

# 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, 12 APRIL 2021

**Present:** Councillor Dominic Boeck, Councillor Graham Bridgman, Nick Carter, Councillor Steve Masters, Meradin Peachey, Matt Pearce, Jo Reeves, Andy Sharp, Councillor Joanne Stewart and Councillor Martha Vickers

**Also Present:** Mandip Bilkhu, Sean Murphy, Gordon Oliver, and Warwick Heskins

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Shairoz Claridge and Councillor Lynne Doherty

#### PART I

#### 120 Minutes of the previous meeting dated 29 March 2021

The minutes of the previous meeting dated 29 March 2021 were approved as a true and correct record.

#### 121 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were received.

#### 122 Local business preparations for Covid-secure reopening

Warwick Heskins of the West Berkshire Pub Company gave a presentation on preparations for reopening his businesses. Key points were:

- Spare Wheel to reopen 14 April with outside seating for 40 people in the Market Place.
- Catherine Wheel reopening yet to be confirmed, potentially up to 20 people in the courtyard.
- The businesses would not have survived without furlough scheme / Government grants.
- Over £5000 of stock went to waste.
- Costs of reopening had to be weighed against likely reduced sales.
- Staff costs were high due to the requirement for table service and having to meet and greet customers for track and trace.
- Sales were down 30% for July to September on equivalent period last year, but wage costs had only fallen by 12%.
- Both businesses were in a better position than others with no outside seating.
- A broad range of measures had been put in place to prepare for reopening including cleaning / sanitisation, staff testing, Covid signs, track and trace posters, staff training, GPS card terminals, pay at table app, and risk assessments for reopening and the outdoor seating in the Market Place.

He expressed surprise about the differences in how different businesses had interpreted the guidance about outdoor spaces.

Councillor Graham Bridgman asked if the guidance was difficult to interpret.

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Warwick Heskins agreed that the Government guidance was 'thin' and indicated that he had asked questions as necessary and had also attended Zoom sessions organised by the Licensing Team. However, he noted that some pubs in other locations appeared to have interpreted the guidance differently.

Councillor Jo Stewart indicated that she had seen people sitting in areas that she considered to be 'indoors'. She asked how staff motivation was being maintained.

Warwick Heskins indicated that he was using WhatsApp chats to keep staff informed and involved. Employees were also being trained in preparation for reopening. In addition, some staff were volunteering at the vaccine centre.

Councillor Steve Masters asked if the pubs would be serving food.

Warwick Heskins confirmed that the Spare Wheel had a full menu and the Catherine Wheel had been operating via Deliveroo.

Councillor Masters asked if table numbers were affected by being in the Market Place.

Warwick Heskins indicated that it was just a convenience issue. He noted that there was a good atmosphere in the Market Place and suggested that it could be made permanent and the area pedestrianised.

Sean Murphy noted that the concept of outdoor seating was well-defined in law and was related to smoking areas. He confirmed that the PPP would be providing advice to businesses and would carry out checks on all aspects of compliance with government guidance.

Councillor Bridgman asked about interaction between local authorities.

Sean Murphy confirmed that liaison was ongoing between local authorities around interpretation of guidance and that advice was also provided by the Office for Product Safety. As such, he suggested that there should be no disparity between local authorities and if officers became aware of issues in other areas, they would raise them with colleagues.

### **123 Vaccination Programme Update**

Jo Reeves gave a presentation on the vaccination programme. Key points included:

- The data related to the period up to 9 April 2021.
- Data was not available for three practices in Hungerford, Lambourn and Mortimer due to the system that they were using, but 90% of residents were covered by the data.
- 58,190 patients (52%) had received one dose, 6,947 (6%) had received their second dose and 48,683 (42%) of those aged 18+ were still to receive their first dose.
- All patients aged 50+ and all clinically vulnerable patients aged 16+ had been offered a first dose
- Over 13,000 doses had been delivered in Pangbourne and over 33,000 in Newbury, with both sites now delivering second doses.
- Take up was higher across all age groups in West Berkshire than the average across the BOB Integrated Care System area and was far higher than for the annual flu vaccination programme.
- Some variances persisted across ethnic groups, but the situation was much improved compared to a month earlier, particularly amongst the Pakistani community.
- Causes for these variances included spread of misinformation, language barriers and access issues.
- Some ethnic groups only had small numbers of older people and so younger cohorts were showing more strongly in the figures.

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- Work was ongoing to understand why some people were declining the vaccine.
- Ambassadors were working with 'seldom-heard' communities.
- Pop-up clinics were being used to improve access and convenience, including at the West Berkshire Muslim Centre.
- Take-up amongst at-risk and inclusion groups was high, although there was a reduced take-up amongst younger people.
- There was a marginally reduced take-up rate amongst young people in deprived wards, but it was broadly similar to other areas.
- There had been a recent change to JCVI cohorts – households of severely immune-suppressed patients were now in Cohort 6 - and additional clinics were being arranged to target these.

