

REPORT TO: COVID-19 RECOVERY WORKING GROUP

DATE: 22 OCTOBER 2020

TITLE: UPDATE ON COVID-19 INFECTION RATES IN HARLOW

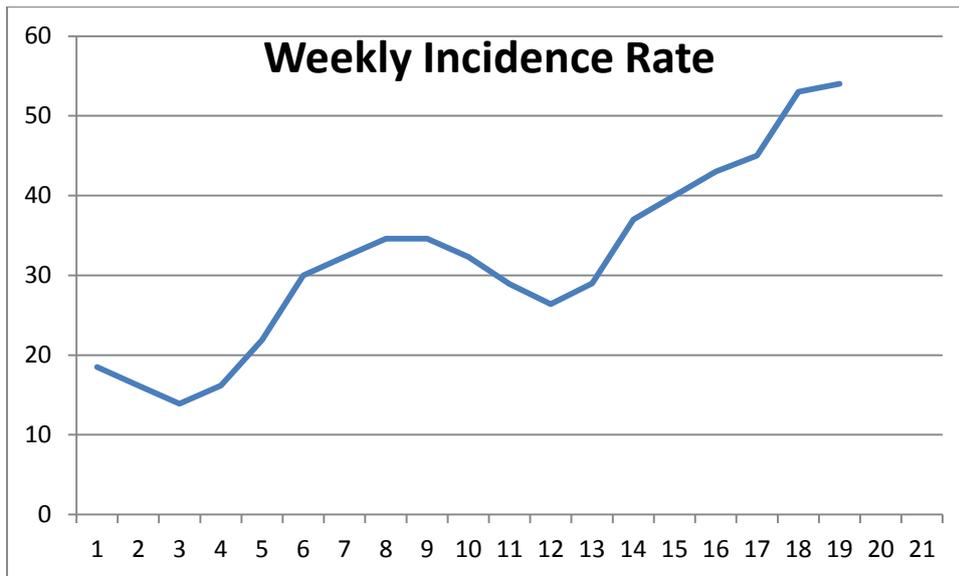
LEAD OFFICER: ANDREW BRAMIDGE, HEAD OF ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING (01279) 446410

RECOMMENDED that:

A The report is noted.

BACKGROUND

1. Clearly Harlow has now moved into the High alert level category following a request to Government from Essex County Council and the District Councils across Essex. This has seen an additional range of restrictions imposed with effect from Saturday 17 October in an attempt to reduce the spread of the virus.
2. However, in Harlow itself infection rates remain relatively low in comparison with the rest of Essex and remain below the East of England average. The key metric that is now being used nationally is the weekly incidence rate – that is, the number of new cases per 100,000 of population.
3. Currently (figures as at 14 October), the Harlow rate is at 54.0 with the East of England average at 67. The figures for neighbouring local authorities are:
 - a) Epping Forest – 89.6
 - b) Uttlesford – 83.3
 - c) East Hertfordshire – 108.8
 - d) Broxbourne – 90.5
4. Harlow has been consistently lower than most other Essex authorities, but the recent trend has still been upwards. The graph below shows the direction of travel for the Harlow incidence rate over the last four weeks.
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6. Public Health England also undertake a daily RAG rating of each local authority, based on the rate of increase in new infections and other measures such as hospital admissions. This is very changeable and a single day of new infection reports can change this dramatically. In the middle of September Harlow was rated as Amber which then quickly changed to Red, but by 9 October this had changed to Green and this has been maintained at the time of writing. Although infection rates are rising in Harlow, this has been less dramatic than in other authorities.

MITIGATION MEASURES

7. Another significant feature of the daily reporting from Public Health England from the middle of September was the falling number of people being tested in Harlow – at the same time as infection rates were raising. There was concern that the actual situation in Harlow was being masked. Brian Keane, Chief Executive, held discussions with PHE and it was subsequently agreed to double the testing capacity in Harlow from 2 days a week to 4. In the last two weeks the Harlow testing rate (i.e. those tested per 100,000 of population) has risen from approximately 250 per week to approximately 300 per week, which is probably then resulting in the higher numbers of reported cases in Harlow.
8. The Council's communications messaging on Covid has been significantly focussed in recent weeks on the PHE 'Hands, Face, Space' campaign to inform residents of the measures they must continue to take.
9. The request to Government to move into Tier 2 has been prompted by the rising infections across Essex (albeit at a lower rate in Harlow at present) detailed above and the desire to avoid more serious outbreaks.
10. The October edition of Harlow Times is to focus extensively on the measure that residents need to take as well as on the recovery activity.

IMPLICATIONS

Environment and Planning (Includes Sustainability)

As set out in the report.

Author: Andrew Bramidge, Head of Environment and Planning

Finance (Includes ICT, and Property and Facilities)

As set out in the report.

Author: Simon Freeman, Head of Finance and Property and Deputy to the Chief Executive

Housing

As set out in the report.

Author: Andrew Murray, Head of Housing

Community Wellbeing (Includes Equalities and Social Inclusion)

As set out in the report.

Author: Jane Greer, Head of Community Wellbeing

Governance (Includes HR)

As set out in the report.

Author: Simon Hill, Head of Governance

Appendices

None.

Background Papers

None.

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

PHE – Public Health England

RAG – Red, Amber, Green