

**Customer and Corporate Services Scrutiny
Management Committee**

25 September 2020

Report of the Director of Public Health

Update on Return of Universities

Introduction / Background:

1. The York Covid-19 Outbreak Control Plan identifies Universities as a high-risk location. Through the internal COPR governance structure CYC, the CYC Public Health Department are leading on implementing the plan.
2. A Universities and Colleges Covid-19 Sub Group has been established to report into the Outbreak Management Board; and alongside this, a University & College Preparedness Group are working through the operational preparedness plans.

Summary of Activity

3. Public Health support for Universities and Colleges has been provided through a named lead to work collaboratively to assess and support institutional readiness. This approach is described within a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) which has been approved at the Outbreak Management Board.
4. Existing networks to support student health within the FE and HE institutions have been built on to progress this work. Regular weekly contact is held as a group network of the Operational Leads for the institutions' preparedness plans, as well as direct support from the Public Health, single point of contact.
5. Each institution has shared its risk assessments and the Public Health team are working closely to support the development of these and to achieve a consistent approach to messages. A

weekly Universities and Colleges Covid-19 Sub Group meets to focus on the strategic response required to support preparedness.

Areas of focus discussed with each institution is summarised below:

Estates and Facilities

6. Risk assessments for each institutions have been developed and reviewed with public health input into these through regular communication and promotion of key public health messages and guidance updates.
7. Face covering policies within each institution have been developed and finalised to require these to be worn on campus space.
8. Facility management arrangements have been reviewed and adapted to meet social distancing requirements.
9. Systems and processes are in place to record student cohort details where this occurs during teaching time and to enable contact tracing to take place. Good information flows exist with daily sharing of soft intelligence and information about students and staff known to be self-isolating and those who are known to have a confirmed case.
10. Desktop emergency planning exercises have been run at both the Universities and Colleges Covid-19 Sub Group and the University & College Preparedness Group is being considered to provide a means to test effectiveness of the plans being in place.
11. This has been supported by 2 regional webinars run by Yorkshire & Humber Health Protection Team to support university preparedness.

Staffing

12. Institutions are operating a phased staffing return and are supporting their staff groups with role and personal specific risk assessments, provision of PPE, and development of information sharing processes to help identify where a student may be self-isolating.

Communication

13. CYC have been supporting institutions with development of communications messages. A significant focus has been put into communicating key messages within each institution to clarify expectations of behaviour and requirements.
14. Institutions have developed comms plans that support messages around institution policies, Covid-19 guidance, access to testing, healthcare, pastoral support, and welfare arrangements if a student needs to self-isolate
15. Courses have adapted teaching regimes to move to a blended approach with the bulk of learning being offered as online, although classroom based learning will still exist.
16. Students – Each institution is developing its messages to students and has adapted its on-boarding processes to respond to Covid-19. Where international students are attending, support to help quarantine is being provided. Initial attendance days for halls students at university for beginning of this semester has been phased. The range of welcome week activities coordinated by student union, graduate student association and societies has been adapted significantly to focus on socially distant and 'rule of 6' compliance along with virtual events.
17. A focus on ensuring that the student body are supported to adhere to social distancing is being prioritised, there are concerns about how this can be maintained, and 'policed' and how well students will comply. This has potential impacts for the reputation of each institution as well as how students are perceived by local residents – in addition to the potential risks this carries for an outbreak.
18. Engagement with local community is an important aspect of institutional consideration as a matter of course and in addition to targeted campaigns, regular and ongoing discussion with local residents through forums such as the Good Neighbours Group that UoY facilitate have been ongoing.
19. First Bus services in York specifically for students have been adapted in consultation with local residents, student unions and CYC. A specific and dedicated University bus will operate on UoY

campus. Due to the limited capacity on buses with social distance requirements in place, there is a focus on messages to students to walk, or cycle if they don't need to take the bus in order to support those who rely on local bus services to have priority.

20. The importance of process and communication as well as welfare provision to support good practice of self-isolation and social distancing is a focus for the operational leads.

Housing

21. Student accommodation risk assessments have been developed. Relationships with independent student accommodation providers are being developed to ensure that there has been public health input.

Standard Operating Procedure

22. An SOP has been developed and reviewed in collaboration with the institutions.
23. York College have decided that the SOP for Schools and Colleges is more relevant to them as an institution and their student profile. Askham-Bryan College feel that elements of both the Schools and Colleges SOP and the Universities and Colleges SOP apply to them.

Testing and Tracing

24. A number of concerns about testing capacity and potential barriers to access testing within the student body population were identified and responded to.
25. Local solutions have been developed to support access to a supply of swab kits provided directly from the Director of Public Health local capacity, as well as work to support the build of a local walk-in test centre that will be for use of all York residents who are unable to access a drive-in appointment and the location of this is going to be within an area of the city that has high levels of need for a walk-in option due to accessibility considerations. This will benefit students and increase access to testing capacity.

