

DRAFT

Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

LOCAL OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD (PUBLIC)

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 20 DECEMBER 2021

Present: Councillor Dominic Boeck, Councillor Graham Bridgman (Chairman), Tracy Daszkiewicz, Councillor Lynne Doherty, Nigel Lynn, Councillor Steve Masters, Matt Pearce, Andy Sharp, Councillor Joanne Stewart (Vice-Chairman), Katie Summers and Councillor Martha Vickers

Also Present: Sean Murphy (Public Protection Manager) and Gordon Oliver (Principal Policy Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Martin Dunscombe

PART I

253 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2021 were approved as a true and correct record.

254 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

255 Covid-19 situational report

The Board considered a presentation from Matt Pearce (Agenda Item 4) on the Covid-19 Situational Report. Key points from the presentation were:

- There had been an exponential increase in Covid cases in the last two weeks, with over 90,000 cases announced on the day of the meeting.
- Omicron was the variant causing 80% of cases in London, and accounted for 40-50% of cases in the South East and West Berkshire.
- Testing rates were increasing, with some pressure on the Newbury Showground test site, but capacity was being increased.
- 9.9% of test results were positive in the most recent 7 day period.
- There were 557.9 cases per 100,000 population amongst the general population which was similar to the South East average and lower than the England average.
- Amongst the 60+ age group the rate was 165.9 per 100,000 population.
- The most recent data for West Berkshire showed a 21.7% increase in the 7-day case rate.
- There were high case rates across a broad range of age groups, particularly the 35-50 age group, but rates were lower amongst older people.
- High case rates were not reflected in hospital admissions – the latest figures showed 24 Covid patients in the Royal Berkshire hospital, 3 new admissions and 1 person on mechanical ventilation.
- The majority of Covid patients in emergency care were unvaccinated and this trend became more pronounced amongst older age groups.
- There had been no Covid-related deaths in the last week.

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- There had been a national high demand for Lateral Flow Devices, driven by the national policy for seven days of testing for vaccinated contacts of Covid-19 cases.
- There had been some short-term logistical issues with the online ordering system, which had since been resolved.
- The Council's Targeted Community Testing Programme had been expanded, with more testing crews, a new static site at the Kennet Centre and a facility supporting the Hungerford pop-up clinic.
- More home LFD test kits had been ordered for the Community Testing Programme.
- Omicron had become the dominant variant in the UK with a doubling time of two to three days. There was evidence that it was immune evasive and very transmissible. People were 5 times more likely to be infected with Omicron than Delta.
- Current vaccines were estimated to protect against severe Covid related illness, hospitalisations and deaths. However, breakthrough infections were expected amongst fully vaccinated people.
- There was limited evidence as to whether Omicron was less severe and a high infection rate was expected to lead to an increase in hospitalisations and deaths.
- Testing, vaccinations and non-pharmaceutical interventions remained critical.

The Chairman asked to what extent the UK would be able to live with Covid, how long ongoing boosters would be needed and when we would reach a situation there were no hospitalisations.

Matt Pearce acknowledged that people were tired and that Christmas would influence how they would behave. He noted that there were still lots of people who had not been vaccinated yet, which would lead to pressure on hospitals if they were to get Covid. He considered that there would be an ongoing need for regular boosters. He hoped that Covid would become less severe in the longer-term.

Katie Summers noted that vaccines could not be offered to anyone who had tested positive in the preceding 28 days. She indicated that it would be helpful to have figures to inform the likely demand for vaccines. She also noted that the design of lateral flow tests had changed and suggested that there should be some public communications about the change.

Matt Pearce indicated that the Public Health Team would work with local pharmacies to ensure that they were communicating the changes to residents and they would work with the Council's Communications Team to get the message out.

Councillor Steve Masters asked about confidence in the ability of Lateral Flow Devices to detect the Omicron variant and if there were any false negative test results being given. Matt Pearce had asked the National and Regional Teams about this and there had been no increase in false negatives as had been experienced following the issues with the Immensa lab. He also reported that the UK Health Security Agency had undertaken some analysis, which had shown that LFDs were as effective at detecting the Omicron variant as they had been with detecting the Delta variant.

Councillor Masters asked if people should self-isolate if living in a household with confirmed cases. Matt Pearce confirmed that for fully vaccinated individuals, national guidance advocated daily LFD tests for seven days. The Chairman suggested that this change should be picked up in Council communications.

Councillor Dominic Boeck noted that he had been able to place an online order for LFD kits with delivery scheduled for three days time.

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Councillor Lynne Doherty asked when there would be more conclusive data about the impact of the Omicron variant. Matt Pearce indicated that London would be a good marker, since 80% of cases were currently related to the Omicron variant and this should show up in hospital admissions within a week. He noted that West Berkshire was a little behind London in terms of Omicron transmission.

