

# **LOCAL OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD (PUBLIC)**

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 10 MAY 2021**

**Present:** Councillor Graham Bridgman (Chairman), Councillor Lynne Doherty, Councillor Steve Masters, Meradin Peachey, Matt Pearce, Jo Reeves, Andy Sharp, Councillor Joanne Stewart (Vice-Chairman) and Councillor Martha Vickers

**Also Present:** Martin Dunscombe (Communications Manager) and Sean Murphy (Public Protection Manager), and Gordon Oliver (Principal Policy Officer)

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Councillor Dominic Boeck and Nick Carter

### **PART I**

#### **139 Apologies**

#### **140 Minutes**

The minutes of the previous meeting dated 26 April 2021 were approved as a true and correct record.

#### **141 Declarations of interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

#### **142 Events and Gatherings**

The Board considered a presentation from Sean Murphy (Agenda Item 4) concerning public events and gatherings. Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- Gatherings were currently controlled by the 'All Steps Regulations', with Step 3 planned from 17 May.
- Gatherings would be banned unless permitted by the Regulations (e.g. weddings, funerals, wakes, etc).
- Events were classed as permitted gatherings, but they must be organised by a business, public body, charity or benevolent / philanthropic organisation, with organisers taking responsibility for the safety of attendees.
- Events were subject to Covid and Health and Safety risk assessments, taking into account any relevant guidance.
- Events had to be run in tandem with licensing objectives where applicable.
- The Council had been notified of 130 events, mostly outdoors.
- Events were managed through the Safety Advisory Group (SAG), which considered event plans as well as health and safety and Covid risk assessments.
- Event organisers could be asked to attend SAG meetings to run through the event, answer questions and receive advice.
- SAG's role was to provide advice and rather than approve events.
- The Council had powers to issue directions and prohibitions to stop an event from taking place, or to impose restrictions if it was felt to be unsafe due to potential Covid transmission.
- Further considerations regarding events, included:
  - Prevailing infection rates

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- Testing
- Variants of concern
- Learning from Government pilot programme
- Numbers attending
- Rolling review of risks
- Compliance checks
- Public confidence
- What happens beyond 21 June? (Covid risk assessments will still be in place.)

The Chairman asked about the following: a) how intelligence from the Government pilot programme filtered down to local authorities; b) who decided if an event was safe; and c) under what legislation were decisions made to prohibit an event. Sean Murphy explained that assessments from the Government pilots was still being compiled. No details had been made available yet, but these would come through shortly with any proposed changes to events guidance. He noted that controls were set out in the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 3) Regulations 2020. He explained that events were permitted unless they were judged to present too great a risk. However, no local events had been prohibited to date, and he acknowledged the learning that had taken place over the last 12 months by event organisers, Public Protection and Public Health about how outbreaks occurred, and how they could be prevented.

Councillor Steve Masters asked if any events planned for West Berkshire would form part of the Government pilot programme. Sean Murphy indicated that he was not aware of any such events.

### 143 Vaccination programme update

The Board considered a presentation from Jo Reeves (Agenda Item 5) concerning the vaccination programme. Key points from the presentation included:

- The data presented was for the week ending 7 May 2021 and covered 91 percent of West Berkshire's population.
- 63 percent of West Berkshire's eligible population had been vaccinated (up from 59 percent two weeks previously).
- 23 percent of West Berkshire's eligible population had received their second vaccination (up from 14 percent two weeks previously).
- These figures compared well with the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB) averages, and were broadly in line with national figures.
- Vaccinations were currently being offered to 40-49 year olds, with 53.5 percent of this age group having had at least one dose.
- As with the older age cohorts, White British residents had come forward quickly, with other ethnic groups tending to catch up after a couple of weeks.
- Messaging would seek to target any groups not coming forward.
- Overall, 70 percent of high-risk patients had received their second dose.
- Vaccine take-up amongst 40-49 year olds in deprived wards was broadly equivalent to that in other areas, although take-up in Greenham was lagging slightly.
- The Newbury Racecourse vaccination centre would close once GP practices had completed second doses.
- Vaccinations would be offered via pharmacies including Boots in Northbrook Street and another pharmacy in the Kennet Centre.
- Vaccinations were also being delivered at the Pangbourne Centre.

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- There were plans for pop-up clinics to target areas with low take-up due to poor access.

The Chairman asked about the mobile vaccination service. Jo Reeves confirmed that two mini-buses would be shared across the BOB area to deliver pop-up clinics. These would have capacity to deliver around 100 vaccines per day. Vaccinations would need to be pre-booked, with second doses booked at the same time. She confirmed that the mini-bus would come to West Berkshire in June and invited feedback on locations it should serve.

