

**REPORT TO:** Safer Policy and Performance Board

**DATE:** 14<sup>th</sup> July 2020

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Director of Public Health

**PORTFOLIO:** Environmental Services, Health and Wellbeing

**SUBJECT:** Covid-19 update Environmental Health

**WARDS:** Borough wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the board on the work of the Environmental Health service since March 2020. It sets out the routine services that have been maintained or adapted and the activities carried out directly in response to Covid 19.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the report be noted.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

**3.1 Direct response to COVID 19.**

### **3.1.1 Business closures and COVID Safe workplaces**

The Environmental Health (EH) team assumed responsibility for enforcing the Health Protection (Corona Virus Restrictions) Regulations 2020. Whilst the police focussed on the movement of individuals and gatherings EH dealt with business closures. In accordance with Government guidance EH adopted the 4 E's approach to compliance, Engage, Explain, Encourage, Enforce.

No formal enforcement action has been required most businesses have complied with the regulations voluntarily. A small number of businesses have been requested to close or amend their trading practices but this has mainly been due to confusion over the regulations as restrictions have been gradually lifted.

Initially all non essential retail, entertainment and hospitality venues where the public could gather were closed. On the 15<sup>th</sup> June non essential retail premises were permitted to open. EH liaised with the regeneration team regarding the reopening of town centres. From the 4<sup>th</sup> July pubs, cafes, restaurants and hairdressers will be permitted to open. However close contact services such as beauty, nail bars and tattooists must remain closed.

All businesses that are permitted to open must follow the government guidance to ensure that their premises are COVID safe for both employees and customers. EH are responsible for promoting and enforcing compliance with this guidance in workplaces.

Separate guidance has been issued for a range of businesses sectors but the essential controls relevant to all sectors are;

- Undertaking a COVID 19 risk assessment
- Encourage regular handwashing
- Ensure anyone who has symptoms stays away from work and engages with the test and trace service
- Implement social distancing measures
- Regular cleaning of key areas such as toilets, rest rooms and hand contact surfaces
- Encourage home working where possible

Since March 2020 EH have dealt with 122 requests or concerns raised about business closures or social distancing measures from businesses, employees and the public.

A liaison group has been formed between Cheshire police and regulatory service leads for each Cheshire authority to ensure a joined up and consistent approach to enforcement of the regulations.

In addition the food safety team have provided advice and guidance to 53 food businesses to enable them to adapt their businesses to comply with the corona virus regulations.

### **3.1.2. Outbreak Management**

Each local authority has been required to draw up corona virus outbreak control plans to manage local outbreaks as part of the Government's national testing and contact tracing programme. If a localised outbreak is identified then the outbreak will be managed by the local authority working with Public Health England. EH will primarily be involved in dealing with outbreaks associated with workplaces although the knowledge and experience within the team enables resources to be deployed across a range of settings.

### **3.1.3 Covid 19 Support HUB**

During the early stages of the lockdown while some routine services were suspended the team assisted the council support hub by providing delivery drivers for the community shop food delivery scheme and assisted public health colleagues with the prescription advice and delivery service.

## **3.2 Routine Environmental Health Work**

### **3.2.1 Business continuity**

As soon as the lockdown period was implemented and staff were required to work from home EH implemented the established business continuity plans to ensure it responded to urgent priority 1 services. These services were maintained and included response to a potential food poisoning outbreak, supporting risk and emergency planning following a large fire in Widnes and prohibition of an unsafe house.

### **3.2.2 Noise complaints**

There has been a significant increase in domestic noise nuisance complaints during the lockdown period. In total 210 complaints were received from 16<sup>th</sup> March to date compared with 53 for the same period the previous year. This represents a 400% increase and has had a considerable impact on the mental health of some residents.

Initially the service was operated remotely and the installation of sound recording equipment was suspended to comply with social distancing requirements. However installation of sound recording equipment has now been resumed following implementation of a revised risk assessment and safe system of work.

### **3.2.3 Pest control**

The team are currently only undertaking treatments for rats outdoors. The service was initially suspended for a short period but reinstated after a revised risk assessment and safe system of work were implemented. Routine Indoor treatments remain suspended. In undertaking a pest control treatment operatives normally have to check most rooms in a property and will potentially visit multiple households a day. The risk to both householders and our staff is considered too high to resume this service at this time. However cases of rats inside properties will be reviewed on a case by case to ensure vulnerable people are protected.

In common with other areas of the UK there has been a considerable increase in rat activity after the last 6 months. Since the start of the year the pest control team have dealt with 1172 rat complaints compared with 703 for the same period in 2019. This represents an increase of 65%. EH have received approval to urgently advertise a vacant pest control operative post to ensure the team can meet demand and resume treatments services for other pest species.

### **3.2.4 Food Safety Inspections**

In accordance with guidance issued by the Government's Food Standards Agency routine food safety inspections have been suspended. The team have continued to respond to urgent cases that suggest an imminent risk to health and have sampled food from business offering a takeaway service. The team are making regular contact with business owners remotely to provide advice and guidance.

With the reopening of the hospitality sector on the 4<sup>th</sup> July there will be a gradual resumption of the routine food safety inspection programme. A revised risk assessment and safe system of work have been developed to ensure the safety of staff. This will involve an alternative method of conducting an inspection for the foreseeable future.

There has been a significant increase in new food business registrations since April 2020 with 44 new businesses registering in this period. Many of these are small home run operations to provide food for delivery. This is likely to be a direct response to the lockdown. Whilst food shops and takeaways have been allowed to remain open many people have wanted to avoid visits to shops and have opted for delivery or collection services.

### **3.2.5 Remote working**

The environmental team have continued to undertake observations for pollution, nuisance, waste and odour complaints within the borough. This has mostly involved officers travelling from home. Remote working is likely to continue for some time. However with the gradual reopening of the economy it is inevitable a small number of officers will need to operate out of council offices on a rota basis.

## **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

None

## **5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

None

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### **6.1 Children and Young People in Halton**

None.

### **6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

None

### **6.3 A Healthy Halton**

The work of the environmental health team contributes to the health and wellbeing of the boroughs residents. The EH team will be involved in covid 19 outbreak managements

### **6.4 A Safer Halton**

The EH team are actively promoting and enforcing the requirement for businesses to be COVID safe

### **6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

The work of the EH team to ensure a safe retail environment will contribute to the recovery of our town and local centres

**7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

None – the report is for information only

**8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

None

**9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None under the meaning of the Act.