Councillor Doherty noted that about 50% of people aged 18+ had received the booster jab, but asked if the data for hospitalisation rates only showed those who were double vaccinated. Matt Pearce confirmed that was correct and that it related to the Delta variant rather than Omicron. He noted that there were challenges in the terminology used and who was eligible for a booster jab.

Councillor Doherty indicated that it would be interesting to see hospitalisation rates for those who had received both doses plus a booster jab. Matt Pearce confirmed that the booster offered significant additional protection and this should be reflected in future statistics.

The Chairman stressed the importance of data about hospitalisation rates between vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals.

256 Vaccination programme update

The Board considered a presentation from Jo Reeves (Agenda Item 5) relating to the Vaccination Programme. Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- All residents aged 18+ could book a booster three months after their second vaccine.
- 12-15 year olds were able to book a second vaccine 12 weeks after their first or wait for a school visit.
- The national aim was to offer a booster dose to all adults by 31 December.
- Work was ongoing with system partners to match supply and demand.
- New sites were being brought online for boosters and capacity was being increased at existing sites.
- Workforce gaps were being addressed with Council staff being redeployed.
- The Hungerford pop-up clinic had been extended to 22 December and discussions were ongoing about whether it could be extended further. This offered first doses to 12-15 year olds, first and second doses to 16-17 year olds, and first, second and booster doses to those aged 18+. 5,335 vaccines had been delivered by 19 December.
- Thanks were given to Councillors Doherty and Vickers for volunteering.
- The Health on the Move Van had been cancelled, since it could not operate safely due to the level of demand. The team was looking to see how residents in isolated communities could be served (e.g. pop-ups run by local pharmacies, more walk-in availability, etc).
- The list of sites in West Berkshire and neighbouring areas was highlighted.
- More slots were being added through the national booking system, so people were encouraged to keep checking for availability.
- 52% of people aged 12+ had received a booster jab – this was better than for England as a whole.
- The Kennet Centre pharmacy was praised for conducting 10,000 vaccinations in 4 days.

The Chairman asked what proportion of the eligible population had received a booster jab. Jo Reeves indicated that this figure was 59.1%.

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Councillor Lynne Doherty asked how members of the public could volunteer to support local pop-up clinics. Jo Reeves suggested that people should sign up through the Royal Voluntary Service, which had an app showing the locations and roles where help was being sought and the shifts that were available. She also noted that Hungerford had its own local system and offered to circulate a link to the sign-up sheet.

Councillor Doherty asked about providing boosters for rough sleepers. Jo Reeves confirmed that a team from Thatcham Medical Practice had provided vaccinations to 25 people at the Newbury Soup Kitchen on 9 December. Some had also used the clinic in the Kennet Centre. In addition, the Health on the Move Van had visited the Two Saints hostel and vaccinated 25 people. She indicated that she would liaise with the Housing Manager to confirm the requirements for future vaccinations.

Councillor Doherty thanked the A34 Primary Care Network for participating in the vaccination programme.

Councillor Martha Vickers thanked Jo Reeves for her hard work on the Hungerford Clinic. She noted that morale had been good despite the long queues. She had also been impressed by the Kennet Centre who had tried to accommodate walk-in vaccinations between appointments. Nigel Lynn confirmed that 20 out of 48 homeless households in west Berkshire had been vaccinated.

Councillor Steve Masters asked about car parking charges for volunteers. Councillor Doherty confirmed that Newbury Station car park had been offered to volunteers at the Kennet Centre. She also indicated that volunteers could claim back expenses, including parking.

Councillor Jo Stewart indicated that she had used the Triangle Pharmacy in Tilehurst for her vaccinations and asked if these would be recorded in the West Berkshire figures, even though the pharmacy was in Reading Borough. Jo Reeves confirmed that the figures were based on the home address of the person being vaccinated.

The Chairman asked if issues affecting data for West of Reading Villages surgeries had been resolved. Jo Reeves confirmed that all surgeries were using the Pinnacle system which fed through to the national service.

Katie Summers highlighted that patients were no longer being asked to wait for 15 minutes after having received a vaccination or booster. This would allow capacity to be greatly increased. She also confirmed that people who chose to have a booster in another part of the UK over the Christmas period would still be recorded on their own GP's system. In addition, she praised the collaboration between the health sector, Council and voluntary sector in getting the Hungerford site up and running, which had attracted widespread praise from service users.

Councillor Masters asked about plans for other pop-ups in Thatcham or areas to the east of the District. Katie Summers confirmed that: the first priority from the National Team was to have as many normal NHS sites as possible; the second priority was around communications of booster opportunities; and the third priority was around additional opportunities provided through pop-up clinics. Modelling work was underway to identify suitable locations for pop-ups to be provided early in 2022.

