

Southwark's Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan (OPCP)

Protecting Southwark from on-going COVID-19 risks

Southwark Public Health Division

Environment and Leisure

Last updated 10 June 2022

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GATEWAY INFORMATION

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CAVEAT



This document is a live document that reflects emerging threats and guidance as they arise.

Please take note of version control which is indicated by the “Last updated” statement on the cover slide.

OUR PLAN AT A GLANCE

Mitigate the impact of novel coronavirus on Southwark's population and communities, focusing on those most at risk.

PREVENT

We will continue our prevention work from previous versions of this plan, supporting vaccination, building on the success of campaigns and our ambassador and community champions programmes.

IDENTIFY

We will evolve our approach from day-to-day identification and monitoring of cases to broader identification of the pandemic's longer-term impacts on population health and our communities.

CONTROL

We will support the transition of acute management to regional specialist teams, but will continue support for our local partners. We will focus on protecting our most vulnerable local populations.

LEARN & RECOVER

We will undertake a review of the lessons learned from our these first stages of the pandemic, with a view to improving the quality of our approach and emergency preparedness going forward.

FOREWORD

For some, the first half of 2022 has seen some return of a pre-pandemic life. No longer is there widespread testing, contact tracing and self-isolation. But for many, anxieties remain just as acute. And for others the collision of longer-term impacts (such as 'Long-COVID') with a cost-of-living crisis means that the future remains both challenging and uncertain.

However, as we refresh our Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan, there are reasons to be optimistic. The vaccination programme has been largely successful and immunity to COVID-19 across Southwark is high. Although community transmission continues, driven mainly by reinfection, the impact on younger and healthier residents is much reduced.

But the challenge of this next year is to balance competing non-pandemic needs with ensuring that we stand ready to respond to new variants as they emerge and what will likely be another challenging winter season. At the same time, it is important to note that our health and social care system is facing the pressures of winter in summertime. Therefore it is also important to consider recovery and renewal – and we do that also in this revised plan.

The key message for our partners and communities is that while there is cause for optimism, this pandemic is not over.

This plan is a live document and will be updated as required reflecting changes in local, regional and national guidance.

Sangeeta Leahy FFPH
Director of Public Health

10 June 2022

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This fifth version of the OPCP marks a major refresh and reorientation of our work towards the future

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This update to the OPCP presents Southwark's amended approach to the pandemic, in response to the national government's policy shift towards *living safely with COVID-19*. Spring 2022 has seen some of the most significant changes to national policy with the removal of universal testing, contact tracing and COVID-19 regulations. Southwark's approach will continue to operate around the same three principal objectives, but also look to the future: beyond the acute phase of this COVID-19 pandemic.

PREVENT: Most of our existing programmes will continue. Communications campaigns are moving into this strand of work. We recognise the on-going need to prevent transmission and ensure that we are suitably prepared for re-emergence of possible variants and the seasonal pressures that COVID-19 will continue to drive. Supporting the NHS vaccination programme is imperative.

IDENTIFY: Although universal testing and contact tracing have been discontinued (which had previously formed the majority of activity around this objective), we are transitioning this objective. We will continue to monitor cases and impact in the near-term. We increasingly need to anticipate the wider and longer-term impacts of the virus on entrenched inequalities that will be made worse by the cost-of-living crisis.

CONTROL: The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is taking back many of the responsibilities for outbreak management and provision of health protection advice that have been delivered since the start of the pandemic. While transferring and escalating work has begun, we will continue to support local partners and ensure that we protect the many vulnerable groups across the borough. Our local Public Health emergency preparedness capacity will also be reviewed.

