

Annex D – Leeds Submission for Covid Alert Levels

Purpose: Set out the Leeds position ahead of the 16 December government review of Covid Alert Levels, recognising that there are different risks associated with a Tier 2/3 outcome which have been considered with city partners and politicians. It is crucial to find the optimum balance between the implications of Covid and broader physical and mental health, along with the economic and social issues both in the short and long term. Local areas are well placed to balance these dynamics and plot the best route through these difficult decisions to help maintain public engagement and compliance.

Background: The government review on 16 December will be based on data from 9 December and the government's framework in the Winter Plan, and our understanding is that any changes would be implemented on 19 December. As a city, we continually stress that restrictions are only part of the overall strategy, emphasising all the other public health interventions as being crucial. For example being vigilant about preventing and managing outbreaks, supporting self-isolation, extensive communications and public engagement about behaviour and compliance, and multi-agency enforcement activity, all delivered through the strongest possible partnership with our communities. **Our proactive and determined approach to drive down infection rates will continue as part of our integrated plan for winter, including crucially prioritising effective rollout of the vaccination.**

Current position to support Tier 2: The latest position demonstrates strong and sustained improvement in all five key areas of the Covid Alert Review, particularly in the last month, although we are far from complacent:

- Latest figures show a statistically **significant decrease in Leeds all age infection rates**, down by more than 20% in the last 7 days to 145.1. Tracking the last 4 weeks rate per 100,000 shows: 442, 296, 189 and 145 – so **reduced by more than 65% in that period.**
- Leeds is currently **ranking 131st** in the country, and 4th amongst the core cities.
- After a very rapid fall in infection rate during November, the recent trend shows a slower rate of reduction, but now showing green on the PHE SAR case rate change chart.
- We know this is still a high rate and we are **pushing for further reductions with our full range of actions.** Unconfirmed data on NHSD is for continued reductions (125) and test and trace referrals are declining (5th lowest regionally, and lowest in West Yorkshire).
- **Positivity is down** at 6.2%, amber on the PHE chart, so still a concern, but down by more than 30% in the last week. Tracking the last 4 weeks data shows: 16.1%, 11.8%, 9.3%, 6.2%, so **reduced by more than 60% in that period.**
- **Over 60s rate is 139.8**, down by 17 in the last 7 days. Tracking the last 4 weeks shows: 422, 272, 169, 139, so **reduced by more than 65% in that period.**
- As at 10 December, the hospital had 187 confirmed Covid patients (a decrease of 31 from the previous week), including 9 patients in Critical Care. These numbers remain a significant concern with the NHS and partners working hard to reduce this. Tracking the last 4 weeks shows: 345, 301, 208, 189, **so reduced by more than 45% in that period.** Hospitals are predicted to see a continued decline in Covid patient numbers albeit slow.
- Covid related deaths have also started to decline recently.
- **Cases in settings and outbreaks are stable and very proactively managed** by the full range of partners as the bedrock of our approach: with cases in 17 care homes (from a recent high of 47); 5134 pupils and 360 staff self-isolating (compared to the recent peak of 12,989 pupils and 828 education staff self-isolating); cases in only 3 workplaces and an outbreak in a prison.
- Testing rates for PCR tests are still strong, with clear and consistent messages about getting a test, in particular in those communities where testing rates have fallen. Thousands of LFT being delivered through universities and the NHS. From the 15,000 tests across our universities, there has been one positive test so far, although this doesn't make us complacent about community transmission. Planning in place for scaling up of targeted community lateral flow testing to complement existing testing activity to help find the infection and break the chain of transmission.
- During national lockdown, city centre footfall was down by between 70 and 80% compared to the same period last year. The early days of Tier 3 has seen footfall down by between 30 and 40% compared to the same period last year, with retailers reporting positive trading activity.

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Rationale for Tier 2: We believe strongly that it is **continued public engagement** and trust that will lead to the right behaviour to help reduce infection rates, so public support and their understanding of decisions is key. This includes that they see the system as being “fair” in relation to restrictions and **balanced judgements about health and the economy**. Our current insight and softer intelligence through social media and other community engagement, suggests an expectation of Tier 2 for Leeds given reductions in rates and comparisons with others in Tier 2. People in the city appear to be worried about the relaxation of Christmas, with many saying they understand the broader message about reducing contact and don’t want to see rates rise. Inevitably there will be some who will break the rules and increase contact, and we are aware of those risks and seeking to manage them. Elected members, MPs, and the full range of partners (particularly local community organisations) are engaged in **messaging so that all parts of the community are reached** and understand the drive to reduce infection and prevent pressure on the NHS.

Although it is difficult, we think the economic and broader health and wellbeing benefits to be gained from a Tier 2 marginally outweigh the risks of losing public confidence if the system keeps Leeds in Tier 3. We worry about increasing contact taking place in households with continued Tier 3 restrictions, whereas Tier 2 just eases some things and could have a positive psychological effect. Whilst opening hospitality just before Christmas will regrettably be too late for some businesses to survive, we think it will be **a lifeline for many businesses**, all of whom have invested in Covid-secure premises and dealt with the continued uncertainty for months. We have the partnership context to **proactively plan for the best possible compliance and enforcement activity** to deal with the safe reopening of hospitality in the city.

Whilst we are understandably nervous about the risks of 3rd wave particularly on the NHS, given the relaxations of Christmas, the significant additional challenges on the workforce with the vaccination programme, and the regular winter pressures, we also recognise the broader health and wellbeing benefits of moving into Tier 2. We remain **determined to continue with all the partnership actions in our outbreak plan that we know drive down infection rates to avoid pressure on the NHS**. This includes excellent and extensive infection prevention and control practise and advice, being vigilant to manage individual cases to prevent outbreaks, being proactive to deal with community transmission, effective use of targeted testing and tracing to support self-isolation, strong partnership work on hospital discharge and health and social care, targeted multi-agency compliance and enforcement work, and relentless communications and community engagement work. Our **extensive multi-agency arrangements** all work to monitor the situation closely and act quickly, and planning ahead as a system as far as possible through our **integrated winter plan**.

Conclusion and recommendation: Whilst there are pros and cons of Tier 2/3 and risks with either scenario, on balance we would recommend Tier 2 based on the improvements in the indicators combined with our relentless determination and actions across all partners and communities to keep infection rates down. We think this will help maintain the public confidence and a greater commitment to follow the guidance and for everyone to break the chain of transmission whilst we push for the most effective rollout of the vaccination.