Councillor Masters asked if Afghan refugees being supported in West Berkshire were vaccinated. Katie Summers confirmed that GP clinical leads would be visiting the three hotel sites.

The Chairman asked about vaccination of care home staff and residents, and vaccination of NHS staff. Andy Sharp confirmed that all care homes had been visited as part of the vaccination programme – there had been strong take-up amongst residents, but less

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than 40% of care home staff had received a booster jab, although there was a time lag on the data. Details of homes with particularly low take-up had been provided to the CCG with a view to arranging a further visit to these sites. A communication had also gone out to all care homes to encourage greater take-up of the booster.

The Chairman asked about the requirement of care home staff to be vaccinated. Andy Sharp confirmed that all care home staff must have two doses of the vaccine, but there was no current legal requirement for them to have a booster.

Councillor Masters asked if there were issues with Covid-related sickness amongst care home staff and what contingency measures were in place should this reach a critical rate. Andy Sharp confirmed that the Council did not track data for Covid rates in the external market, but he had not been alerted to any providers with staffing issues. Internally, there had been a few cases amongst staff, but the service had worked with Public Health to manage the situation and ensure that staff and residents were protected. He confirmed that all providers used agency staff to address any staffing shortfalls and while there was sufficient coverage now, this was a concern going forward, so contingency plans had been put in place.

Councillor Masters asked about discharge of patients from hospital and how the domiciliary care market was holding up. He also asked if hospitals had sufficient capacity. Andy Sharp stated that there was pressure in the domiciliary care market with a higher number of hours to be commissioned than the service would like. He indicated that the sector had been experiencing workforce challenges for some time and had been further affected by Covid. The Council was working with providers to ensure that people were not waiting too long for care. Katie Summers confirmed 72% of staff at the Royal Berkshire Hospital had been given a Covid booster jab, with an additional clinic run earlier that day. She agreed that there was a growing concern about staff being affected by Covid and if staff did not get boosters by the end of the year then this would translate into staffing issues by mid-January.

257 Public Protection Partnership update

The Board considered a presentation from Sean Murphy (Agenda Item 6) relating to the work of the Public Protection Partnership (PPP). Key points from the presentation were:

- Local contact tracing activity was increasing – 223 for the week ending 8 December vs 201 for the previous week.
- The service had made self-isolation support calls to 450 residents in the last two weeks and had provided practical assistance to 20 people.
- Staff were being redeployed to provide additional support and more staff would be trained up.
- A new prioritisation model had been agreed with the NHS Test and Trace service.
- The national service would run contact tracing between 25-28 December, with the local service resuming on 29 December.
- Outbreak monitoring and notifications would continue over the Christmas period.
- Coincidence reporting would still be considered on a daily basis and contact made with settings with potential outbreaks.
- Advisory visits were being made based on risk.
- The service was working with premises / businesses affected by certification rules (e.g. Newbury Racecourse).
- Enquiries had been received from other premises and businesses with planned events.
- The pre-Christmas event seasons was largely over – the PPP had attended a number of events and had provided advice where sought.

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- The PPP had considered nearly 300 events since April.
- The Service was ready to react to any changes in guidance over the holiday period.

Councillor Steve Masters asked what additional protections were planned for schools when they returned in January. Sean Murphy observed that many recent outbreaks had been in schools. He explained that the Internal Coordination Cell would meet on 29 December to review any new guidance. Andy Sharp indicated that the Council continued to work closely with schools and there were testing regimes and a vaccine programme in place. He noted that schools were allowed to make some decisions around the use of masks and to take additional steps as needed. Education staff had been allocated to work with schools and ensure they had the right advice and to address outbreaks as they occurred.

Councillor Dominic Boeck observed that when he had visited schools, they had praised the work of the Schools Improvement Team in interpreting and communicating government guidance and regulations. With regards to the work of the PPP, he highlighted a news item on the radio where a business had been fined for a marginal breach of social distancing guidance, but the approach in West Berkshire had been to simply to highlight where there had been a breach and encourage businesses to take the appropriate steps. He thanked Sean and his team for their approach.

258 Communications update

Martin Dunscombe was not present to provide an update on Covid related communications.

The Chairman noted that there were several communications issues that had cropped up in discussions, which would be referred to the Communications Team for their attention.

Sean Murphy indicated that he would be asking the Communications Team to develop messaging asking people who tested positive for Covid to complete the online journey, since this helped to reduce the workload for the national and local Contact Tracing Teams.

259 Future meetings and agenda items

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Board should be on Monday 10 January 2022 at 6pm.

260 Any other business

No other items were raised.

(The meeting commenced at Time Not Specified and closed at Time Not Specified)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature