COVID-19: Review of emerging evidence of needs and impacts on Cambridgeshire & Peterborough

Pack 1 V1.1 Final – Executive Summary

September 2021: Public /Open Information

Public Health Intelligence, Business Intelligence and the CCG Business Intelligence team have worked together to produce an overview of the emerging evidence of the impact COVID-19 has had on Cambridgeshire and Peterborough residents and emerging needs of residents

We have adopted a new approach, releasing several information packs as and when data becomes available, rather than delaying publication for an extended period of time until all analysis is completed. We will produce collated evidence and executive summaries, aimed at the public and multi-agency audiences.

This is our first release of evidence, which focuses on the most universal aspects of impacts – the course of the pandemic (direct health impacts), the impacts on the economy and the impacts on the environment.

Our second suite of evidence will drill down into issues which affect particular groups in society. This will include

- Long Covid
- Delayed/missed diagnosis/identification of risk factors
- Direct impacts upon children
- Prevention pathway impacts
- Educational disruption
- Mental health
- Victimisation and community safety
- Social care

We will produce publicly available collated evidence and executive summaries and publish them here on Cambridgeshire Insight.

Key messages – Direct Health Impacts

COVID-19 positive case numbers locally have broadly followed national trends, with 'waves' observed in April - May 2020, November 2020 – March 2021 and July 2021 onwards. Approximately 6 in every 100 residents have had COVID-19 confirmed by a test across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. More may have had COVID-19 but not had symptoms or been confirmed by a test.

In Peterborough this is higher (approximately 8 residents per 100) and in East Cambridgeshire this is lower (approximately 4 per 100 residents). In our worst-affected neighbourhoods (such as Millfield and Bourges Boulevard in Peterborough) it is 12 in 100 residents.

The crude rate of cumulative COVID-19 cases follows a socio-economic deprivation gradient (linked to population density), with case numbers highest in the most deprived areas of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (Peterborough and Fenland) and lowest in the least deprived areas (East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire.) Some relatively deprived but sparsely populated rural areas have had relatively lower COVID-19 incidence rates.

Age data show higher proportions of cases than would be expected among residents aged 20-49 and 90+ and lower proportions in 0-19s and 50-89s. This is likely to be due to high asymptomatic incidence in 0-19 and reduced occupational exposure in older age groups.

Deaths from COVID-19 have been much less common. 1.6 people per 1,000 residents have died within 28 days of a test in Peterborough, and 1.2 people per 1,000 residents have died in Cambridgeshire. Crude cumulative mortality rates within 28 days of a positive COVID-19 test are lower in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire than any other area of the East of England. Taking the age of the population into account, all Cambridgeshire districts except Fenland (which is statistically similar to England) have a statistically significantly low cumulative mortality rate with regard to deaths within 28 days of a positive test compared to England. Peterborough is also statistically similar to England.

Looking at all deaths, over the period of the pandemic, Cambridgeshire (+11%) and Peterborough (+12%) had more deaths than would be expected based on 2015-19 averages. After a wave of excess deaths, recent mortality trends show periods of lower than average weekly deaths.

There is more to say about Long Covid, which will be part of the next release of impact assessment.

Key messages – Economic Impacts

The pandemic has impacted the economy very significantly. However, nationally, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is expected to grow by 4 per cent in 2021 and to regain its pre-pandemic level in the second quarter of 2022.

Some sectors of the economy were more significantly affected by the lockdown than others. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough industry sector profile is similar to the England profile, although a few sectors show a notable difference; there is also variation between districts. The opportunities for economic recovery in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will grow from these sectors, their unique position and contribution to the economy, and how much of the economy the more heavily affected sectors make up.

Visits to recreational locations, retail, and workplaces were all impacted by the lockdowns. In most districts these are still approximately 20% below where they were immediately prior to lockdown, although there are variations between the districts.

Sectors which could switch to home working saw lower proportions of employees on furlough, whereas sectors which relied upon consumer activity were more affected. These may be generally lower paid. For example, Accommodation and Food Services is a generally lower paid sector compared to others, so the impacts on income for employees in this sector are likely to be larger for them personally.

Differences in sectors in the local economy may explain the overall lower uptake locally of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) and the Self-employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) compared to national. The largest sectors in our local economy by employee numbers may have been less exposed to risks from restrictions.

At its peak at the beginning of the pandemic, nearly 1 in 3 employees living in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough were furloughed (approximately 107,000 people). This dropped to 1 in 10 or fewer in May 2021. Between 50-70% of eligible self-employed people claimed support from the Self Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) across the different phases of the scheme.

These schemes appear to be supporting employment. Although the latest data suggests a slight increase in unemployment in Cambridgeshire (to Dec 2020), which mirrors the national change, unemployment in Peterborough appears to have gone down slightly. Job postings across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough over the last two months are the highest they have been since January 2020.

However there has still been a large increase in the number of people accessing benefits relating to low income. Claimant counts suggest that despite the employment support schemes and a more limited impact on employment than feared, the number of people with low incomes approximately doubled when measured by Universal Credit claimant counts.

The number of residents of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough accessing Universal Credit as a result of low income increased from 11,270 in March 2020 to 26,795 in March 2021. It has fallen slightly to 23,220 in June 2021, which represents 4 in 100 people in the working age population aged 16-64.

Food insecurity hit UK households throughout the pandemic, with additional factors affecting access to food in lockdowns.

The volume and proportion of pupils claiming free school meals has increased in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough between Spring 2019 and Spring 2021. The number of children claiming free school meals has increased by 40-50% compared to pre-pandemic levels. In Peterborough, nearly a quarter of all pupils now claim free school meals, and in Cambridgeshire it is now just over 1 in 6.

The end of employment and housing support schemes will have a further impact, which will be discussed in the next release.

Key messages – Environment and Transport

Economic and travel patterns are also diverging in the area. Workplace visits in Cambridge are approximately 1/3 below pre-pandemic levels, with lower levels of motor vehicle traffic, and there is some evidence to suggest an improvement in air quality. However, Peterborough motor vehicle traffic has returned to approximately pre-pandemic level, and workplace visits are around the national average.

In Cambridge there are also fewer cycle journeys (perhaps associated with fewer journeys to work). Active travel strategies should take account of changing patterns of work journeys to maximise impact.

Cross-cutting theme - Inequalities

COVID-19 and the associated socio-economic restrictions have impacted everyone; however it has impacted the health and economic status of some groups of people more than others. More cases of COVID-19 have been found in more deprived areas in general, linked to occupational exposure and dense populations or crowded housing. Younger working age people and people over 90 have tested positive for COVID-19 more often than their proportion of the population would suggest. Twice as many people are on low incomes making them eligible for Universal Credit. The number of children accessing Free School Meals has increased.

Pre-pandemic, people in some of these groups already experienced inequalities in outcomes of health and wellbeing. We know that people on low incomes are more likely to have worse health outcomes in general; more people on low incomes increases the number of people who fall into this group. Similarly, we know that children accessing Free School Meals have worse educational outcomes overall; more people in this group means more people are at risk of lower achievement, as well as the poorer health outcomes associated with lower income. It is likely, given employment has stayed relatively stable, that new people in low income groups were already below median income. It is important that economic recovery targets people in these groups.

People living in more deprived, more urban areas also were worse affected directly by COVID-19, with more cases and worse outcomes. Some communities will therefore have experienced a ‘double whammy’, with more direct impacts of COVID-19, and more impact on their incomes, than people living in more affluent, less densely populated areas (who weren’t exposed to occupational risks or more crowded, multi-generational housing).