Councillor Graham Bridgman sought clarification as to whether the tables showed percentages of the total population who had been vaccinated, or percentages of the eligible population who had taken up the offer. He also asked about what was being done to tackle the low take-up amongst certain European white communities.

**Action: Jo Reeves to confirm if the statistics related to total population or to eligible patients.**

**Action: Jo Reeves to discuss take-up amongst European white communities at the Inequalities Group and report back.**

Councillor Steve Masters noted that some people had had their second vaccines cancelled and had been asked to re-book.

Jo Reeves explained that when appointments were being booked in January, the guidance had indicated that the second dose should be delivered after 12 weeks. However, deliveries were now being delivered at 11 weeks, which had required some appointments to be re-booked. She stressed that a second dose was available to everyone who had received their first dose.

Councillor Masters noted that some people had not been allocated an ethnicity in the statistics and inquired about how and when people were being asked for this information. He had spoken to community leaders who were promoting the vaccination programme and did not wish to be highlighted as not engaging. He also noted that some of the mis-information on social media appeared to be targeting certain white European communities.

Jo Reeves explained that ethnicity of patients was captured through the GP clinical system and work was ongoing to improve this in order to better understand the health needs of the population. She also confirmed that patients were also being asked their ethnicity by the people giving the vaccinations to help understand take-up amongst different ethnic groups. She agreed that there was a lot of support from faith leaders, which was being borne out in the data, but some gaps remained.

Councillor Masters asked about the Riverside pop-up clinic.

Jo Reeves explained that this would be reviewed once a further clinic had been held at the Racecourse. She stressed that appointments would need to be booked for pop-up clinics to avoid wasting vaccine. She offered to keep the Board informed of developments.

Councillor Dominic Boeck noted that data was not available for three practices and suggested that this could account for a high proportion of people in a particular MSOA or ethnic group.

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Jo Reeves suggested that the Kintbury profile would be similar to Hungerford, and Lambourn, while Mortimer would be similar to Theale or Pangbourne, but acknowledged the need for more granular data. She suggested that the racing community may struggle to access vaccination centres and this might be an area where further efforts would be needed.

Councillor Boeck asked what data was missing.

Jo Reeves confirmed that it was patients who had received their vaccinations.

Councillor Jo Stewart indicated that many residents of wards in the east of the district would be registered with GP surgeries in Reading, and these areas had pockets of high deprivation. She suggested that these people may not be picked up in the statistics. She also asked if people were reluctant to be vaccinated due to concerns about the AstraZeneca vaccine.

Jo Reeves noted that NHS England provided weekly updates that captured vaccination take-up for residents rather than GP patients. She undertook to see if the LOEB could receive reports for West Berkshire residents. She stated that there had been very few people who had expressed concerns about the AstraZeneca vaccine.

**Action: Jo Reeves to source data for West Berkshire residents rather than patients of West Berkshire GP surgeries.**

Councillor Bridgman reiterated the need to show statistics for those who were eligible for the vaccine, but had not taken it up.

Meradin Peachey noted that the MHRA had a very good system for recording adverse events following vaccination. She explained that the MHRA and European regulators had reviewed the evidence for blood clots as a side effect of vaccination and concluded that this was very rare, with a very slight increased risk following the AstraZeneca vaccine. However, it was still safer to have the vaccine. The MHRA had recommended that people aged under 30 should have an alternative vaccine, because their risks from Covid were lower and it was just a precautionary measure. She stressed that the risk of clots was incredibly low (approximately 4 per 1,000,000). She indicated that there was no change to the target for all adults to be vaccinated by mid-July, since the Moderna vaccine would become available next week. The guidance was for health professionals to weigh up the risks for individuals in determining which vaccine was appropriate (e.g. history of clots), and for people under 30 to have a discussion with a clinician.

Councillor Bridgman noted that all medicines had potential serious side effects.

Councillor Martha Vickers stressed the need to help people understand the risks (e.g. comparison with the risks of blood clots from long-haul flights). She suggested that the media had over-reported the risks.

Meradin Peachey agreed with the points made by both Members. She highlighted that there was a similar risk from one of the flu vaccines and noted that blood clotting was a known symptom of contracting Covid. She indicated that national guidance was being developed in relation to communicating risk.

### 124 Covid-19 Situational Report

Matt Pearce gave a presentation on the Covid-19 situation in West Berkshire. Key points included:

- There had been 6,325 confirmed cases with 23 in the last week.
- Positivity rate was 0.8%.

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- There were 14.5 cases per 100,000 population, which was the lowest in Berkshire and lower than the South East and national averages.
- There were 2.5 cases per 100,000 population amongst residents age 60+, which suggested vaccinations were working well.
- There were few clusters being reported.
- There had been 247 Covid related deaths with 1 in the last week.
- The all-cause mortality rate was 18% above the 5 year average.
- Long-Covid would be an ongoing challenge.
- There were just 3 new admissions to Royal Berkshire Foundation Trust Hospitals in the last week
- There were 14 Covid patients in RBFT hospitals, of which 3 were on mechanical ventilation.

Councillor Martha Vickers indicated that she had been told of hairdressers requiring customers to have lateral flow tests.