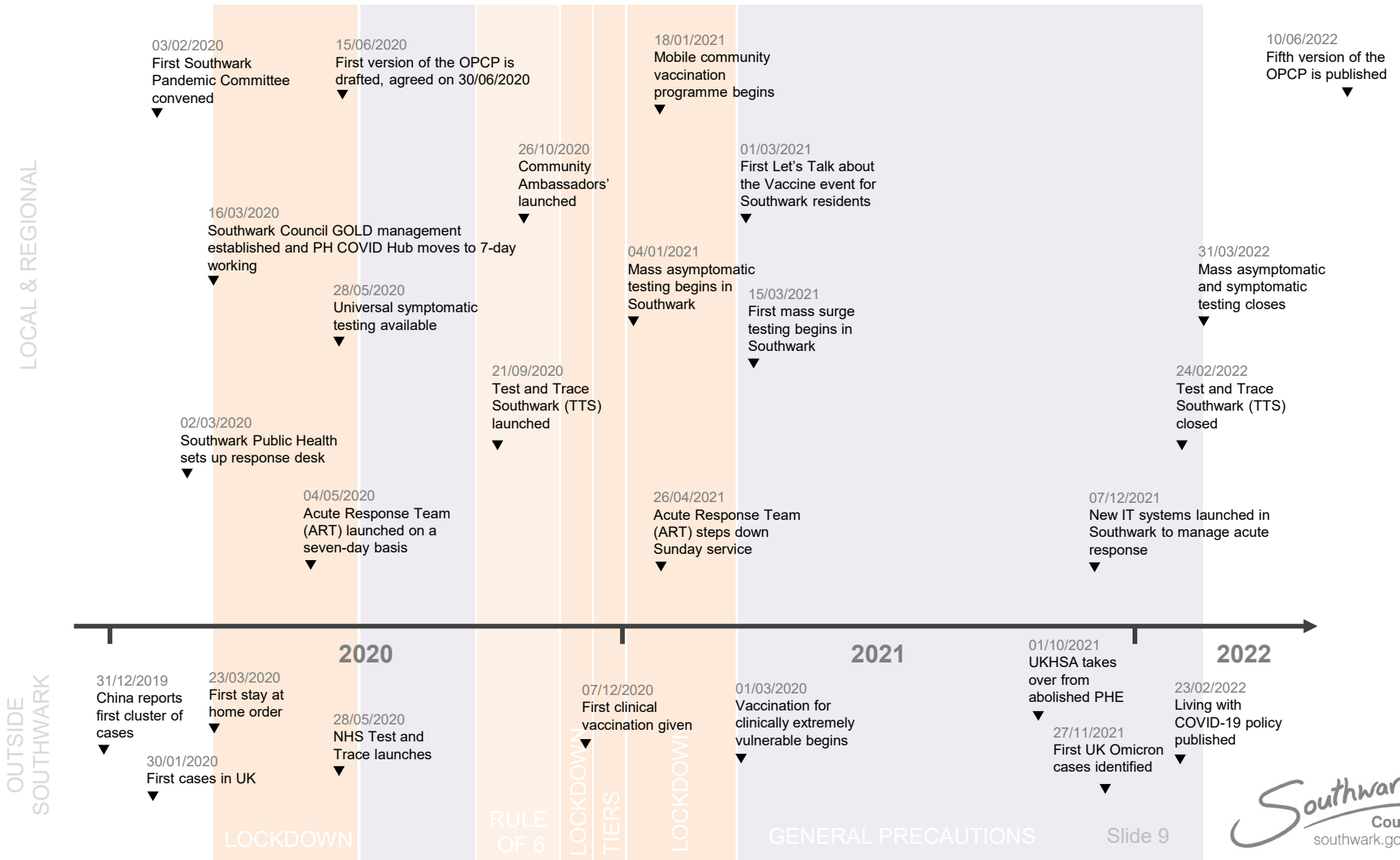
Finally, we will continue to **LEARN** from our experience of the pandemic, as well as ensuring that we take time to **RECOVER** existing services and teams who have faced sustained pressure over the last two years.

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In spring 2022, we enter the next phase of our COVID-19 pandemic response: living with COVID-19

WHERE ARE WE NOW?



