

Continuation of the Leeds Covid-19 Local Contact Tracing Service from the 1st December 2021 to the 31st March 2022 at a total approx. cost of £230,000

Date: 24th September 2021

Report of: Head of Public Health – Health Protection

Report to: Director of Public Health

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

What is this report about?

Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- Due to the global Public Health emergency COVID-19 pandemic, a local contact tracing service was developed and launched in December 2020 with funding until the end of November 2021 (Significant Operational Decision dated 25th January 2021 - D52672). This report seeks approval to continue funding two elements of the Leeds COVID-19 Local Contact Tracing Service from the 1st December 2021 until the 31st March 2022 as part of the ongoing public health response to COVID-19.
- This service works hand in hand with the national contact tracing service. The service contacts those hard-to-reach positive cases in addition to offering support to isolate and supports the Leeds Best Council Plan by 'keeping people safe from harm and protecting the most vulnerable alongside helping people out of financial hardship'.

Recommendations

- a) The Director of Public Health is recommended to continue funding two elements of the Leeds COVID-19 Local Contact Tracing Service (Leeds City Council Contact Centre and Connect and Support Community Outreach facilitated by the third sector, led by Better Together) from the 1st December 2021 until the 31st March 2022 at a total approximate cost of £230,000 to ensure we have resilience over winter to prevent further spread of Covid 19 and keep people safe and supported.

Why is the proposal being put forward?

- 1 Leeds City Council received £10.4 million from the Government to support the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This funding supports proactive and preventative evidence-based measures informed by the Leeds Outbreak Plan. A local contact tracing service was developed and launched in December 2020 with funding until the end of November 2021. The service manages the positive Covid cases the national service has been unable to contact. As Covid cases continue, we need to ensure we have a robust

service in place to be able to support those living predominately in areas of deprivation and stubborn transmission, to control the spread and promote vaccine uptake.

- 2 The Local Contact Tracing Service in Leeds is an important part of reducing and then limiting the spread of COVID-19. The two elements of the service (Leeds City Council Contact Centre and Connect and Support Community Outreach facilitated by the third sector, led by Better Together) are integral to reaching positive cases and reducing transmission. The Leeds City Council Local Contact Centre will try to contact people who have not been contacted by the national track and trace service. People not contacted by the contact centre will be referred to the Connect and Support Community Outreach Service.
- 3 The Leeds Local Contact Tracing Service receives a daily caseload from Powerbi via Health Informatics. The purpose of the call is to offer support regarding isolation and establish contact names and details. If no contact is made within 24 hours the case will be closed. When an address is available and contact by phone has been unsuccessful, the case will be referred to the outreach 'door knocking service' facilitated by the third sector.
- 4 The outreach door knocking service aims to follow up residents unable to be reached by the contact centre. This service is led by Better Together who are a third sector provider who are experienced in community health development and have a good understanding of the communities that they work with.
- 5 As well as encouraging people to complete the contact tracing, there is a strong emphasis on support and helping people to self-isolate for the necessary time. The service is connected to local community hubs where they can offer practical support with food parcels and help with shopping, prescription collection and help with money worries.
- 6 A critical step in the effective control of community transmission is the fast and efficient tracing of people who have tested positive and their close contacts. As part of the continuation of the Local Contact Tracing Service, all positive cases, regardless of age or vaccination status will continue to be contacted. The service will continue to focus on those who are socially vulnerable and those communities who are marginalised or under serviced. If the number of positive cases decline the remit will expand to include all non-contactable cases.

What impact will this proposal have?

Wards Affected:

Have ward members been consulted? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

- 7 The Local Contact Tracing Service will help to stop further transmission of Covid-19 and ensure people required to isolate have the necessary support to do so. The service links in with Leeds Welfare Support.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

- 8 The continuation of the two elements of the Leeds COVID-19 Local Contact Tracing Service has been co-designed with these services who have collectively considered how best to use the funding to maximise the impact on reducing the health inequalities associated with Covid 19.

- 9 The Executive Member for Public Health and Active Lifestyles was briefed on the 23rd September 2021 and is supportive of the proposed way forward.

What are the resource implications?

- 10 The two elements of the Local Contact Tracing Service which need to continue to be delivered are detailed below. It is anticipated that the total cost to continue funding the Local Contract Tracing Service for an additional 4 months from December 2021 – March 2022 will be approximately £230,000. This will be funded from the Council’s Contain Outbreak Management Fund provided by the Government to locally manage the COVID-19 pandemic. There will be flexibility with this approach depending on the specific needs of the Leeds population and the rates of infection, therefore costs may increase or decrease in line with local data.

11 Staffing for the Local Contact Tracing Service - £180,000

The call handlers at the Leeds City Council Contact Centre will be given a daily caseload from Powerbi via Health Informatics. The purpose of the call is to offer support regarding isolation and establish contact names and details. If no contact is made within 24 hours the case will be closed. When an address is available and contact by phone has been unsuccessful, the case will be referred to the ‘door knocking service’ facilitated by the third sector.

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Number	Role	Duration	Approx. cost per month
20 x FTE (B3)	Customer Service Officers	1 st December 2021 to 31 st March 2022	£41,777
1 x FTE (S02)	Team Leader	1 st December 2021 to 31 st March 2022	£3,223
Total Cost from 1st December 2021 to 31st March 2022			£180,000

- 13 The approximate total cost for staffing for the Leeds Contract Tracing Service from 1st December 2021 to 31st March 2022 is £180,000. Funding will be transferred through internal recharges based on actual costs on a quarterly basis.