26. The current local arrangements for testing follow the national testing programme¹ where:

- pillar 1: swab testing in Public Health England (PHE) labs and NHS hospitals for those with a clinical need, and health and care workers
- pillar 2: swab testing for the wider population, as set out in government guidance

27. Any resident living in York who develops symptoms of Covid-19 can access testing through either attending the Pillar 2 testing site in Poppleton (or other nearby local options), or if unable to attend, can request delivery of a home-test kit for postal return to obtain Covid-19 results. Students are a particular group who can be considered for a provision of a local swab where specific criteria are met. This local resource is a city wide resource and is open and available to strengthen the testing capacity where there are particular needs or a need for a local testing programme as part of any outbreak prevention approach. Students can qualify for this if they can't access a test and live in high density on campus residences, or have other specific needs that mean they are unable to access a test through any of the above means (as well as the walk-in option when it is built).

28. The above describes the Pillar 2 testing routes. Pillar 1 testing is available for those with a clinical need and health and care workers who meet the inclusion criteria. Tests are processed locally at York Teaching Hospital Foundation Trust (YTHFT).

29. Pillar 1 testing is currently locally available through York Teaching Hospital Foundation Trust (YTHFT). There is one option to develop and enhance local Pillar 1 testing access for the local student population:

30. Provision of additional testing capacity within local Pillar 1 system YTHFT have advised that they could make 25-50 swab kits available for distribution to the local FE and HE student population.

Non Testing Related Prevention Measures

31. The success of a prevention focussed response to a potential outbreak is not reliant solely on the timeliness of test results,

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-data-methodology/covid-19-testing-data-methodology-note>

although this has been evidenced to provide good early contact tracing opportunities which is a very effective means of reducing the risk / severity of a disease outbreak.

32. The application and enforcement of social distancing requirements, hand washing, respiratory hygiene, and use of face coverings, along with other mitigations are all factors in how effective a prevention focussed approach will be.
33. A focus on developing good communication with the student and staff bodies about personal and institutional prevention measures; and cohort identification of students who are potentially at risk of being a close or proximity contact is something that each local institution is working to develop. This will be required to be effective no matter which testing route is taken.
 - Where this works well, in that institutions are notified early of a student choosing to self-isolate or that a positive test has been confirmed, there can be support pathways put in place to enable early access to suitable testing, compliance with self-isolation, and potential requests for those identified within cohorts to also self-isolate.
 - The current Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) to define how a positive covid-19 case is responded to, identifies a process to follow which may result in a student cohort being notified that they are advised to self-isolate. The current SOP does not require this consideration when there is an unconfirmed case of Covid-19 or a student or staff member chooses to self-isolate because they have symptoms.
34. A focus on ensuring that those who do develop symptoms are supported to self-isolate for the full amount of time required will also play a part in helping to reduce onward transmission.
 - This could be an effective mitigation where testing may be difficult to access for some of the reasons described above.

Information and Data

35. New government guidance removes any remaining blocks to sharing information between institutions and the local authority. The information governance processes that each institution works to will be reviewed in line with Covid-19 requirements to ensure

that information is timely and relevant to help identify and respond to potential clusters or outbreaks.

36. The information sharing processes in place between the institutions and local authority have been refined as learning from individual cases is known. 'Soft intelligence' of numbers of students who are self-isolating is shared daily by each institution to ensure that as a local authority system, this information provides insight into the local picture to build on the regular and robust data that the local Public Health Department receive about testing and epidemiology.

Single Point of Contact & Escalation

37. Each institution has identified a SPOC and this information has been shared along with HPT SPOC, and LA SPOC for York and surrounding areas should there be a cross-boundary need.

Outbreak Planning Response

38. Each institution has been asked to identify possible sites to house an on-site testing unit should the need to respond to an outbreak occur. This is part of the IMT response preparation co-ordinated through the emergency planning department

Transport

39. Both colleges in particular see a proportion of students attend using public transport from out of area locations on dedicated transport services. Risk assessments for transport still need to be reviewed by the Public Health SPOC.
40. First Bus services in York specifically for students have been adapted in consultation with local residents, student unions and CYC. A specific and dedicated University bus will operate on UoY campus. Due to the limited capacity on buses with social distance requirements in place, there is a focus on messages to students to walk, or cycle if they don't need to take the bus in order to support those who rely on local bus services to have priority.

Next Steps

41. The University Preparedness group will continue to meet regularly as required for the duration of the pandemic in order to track institutional responses and develop learning.

Implications

- **Financial**

There is a potential risk to financial stability of institutions if a localised outbreak is experienced that would require institutions to close for public protection purposes

- **Human Resources (HR)**

None for City of York Council

- **Equalities**

The student population is acknowledged to be connected to a high risk setting and has a range of equality needs within its broad categorisation of students. As a general group, the age profile of students puts them at less risk of severe symptoms and impact from covid-19

- **Legal**

There are no Legal implication of this report

- **Crime and Disorder**

There are no Crime and Disorder implication of this report

- **Information Technology (IT)**

There are no IT implication of this report

- **Property**

There are no Property implication of this report

Recommendations

42. The Committee is asked to discuss and note the report and associated issues in the context of the council's COVID-19 outbreak control plan for part of the theme around high risk places that included university settings.

Contact Details

Author:

Nick Sinclair

Public Health Specialist
Practitioner Advanced

Tel: 01904 554353

nick.sinclair@york.gov.uk

Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Sharon Stoltz

Director of Public Health

Report Approved



Date 25/09/20

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

tick

For further information please contact the author of the report

Annex:

Submission on challenges Universities are facing in relation to COVID