Since January 2020, our staff, partners and residents have been working continuously to keep Southwark safe

OPCP UPDATES

100,200+

Confirmed cases among Southwark residents since the start of the pandemic

650+

Clusters and outbreaks managed by Public Health specialists

1000+

Queries responded to by the Public Health team

545,000+

Vaccines administered to Southwark residents by NHS partners

5600+

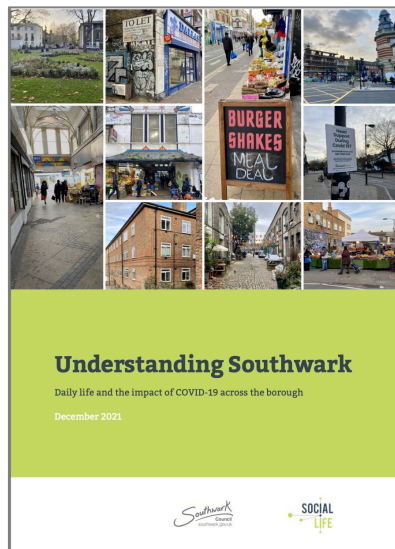
Contacts successfully followed up after referral from NHS Test and Trace

100+

Community ambassadors and vaccine champions trained

Local engagement has identified a range of concerns as people think about where the pandemic has left them^{1,2}

CITIZEN VOICE



“Mentally for me it affected me when I contracted the virus, I was worried that I wasn’t going to pull through, but after 3 weeks I recovered and went back to my work. I've travelled. I think COVID isn’t going anywhere, and we are just going to have to learn to live with it.”

Resident²

“I am concerned for my family. Currently they cannot afford to live in Southwark due to the high cost of housing. Rents are high and purchasing housing is unaffordable for most.”

Resident²

“A lot of places are shut down, and businesses are closed and things like small businesses... I think they're trying to sort of pull it back up again, and now everything's open, so it must be difficult for them trying to sort of survive the pandemic and then try to bring that business back to life now.”

Resident²

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL: LET'S TALK ABOUT LIFE AFTER COVID-19

TSIP 

1. [Understanding Southwark](#), Daily life and the impact of COVID-19 across the borough. 2021. Social Life.
2. Southwark Council: Let's talk about life after COVID-19. 2021. TSIP Centric.

The impacts of the pandemic are wide-ranging and will be long-lasting across our communities

IMPACTS AND ISSUES



Young people, in particular children of school age have faced substantial disruption to their **education** and relationships.

The pandemic has added to the existing burden of **mental health** problems which have always been challenging locally.

Many people have been subject to **unemployment**, under-employment and furlough, made worse by inflation and the **cost-of-living** crisis.

Our health and social care system has been stretched beyond its limits with resulting **waiting lists** and **access challenges**

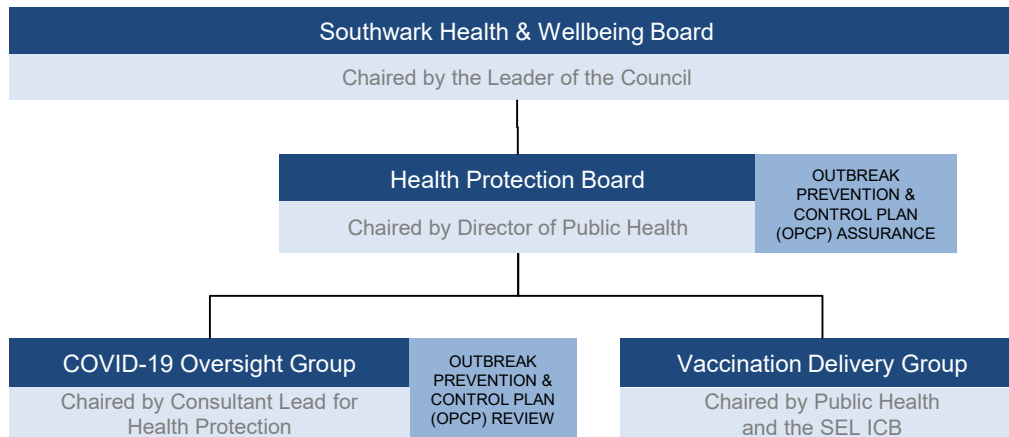
And like so many societal issues, we know the most vulnerable groups and communities in our borough will be affected disproportionately by these impacts.

We therefore must consider these stark inequalities in our programmes going forward.

