

KCC Director of Public Health response to national media reports re Ashford and Folkestone

Kent County Council Director of Public Health, Andrew Scott-Clark statement:

As part of our outbreak plans, we work closely with Public Health England to monitor the figures across Kent - the seven-day rolling average for Ashford and Folkestone continues to decline from the peak seen in April/May, so this PHE report does not mean there is a current need for any local lockdowns.

While the figure for cumulative confirmed cases will always appear high for these areas, there is no comparison to be made between the rates of new cases currently occurring in Ashford and Folkestone, and areas such as Leicester.

We have seen a number of infections in care settings and these are being effectively managed but we have not seen any evidence of any widespread community transmission of COVID-19 and there are currently no plans to introduce any lockdowns specifically these areas.

Should, however, the need arises, we will not hesitate to take further steps should it be necessary.

Ashford and Folkestone have seen higher rates than other areas and is a combination of higher testing rates earlier in the pandemic, a large NHS Trust and many care homes in the area plus the London commuter effect.

We have known Ashford has experienced high numbers for a while and as a result we have deployed mobile testing sites to this area to increase the amount of people who are tested to allow us to better understand how and why this is happening.

As a result, we are finding more positive results because we know that some people can be infected with Covid-19, but not exhibit symptoms (asymptomatic cases).

The public should be reassured that the levels of testing across the whole of Kent have also been ramped up and we would expect to see a rise in the number of cumulative confirmed cases.

We have increased our testing capacity so that we are able to identify and confirm cases in our community and support the NHS Test and Trace programme. We appeal to residents to follow the guidance should they be contacted by NHS test and trace. This will all help us control the spread of the virus.

The NHS in the region have also been working hard making sure that there are sufficient testing resources for their patients and staff to get the testing that they need to support their safety and treatment.

The Government has also set up a home-testing service where kits can be delivered to someone's door so they can test themselves and their family without leaving the house.

The message to residents remains clear – to follow national guidance on social distancing, use thorough and regular handwashing, and follow advice if contacted by the NHS Test and Trace system. For more information, go to.

www.kent.gov.uk/kentprotect