

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 FRIDAY, 28 AUGUST 2020

Councillors Present: Dominic Boeck, Graham Bridgman, Shairoz Claridge, Steve Masters, Peachey, Martha Vickers and Howard Woollaston

Also Present: Mandip Bilkhu (Communications and Marketing Officer), Sean Murphy (Public Protection Manager), Matthew Pearce (Head of Public Health and Wellbeing) and Andy Sharp (Executive Director (People)), Gordon Oliver (Corporate Policy Support)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Nick Carter, Councillor Lynne Doherty and Rachel Johnson

Absent: Tessa Lindfield

PART I

10 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

11 Minutes of the previous meeting dated 31 July 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 July 2020 were approved as a true and accurate record and were signed by the Chairman.

12 COVID-19 Status Report

Matthew Pearce presented the latest data on COVID-19 cases, starting with the UK situation:

- Cumulative - 330,368 confirmed cases and 41,477 deaths
- Daily total (26 August) – 1,522 confirmed cases and 12 deaths

At the local level, he noted that there had been 520 confirmed cases in West Berkshire and 3,638 across Berkshire as a whole. He stated that actual figures would be higher, since many cases are asymptomatic and go unidentified.

In terms of infection rates, he highlighted that West Berkshire's figure of 328 cases per 100,000 population was lower than national and regional averages and was a middle figure compared to the other Berkshire authorities.

For the previous two weeks, he highlighted that there had been 9 and 10 confirmed cases respectively and although there had been a slight increase, numbers were still relatively low.

He noted that cases were spread across the district, implying general community transmission, with no significant clusters.

Looking at weekly death rates, he confirmed that these were in line with the five year average with no detectable COVID-19 impacts.

He stated that the Council was about to launch a new website to show the latest local data and information on COVID-19.

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Councillor Dominic Boeck highlighted the fact that the COVID-19 rate in Wokingham was half that in West Berkshire and asked if anything could be inferred from this.

Matthew Pearce stated that West Berkshire had fewer cases in total since the start of the pandemic, He highlighted that the weekly figures were very small numbers, so any changes had a big effect on the rate per 100,000 population.

13 Local Incident Report

Matthew Pearce confirmed that there had not been any major outbreaks. There had been three incidents in recent weeks – one workplace, one care home and one health setting. These were isolated incidents with less than two cases each and were being managed through the Local Outbreak Control Plan.

14 Local Powers

Sean Murphy gave a presentation on local health protection powers that had been recently introduced at short notice.

He explained that the Regulations gave local authorities powers to:

- Restrict access to, or close, individual premises
- Prohibit certain events from taking place
- Restrict access to, or close, public outdoor places

He highlighted that some local authorities were taking action to close some outdoor spaces over the bank holiday weekend where they are expecting gatherings to take place.

He outlined three tests that must be passed before enacting the new powers:

1. That there would be a public health risk from COVID-19
2. That the use of the powers by the local authority would address the risk
3. That the use of the powers would be proportionate

He explained that local authorities must:

- Gather evidence to demonstrate that these test have been met.
- Consult with the Director of Public Health and Police.
- Carry out an equalities impact assessment, and ensure that the public has access to essential services.
- Communicate the reasons for any action to the Secretary of State, the persons to whom the direction applies and, where appropriate to the those affected by the direction.

He summarised powers in relation to individual premises, which included closure, restricting entry, and restricting the location of persons within the premises. However, he stated that essential infrastructure could not be closed (e.g. food manufacturing, transport hubs, or large supermarkets).

He described powers in relation to events where numbers of people expected would make it unsafe due to COVID-19 transmission, and highlighted the need for risk assessments for events that were not previously assessed. He indicated that directions affected the owner / occupier / organiser of the event rather than attendees.

For public open spaces, he explained that closures could apply where an event is planned or where past experience shows that large numbers of people are likely. Where a space was closes, people would not be allowed to enter without a reasonable excuse.

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He stated that enforcement was carried out by Public Protection Officers, Police Officers and PCSOs. He highlighted the need for the Council to advertise the extent of the restrictions and explained the enforcement procedures, and the relevant penalties and appeals processes.

Councillor Graham Bridgman noted the amount of work undertaken by the Public Protection Partnership and Public Health to permit the Medicine Festival at Wasing to proceed. He indicated that that power to stop events was being used to engage event organisers and ensure that events are COVID safe.

Sean Murphy agreed that it was time-consuming and that even smaller events were now being assessed. He indicated that there was a balance between supporting the economy and managing public health risks and that events can be complicated and time-consuming to work through, but he considered that a balance could be achieved. He acknowledged that this would be a major part of work programmes for the foreseeable future.

Matthew Pearce explained that the Council did not want to use its powers unless necessary. He agreed that there was a lot of work being done in relation to events and settings (e.g. schools, care homes, workplaces) to review policies and risk assessments, while learning from experience to achieve COVID-secure facilities.

Councillor Steve Masters acknowledged the hard work undertaken by officers and asked if additional resources would be required to meet the additional demand and undertake appropriate enforcement.

Councillor Graham Bridgman stated that the Council was allocating additional resources where necessary to respond to COVID requirements.

Sean Murphy explained that the situation was currently manageable, since work was being done by officers who were previously inspecting food premises and dealing with health and safety enforcement. However, he indicated that Government was pushing for food inspection to recommence. He highlighted that additional funding was available and that the PPP could put in a request to Gold and the Executive in future if required.

Matthew Pearce noted the need for a collective response to comply with Government guidance. He mentioned that community champions could be helpful in identifying issues or concerns that might need further investigation.

Councillor Martha Vickers thanked the services for introducing more normality into people's lives (e.g. the fair at Northcroft). She suggested that there was a danger of people closing in on themselves, particularly those shielding at home, which could lead to mental health issues. She stressed the need to provide reassurance and balance in messaging.

15 Communications Update

Mandip Bikhu gave an update on recent communications activities, which included:

- A leaflet sent to residents last week, put on the Council's website and translated into different languages;
- Information sent to local businesses, including a 'top tips' poster;
- A community conversation, which resulted in actions such as posters at village entrances reiterating national messages, identification of local communications channels, and ongoing monthly collaboration to share ideas and best practice;
- The 'top tips' poster and business information were disseminated to the Local Outbreak Control Cell for circulation to their contacts;

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- Joint working with Newbury Business Improvement District (BID) and Thames Valley Police on messaging to residents;
- Plans for outdoor advertising, which could be used for preventative messaging as well as communications around future local lockdowns;
- Discussions on webinars for businesses to disseminate the Local Outbreak Control Plan;
- Ongoing messaging via social media, the Council's website and newsletter on testing and preventative measures;
- Arranging filming at Newbury Showground to show what happens during a test;
- Paid social media campaigns targeting young people and links with Berkshire Youth;
- Internal communications

Councillor Steve Masters asked about budgets available for social media campaigns.

Mandip Bikhu confirmed that the campaigns were not expensive and varied according to what needed to be achieved. She suggested that a £500 spend would be enough to reach people across the district.

16 Future agenda items

No new agenda items were proposed. Councillor Vickers indicated that she wished to speak, but experienced difficulties with her Internet connection, so it was agreed that she should contact the Chairman after the meeting if she wished to add an item to a future agenda.

17 Any other Business

No other business was raised.

(The meeting commenced at 10.02 am and closed at 10.44 am)