Governance arrangements are evolving with the OPCE stepped down into a broader Health Protection board

GOVERNANCE

The Outbreak Prevention and Control Executive (OPCE) operated fortnightly from July 2020 through to April 2022 and was accountable to the HWBB and Cabinet for the OPCP. With the publication of this fifth version of the plan, a new Health Protection Board (with terms of reference wider than COVID-19) will be established and will hold the OPCP on behalf of the Health and Wellbeing Board. A separate COVID-19 Oversight Group is also in development to review surveillance and emerging guidance.



The COVID vaccination strategy and delivery groups plus the H&WB sub group for vaccinations have been stood down and replaced with a new Vaccination Delivery Group that will take action to improve uptake and address inequalities across all childhood and adult immunisation programmes including COVID

Southwark's Health and Wellbeing Board provides member-led oversight

OVERSIGHT

Membership and Leadership

The Health and Wellbeing Board is chaired by the Leader of the Council. The membership includes the Cabinet leads for public health, education, children and adult social care, and senior officers of the Council, local NHS partners and the VCS.

Oversight function

- Receive and review reports on activity and decisions from the Health Protection Board relating to the implementation of the Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan (OPCP) and stakeholder engagement.
- Provide feedback to the Health Protection Board and the work programmes Health Protection Board supervises within the scope of the OPCP.
- Provide assurance back to the Health and Wellbeing Board and Cabinet, and in so doing, the public that we serve.

Frequency

- Health and Wellbeing Board meets quarterly
- The Health Protection Board will initially meet every 2 months
- Outbreak Prevention and Control Executive met every 2 weeks
- The new COVID-19 Oversight Group will meet every 6 weeks

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Central government has laid out guidance that will see the COVID-19 response mainstreamed

NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

The Cabinet Office issued new guidance on 23 February 2022 outlining the government's approach to "[Living with COVID-19](#)":

- The pandemic is not over, and it is likely that new variants will continue to emerge.
- It is expected that over time, COVID-19 will become another winter seasonal illness.
- The government is therefore attempting to enable the UK to manage COVID-19 like other respiratory illnesses, while maintaining appropriate readiness to respond if or when new variants emerge and threaten NHS sustainability.

Accordingly, there are four principles around which the next phase of COVID-19 response will be structured:

- a. Living with COVID-19: removing domestic restrictions while encouraging safer behaviours through public health advice, in common with longstanding ways of managing most other respiratory illnesses;
- b. Protecting people most vulnerable to COVID-19: vaccination guided by Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advice, and deploying targeted testing;
- c. Maintaining resilience: ongoing surveillance, contingency planning and the ability to reintroduce key capabilities such as mass vaccination and testing in an emergency; and
- d. Securing innovations and opportunities from the COVID-19 response, including investment in life sciences.

This revised Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan therefore predominantly relates to the first three principles presented above, and outlines the local considerations required.

See previous versions of this plan for preceding regulatory and legislative detail.

This raft of national changes has implications for local service delivery

NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

The following changes to national processes are particularly relevant to local arrangements in Southwark. More details on continuing pandemic response are outlined in Section 3 of this plan.

From 24 February 2022

- The legal requirement to self-isolate following a positive test was removed. Most adults and children who test positive continue to be advised to stay at home and avoid contact with other people.
- Fully vaccinated close contacts are no longer required to isolate or test. The legal requirement for unvaccinated persons to self-isolate was also removed.
- Self-isolation support payments and national funding for practical support was discontinued.
- Contact tracing was discontinued.
- The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 3) Regulations were revoked.

From 24 March 2022

- COVID-19 provisions within statutory sick pay and allowances were discontinued.

From 1 April 2022

- Vaccine certification and NHS venue-based COVID passes were discontinued.
- Universal symptomatic and asymptomatic testing ended.

UKHSA have identified four joint objectives for national and local outbreak management

NATIONAL OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT EXPECTATIONS

UKHSA recognises that local COVID-19 outbreak management will need to adjust to responding to COVID-19 as part of wider infectious disease functions. Given the wider strategic direction, outbreak management will need to focus on protecting those at highest risk from COVID-19.

From 1 April, the joint priorities for the national and local system relating to outbreak management will be:

- **To continue COVID-19 outbreak management in high-risk settings** to reduce the risk to vulnerable people within these settings. This will include working proactively with such settings to reduce the risk of importation and spread of COVID-19. Further information on high-risk settings in scope will be provided in due course.
- **To support COVID-19 outbreak investigation and management in other settings** when needed to protect public health, alongside other respiratory illnesses.
- **To support a range of settings to reduce the risk of, and to manage, COVID-19 outbreaks** as part of usual practice, now including COVID-19 alongside other respiratory illnesses.
- **Community engagement** to support public health messaging and behaviour change including working with local partners, employers and with vulnerable people in their community through tailored and targeted communication. This includes continuing to promote positive behaviours that can reduce the transmission of respiratory and other viruses.

Accordingly, there are five major implications for Southwark's pandemic response

LOCAL IMPLICATIONS

1. **Standing down local operations**

A range of pandemic-specific operations are no longer required: including elements of the acute response; the local contact tracing partnership (Test and Trace Southwark, TTS); open-access local testing arrangements; monitoring and enforcement operations arising from the revoked Regulations; and others.

2. **Mainstreaming functions into regional Health Protection structures**

New arrangements are needed to integrate pandemic response with regional Health Protection structures, however these largely depend on the regional planning from UK Health Security Agency and their on-going capacity.

3. **Managing finance and resources for local response**

National communications have made clear that the financial settlement for local Public Health teams will revert to the pre-pandemic norms. The longer-term impacts of the pandemic precipitate population health needs that will need to be met out of existing pre-pandemic budget allocations.

4. **Establishing feasible expectations on future emergency preparedness**

The responsibility for local health protection issues pre-pandemic was loosely defined. And although the expectation is that any future surge-work would be regionally or nationally led, local teams will need to retain clearer capacity and capability to scale-up an emergency response.

5. **Communicating and engaging with local stakeholders**

The move to normalise COVID-19 is important, but risks communicating a mixed message or that the pandemic has concluded. Covid rates are currently receding in the United Kingdom, however we together with local partners will need to maintain communication of the risks and public health mitigations as we move into this 'next phase' of the pandemic.

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This next phase of pandemic response necessitates Southwark to amend the OPCP objectives

PUBLIC HEALTH OBJECTIVES

While the aim of the OPCP remains:

- **Mitigate the impact of novel coronavirus on Southwark's population and communities, focusing on those most at risk.**

Recognising the four joint objectives, we will now focus within Southwark on three local objectives:

- i. **PREVENT:** Promote healthy behaviours (including vaccination) that reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission and outbreaks across the population but focusing on continuing our support for higher consequence settings including institutions such as residential care facilities, hostels and SEND schools.
- ii. **IDENTIFY:** Monitor transmission and impact of COVID-19 both acutely and in the longer term, while working with partners to mitigate the medium and longer-term impacts of the pandemic whether associated with "Long-COVID", or other impacts such as mental health and socioeconomic outcomes.
- iii. **CONTROL:** Collaborate and escalate high consequence outbreaks of disease to regional Health Protection specialists at UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

Finally, we will also be reflecting on and **learning** from Southwark's experience of the pandemic to take forward learning and improve our future emergency preparedness. We will also be undertaking work to build back the Public Health function and team recognising evolving priorities emerging across the system (**recovery**).

However, there are transitional arrangements and changes that require attention

A SUSTAINABLE FOOTING

At the point of publication of this plan, the following changes have taken place or are underway:

1. The Outbreak Prevention and Control Executive (OPCE) has been replaced with the Health Protection Board and the COVID-19 Oversight Group.
2. Epidemiological reporting to local partners and decision-makers has stepped down from a daily frequency (at the peak of the pandemic) to a weekly update.
3. Open access asymptomatic and symptomatic local testing sites (including London Bridge station) and the mobile testing units were closed down between 29 and 31 March 2022. Testing capacity for specific groups remains and is detailed later in this plan.
4. Test and Trace Southwark (TTS) was stepped-down on 24 February 2022. It is not anticipated that this service will be stepped-back up in the future, but a lessons learned document has been collated to ensure institutional memory should it be required.
5. The Acute Response Team (ART) moved to a lower operational tempo as of 4 April 2022. While incidents are still being reported, instructions to local partners changed and there is no longer a requirement for all incidents to be notified to the local authority. However, the ART continues to provide support partners on request and is revising and disseminating local policies in-line with regional guidance.
6. Support payments were discontinued on 24 March 2022.
7. The Public Health team is transitioning the acute response team function COVID-19 as members of the Public Health team return to business as usual and integrating medium and longer-term pandemic response issues into their existing portfolios. Work is underway to establish the needs for on-going emergency preparedness across the team.