Matt Pearce confirmed that there was no requirement for people to be tested and that businesses should not be requiring people to be tested. However, he indicated that residents were being encouraged to test twice weekly and lateral flow tests were being made available.

Sean Murphy added that they were encouraging testing in workplaces, but confirmed that there was no requirement for people to have a test.

Graham Bridgman noted that information on Covid testing was on the West Berkshire website.

Meradin Peachey agreed that businesses could not require people to take tests, but there was no reason why they couldn't encourage people to do so or hand out information on testing. She noted that 19 local pharmacies were offering community collect facilities.

Councillor Steve Masters asked about Covid patients in other hospitals.

Matt Pearce noted that admissions were going down across the south east

**Action: Matt Pearce to obtain data for other hospitals used by West Berkshire residents.**

Councillor Jo Stewart stated that she had ordered a home test kit online on Saturday and had received it by Monday morning.

### 125 Local Outbreak Control Plan

Matt Pearce gave a presentation on the Local Outbreak Control Plan. Key points included:

- The original version was published in June 2020 when the district was in the 'control and recover' phase prior to the second wave and under national restrictions.
- Phase 4 was 'prevention and renew' with roll-out of vaccines.
- Phase 4b was 'living with Covid' effective from March 2021, based on the government roadmap.
- Prevalence of Covid would reduce as more people are vaccinated.
- Outbreaks would be more localised in future with local-led response.
- The LOCP outlined changes to roles and responsibilities in the next phase.
- The ability to respond to outbreaks would be more challenging as restrictions were relaxed and local authorities resumed their full services.
- The approach would be guided by four principles:

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1. Transmission of the virus to be brought, and kept, as low as possible.
  2. Surveillance of transmission and variant emergence must be optimal.
  3. Test, trace and isolate must work effectively with a clear testing strategy.
  4. Vaccines must be effective and delivered equitably.
- The LOCP contains nine themes – the following were highlighted:
    - Testing and responding to variants of concern
    - Local Contact Tracing Partnership (headed up by Sean Murphy)
    - Community and engagement (working with partners and community champions)
    - Compliance and enforcement (supporting communities to be compliant and using powers as a last resort)
    - Enduring transmission (responses in the event that local Covid levels were sustained at levels higher than the national average)
  - Knowledge about airborne transmission was improved – smaller aerosols played a key role, which was why face coverings and ventilation were important.
  - Some people were more at risk of catching Covid and needed additional protection.
  - Local high risk settings were identified in June 2020 – the Council and its partners had worked closely with them to develop plans and manage outbreaks.
  - Some additional settings were identified since the original LOCP was produced and plans had been developed for these.
  - West Berkshire Council now had a Surveillance Cell to review epidemiology data and outbreak data.
  - Processes for responding to outbreaks and enduring transmission remained broadly unchanged.
  - Actions would be tailored to the specific situation in terms of those most likely to be effective, based on evidence.
  - Clear escalation and de-escalation processes were in place for action in the event of enduring transmission.
  - The Community Support Hub continued to operate and could be stood-down and brought back as required.
  - Communications remained vital and an automated Covid information line had been introduced to cater for those without access to digital platforms.

Councillor Martha Vickers indicated that some things would remain for a long time such as mask wearing and washing hands and suggested that people may not be aware that this would be needed and would be expecting to return to normal.

Matt Pearce indicated that there was a high probability of another wave and agreed that there were things that should be continued, such as hand washing. He highlighted the low prevalence of flu in the last year, which could be attributed to social distancing and people staying at home.

Meradin Peachey noted that the UK Health Security Agency had suggested there would be an ongoing role for local government in tackling communicable disease and engaging with the public.

### 126 **Communications Update**

Mandip Bilkhu gave a presentation on Communications. The key points were as follows:

- Communications were focused on Step 2 of the Government's roadmap (reopening of non-essential shops, hospitality, gyms and promotion of 'hands, face, space and fresh air' messaging).
- Step 3 of the roadmap would be communicated in a few weeks.

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- Filming had taken place with local businesses that were reopening.
- Restart Grants had been promoted to local businesses.
- Covid marshals were supporting the public and local businesses about how to adhere to guidelines.
- Information on community testing was being promoted, including a mobile collection service in the east of the district.
- A Covid-19 letter had been prepared for schools to send to parents with advice on testing, self-isolating and observing rules to minimise spread in the holidays.
- The residents' newsletter was still going out every Friday.
- Information had been shared on Ramadan, around keeping safe and confirming that taking the vaccine did not break the fast.
- Communications had been prepared around parks and open spaces, encouraging people to take rubbish home rather than littering.
- A Community Forum event would take place on 30 April on mental health.
- The Leader would host a Facebook Live event about Covid Recovery on Thursday at 5pm.

### 127 Future agenda items

Members were asked to email Gordon Oliver and copy the Chairman with suggestions for future agenda items.

### 128 Any other business

Mandip Bilkhu noted that Martin Dunscombe would attend LOEB meetings in future.

*(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 7.27 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature** .....