14 Connect and Support Community Outreach - £50,000

A further grant by the way of new grant agreements will be awarded to existing providers of the Better Together programme detailed below, to enhance capacity to provide community outreach. The existing grant agreements are due to expire imminently, with no further extension provisions, hence the need to put in place new grant agreements for continuous service provision. Despite new agreements, this will be a continuation of the work already being delivered under the existing agreements. Due to the nature of the outreach, work is needed immediately and their ability to mobilise quickly across all communities to support the Local Contact Tracing Service is essential as part of the Leeds COVID-19 Outbreak Plan. The implementation of the Connect and Support Community Outreach Service is a key priority for the Council in order to minimise the spread of the virus and the risk of local outbreaks. The need for a fast response and for organisations to be both trusted by the vulnerable groups and have a deep understanding community needs, means that grant

funding to providers of the current services is the preferred option. The Better Together providers have been an integral part of the community response to Covid-19 since the beginning of the pandemic and are well placed to be able to respond quickly and effectively and continue to provide this support from 1st January to 31st March 2022 with flexibility due to on-going needs of the Local Contact Tracing Service:-

- £15,807.50 grant to Health for All (Leeds) Ltd (working in partnership with Asha and Hamara)
- £9,927 grant to Barca - Leeds
- £24,265.50 grant to Feel Good Factor (Leeds) (working in partnership with Shantona, Space 2, Touchstone and Zest)

- 15 The Connect and Support Community Outreach Service will work with local people, community networks and community-based services to develop effective approaches to connect and support people with COVID-19 in the community and reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- 16 It will meet the needs of diverse communities, communities of interest and those who are at greater risk, or more vulnerable, to COVID-19. Focusing on vulnerability, encompassing people who are clinically vulnerable, those who are socially vulnerable and those communities who are marginalised or under served.
- 17 The service will work with local people, community networks and community-based services to develop effective approaches to connect and support people with COVID-19 in the community and reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

What are the legal implications?

- 18 As the Council would be entering into grant agreements with the organisations listed above to deliver Connect and Support Community Outreach in Leeds, the Council will have no contractual control over enforcement of the terms. The only sanction available with grant payments is for the Council to claw-back grant monies unspent or spent on matters for which the grant wasn't provided.
- 19 There is a risk of challenge that a grant payment is not a grant. Legally there is some confusion about when a grant can and cannot be used as there is a fine line between a grant (which is not caught by the procurement rules) and a contract for services (which is caught by the procurement rules). Although no longer directly applicable due to the UK's departure from the European Union, the preamble to EU Procurement Directive 2014/24/EU (from which the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 were transposed into English law) is still persuasive and the directive makes it clear at paragraph (4) that "the mere financing, in particular through grants, of an activity, which is frequently linked to the obligation to reimburse the amounts received where they are not used for the purposes intended, does not usually fall within the scope of the public procurement rules".
- 20 As such, unconditional grants are unlikely to meet the definition of a contract set out in the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (PCR 2015). However, where grants are used with strict qualification criteria and an obligation to pay back money if certain targets are not reached, the position is less straightforward and it is possible that an arrangement referred to as a grant could actually meet the definition of a contract set out in the PCR 2015 and, if it does, the PCR 2015 may apply. It is therefore extremely important to ensure that, if providing grants, the process followed does not fall within the definition of a "public contract" as set

out in PCR 2015 which states – “contracts for pecuniary interest concluded in writing between one or more economic operators and one or more contracting authorities and having as their object the execution of works, the supply of products or the provision of services”.

- 21 Grants may be in breach of subsidy control, but it is unlikely that the grant payments proposed in this report will fall foul of the subsidy control rules.
- 22 Funding from which any grant payment is made must be designated as “grant” money. If the Council wish to make a grant, the money must be in the “grant” block. If it is not, it can normally be moved from other blocks in the Council budget into the grant block.
- 23 As this is a grant it is not subject to the Council’s Contracts Procedure Rules or within the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, but good practice and transparency will be observed throughout.
- 24 There is no overriding legal obstacle preventing the award of the grants and the contents of this report should be noted.
- 25 In making their final decision, the Director of Public Health should be satisfied that the approved course of action represents best value for the council
- 26 As this decision is a consequence of a previous Key Decision dated 11th December 2020 (D52580) under the special urgency rule, for clarity this is a significant operational decision providing specific detail as part of the key decision report and is not subject to call-in.
- 27 There are no grounds for keeping the contents of this report confidential under the Access to Information Rules.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

- 28 Cases of Covid 19 are unpredictable, cases could decrease to a level whereby the current workforce is not needed. To ensure the service is flexible call handlers can be reallocated to other parts of the contact centre such as elections, supporting assisted digital services and switchboard. Third sector staff will continue to promote vaccine uptake and lateral flow testing through small scale community events.

Does this proposal support the council’s 3 Key Pillars?

Inclusive Growth Health and Wellbeing Climate Emergency

- 29 This decision will work towards keeping people safe from harm and protecting the most vulnerable, alongside helping people out of financial hardship.

Options, timescales and measuring success

a) What other options were considered?

- 30 All contacts are managed by the national team, and those uncontactable after 24 hours have their cases closed with no further action. As the local contact service has managed to contact and additional 50%-60% of those the national service were unable to reach it has a key role in preventing further spread and ensuring those isolating are supported.

b) How will success be measured?

31 Numbers contacted and contact information sheet completed, and numbers supported via Leeds Welfare service. In addition, the number of doorstep visits will be recorded to ensure every contact counts.

c) What is the timetable for implementation?

32 1st December 2021 until the 31st March 2022.

Appendices

33 Equality Impact Assessment Screening

Background papers

34 None