Testing capability will be retained on a more targeted basis for specific groups in Southwark

APPROACH TO TESTING

Although the universal offer of asymptomatic and symptomatic testing has now been discontinued, testing capacity (both laboratory based PCR and lateral flow antigen tests) is retained for specific contexts and groups.

There are three principal areas where COVID-19 testing which will continue in Southwark, in-line with national arrangements:

- **Testing to care**
Patients admitted to hospital (as well as others) with or without symptoms will still be tested subject to local arrangements on the basis of diagnostic and management needs.
- **Testing to treat**
People at greater risk from infection (such as those who are immunocompromised) will continue to be offered testing that facilitates early identification of infection and provision of antivirals and other therapies in the community.
- **Testing to protect**
Front line workers in health, social care and other high risk environments will continue to be eligible for asymptomatic testing through the national portal and through local arrangements.

UKHSA will retain a stockpile of lateral flow tests to support local Public Health teams to respond to outbreaks of infection, emergence of new variants and other scenarios.

The sharing of roles and responsibilities is likely to evolve between Southwark and UKHSA regional teams

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

| UKHSA (National and Regional) Objectives reproduced from Briefing Pack, March 2022 | What does this mean for Southwark locally? |
|---|---|
| Provide intelligence and technical advice to LAs, NHS and other local stakeholders on COVID-19 response activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Southwark Knowledge and Intelligence team will continue to review and report on local intelligence to and from partners in Southwark. ▪ The Public Health team within Southwark Council will continue to review, disseminate and act upon guidance received. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead on management of outbreaks in higher risk settings and complex outbreak investigation and management • Continue COVID-19 outbreak management in high-risk settings to reduce the risk to vulnerable people within these settings. This will include working proactively with such settings to reduce the risk of importation and spread of COVID-19. • Provide guidance in limited circumstances as outlined above, contribute to national surveillance; | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thresholds have been established for escalation and transfer of outbreak management to the UKHSA regional partners. The expectation is that most outbreaks (unless otherwise specified) will be managed by UKHSA. ▪ Like other local authorities, Southwark will continue to manage communications to local partners, and support the outbreak management of COVID-19 in adult social care settings after escalation to UKHSA. ▪ For SEND schools, Southwark will continue to support prevention measures and escalate to UKHSA when outbreaks are suspected. LA support may be required for rapid increases in cases of acute respiratory infection. ▪ Southwark hosts a large number of hostels, supported accommodation and temporary accommodation facilities (some of which are managed by the Home Office). Southwark's Public Health team will continue to support prevention and vaccination efforts, and outbreaks will be escalated to UKHSA where appropriate for management. In such instances, Southwark Council will support the UKHSA-led response. ▪ The Southwark team will continue to receive enquiries from local partners such as schools, universities and community groups, recognising the value of local knowledge in mapping impact and maintaining capacity / resilience outside the Public Health team. The Southwark team will escalate queries as needed to UKHSA partners. |
| Continue to play a key enabling role in collaborating with partners across Whitehall and connecting the national response and policy making to local response and feedback. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Southwark will continue to engage with regional and national partners to share learning and feedback. |

