster.gov.uk

APPENDICES:

Independent report

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None