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ACTION PLAN

| OBJECTIVE | ACTIONS |
|--|--|
| <p>PREVENT: Promote healthy behaviours (including vaccination) that reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission and outbreaks across the population but focusing on continuing our support for higher consequence settings including institutions such as residential care facilities, hostels and SEND schools.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Continue to collaborate with partners across and beyond the council, including in the NHS, Community Southwark, Healthwatch Southwark and our VCS colleagues recognising the risks of future seasonal pressures and the likelihood of novel variant emergence. ii. Continue to develop and deliver the Community Ambassador programme with our group of more than 100 ambassadors who empower and protect residents by addressing misinformation and promoting positive behaviours including vaccination. iii. Continue the Community Vaccine Champion programme to challenge vaccine inequality locally. iv. Continue the COVID-19 Prevention Health Grant programmes for community groups. v. Support NHS leadership of vaccination work for both COVID-19 and the prevention and management of other respiratory infections. vi. Deliver up-to-date and effective messages on a borough and hyper-local basis, liaising with regional and national communication campaigns. |
| <p>IDENTIFY: Monitor transmission and impact of COVID-19 both acutely and in the longer term, while working with partners to mitigate the medium and longer-term impacts of the pandemic whether associated with “Long-COVID”, or other impacts such as mental health and socioeconomic outcomes.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Transition surveillance to a lower tempo, with weekly short reports distributed to key partners and senior decision makers on across the borough, while maintaining reporting to the Health Protection Board and HWBB. ii. Continue capacity-building work by providing advice and support to organisations and institutions to identify outbreaks early. This will proceed proactively by active outreach and dissemination of guidelines, as well as providing continued response to enquiries through the single point of contact within the Public Health Team. iii. Evolve our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment process to capture wider pandemic impacts on a continuing basis going forward. iv. Provide evidence-based advice to partners across the health and social care system to most efficiently and equitably handle the impacts on waiting lists and other services. |

ACTION PLAN

| OBJECTIVE | ACTIONS |
|---|---|
| <p>CONTROL: Collaborate and escalate high consequence outbreaks of disease to regional Health Protection specialists at UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">i. Re-establish standard operating procedures in-line with national and regional guidance on escalation processes to UKHSA.ii. Review and disseminate updated guidelines to partners across Southwark on the notification and management of COVID-19.iii. Continue support for institutional settings and other groups in-line with agreed regional escalation policies.iv. Review and update our approach to emergency preparedness and health protection capacity / capability within the Southwark Public Health team.v. Work with partners to ensure additional safeguards and protections for vulnerable groups in Southwark including homeless persons, refugees and asylum seekers in residential settings recognising the risks posed by future seasonal pressures and the likelihood of novel variant emergence. |
| <p>LEARN & RECOVER</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">i. Undertake a high-level review of the lessons learned from the first stages of the COVID-19 pandemic within the Public Health team from January 2020 to March 2022, with a view to publishing a summary of the lessons learned and how these can be taken forward into improving our future approach to emergency response.ii. Best practice in emergency response mandates consideration of recovering services and how the transition back to business as usual (BAU) can be achieved. We recognise the sustained pressures faced by staff over the pandemic (both across the system and within the Public Health team in particular). We will be undertaking work to recover and renew team capacity and capability. |

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The pandemic is not over – but we must increasingly manage the wider range of Public Health challenges

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

The COVID-19 pandemic will continue as new variants are likely to emerge. The evolution of the virus will create even further pressures on services, in particular during the colder months of the years.

However there are Public Health challenges that we must address beyond COVID-19. Socioeconomic inequality, the cost of living crisis, homelessness, substance misuse, cardiovascular disease and cancer are among these challenges. At the same time, the health and social care system is undergoing substantial reconfiguration into an integrated care system that spans all six boroughs of South East London. We are also renewing our Joint Strategic Health and Wellbeing Strategy alongside a new Council Plan.

We will continue to work collaboratively, constructively and intensively to improve the health and wellbeing of all those who live, work or learn in Southwark.

While the pandemic has been unconscionably difficult for everyone, we must grasp the learning and new opportunities that have arisen in its wake. Whether through new capabilities or relationships, there is now widespread recognition that Public Health is important, and is everyone's business.

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LINKS TO NATIONAL GUIDANCE

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance - published 1 April 2022](#)

Includes:

- [Guidance for the public](#)
- [Guidance for non-clinical settings](#)
- [Adult social care](#)
- [Guidance for health professionals](#)
- [Infection prevention and control](#)
- [Sampling, testing and diagnostics](#)