The Chairman asked if the 40-49 age group was showing as amber because this cohort had not yet fully come through the programme. Jo Reeves confirmed that was correct and noted that the vaccine supply had been lower in recent weeks, so the rate of increase for first doses was lower than it had been for older age groups.

### 144 Covid-19 situational report

The Board considered a presentation from Matt Pearce (Agenda Item 6) concerning the Covid-19 Situational Report. Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- There had been a significant increase in Covid-19 cases.
- 1.1 percent of test results were positive in the most recent period.
- The rate was 30.9 cases per 100,000 population compared with 25.9 per 100,000 in the previous week.
- These figures were higher than national and regional averages.
- There had been 49 cases in West Berkshire in the last 7 days, but data just released showed this had fallen back to below 30.
- Numbers of cases remained low, so any increases appeared as large swings in the data.
- Cases had doubled from the previous week, with school pupils accounting for 41 percent of cases in the most recent week.
- There had been a single outbreak of 10 cases in one school and an increase in cases amongst 16-18 year olds in recent weeks.
- There were no geographical 'hotspots' in Covid-19 cases, with a maximum of 1-4 cases per Lower Super Output Area.
- There had been 252 Covid-19 related deaths during the pandemic, but none since the end of March.
- Since the beginning of the pandemic, there had been an 18 percent increase (247 deaths) in all-cause mortality compared to the 5-year average.
- Death rates were currently in line with expected levels.
- There had only been one new admission as of 7 May across all Royal Berkshire Foundation Trust hospitals.

The Chairman noted that the effects of Covid-19 were less severe due to the number and age of those vaccinated. He asked about the long-term impacts of living with Covid-19. Matt Pearce agreed that the rise in community transmission was not yet resulting in hospital admissions or deaths and that younger people were less at risk. He acknowledged that there were still unknowns around 'long-Covid'. He stressed the importance of continuing with restrictions and following the Government 'roadmap'. Also, he noted that there was a risk of new variants with increased community transmission. He suggested that a threshold would be achieved beyond which we would be 'living with Covid'. Meradin Peachey agreed that Covid would not go away completely. She confirmed that there was a lot of research into long-Covid, and NHS services would be altered to account for this. She noted that research suggested that children from low-

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income families were falling further behind academically. She suggested that resources would need to be tailored to reflect research findings. She noted that the 'resilient communities' approach adopted by West Berkshire focused on what communities could do for themselves.

Councillor Lynne Doherty asked, in relation to recent outbreaks, whether schools were doing anything differently and if there was any obvious contributory factor. Matt Pearce indicated that it was often difficult to identify what was driving transmission, since schools were mostly compliant with the guidance. He suggested that the more potent Kent variant was going through schools. He observed that pupils were being tested frequently, although the testing rate in West Berkshire was lower than in other parts of England and stressed the importance of parents as well as pupils being regularly tested.

Councillor Doherty noted the planned move to Step 3 of the Government's roadmap on 17 May and suggested that messages should be sent out in advance of the change to ensure that residents took accountability for continuing to drive numbers down. She asked what else should be done to prepare for the change. Matt Pearce suggested that with indoor mixing, people should increase ventilation, maintain distance, wash their hands regularly and continue with regular testing. He stated that Government would advise when restrictions could be relaxed as the evidence of the impact of the vaccine became clear. Sean Murphy observed that all positive cases were investigated carefully, but within schools these were mostly isolated cases, with only one significant outbreak. Regarding the move to Step 3 of the roadmap, he stated that the Public Protection Partnership was working with businesses to ensure that the required measures were in place, but stressed that the public had a role to play in complying with the rules in order to make premises as secure as possible.

Councillor Steve Masters asked if there was an issue with younger children not understanding the risks and if the risks decreased with older children. Matt Pearce indicated that risks had to be weighed against education benefits. He acknowledged that it was difficult to keep younger children socially distanced. While primary school children were not regularly tested, secondary school pupils were being tested. He confirmed that parents of primary school pupils were being encouraged to test themselves regularly.

Councillor Masters asked what was being done to increase the testing rate amongst school pupils. Matt Pearce suggested that this may be due to the lower infection rates in West Berkshire. He indicated that people were being made aware of how they could access testing and it was being made as easy as possible to get tests through the 'community collect' scheme, the mobile service and the pharmacy service. Also, people were being educated that they had a role to play to regularly test themselves, even if they were not displaying symptoms.

### **145 Communications update**

The Board considered a presentation from Martin Dunscombe (Agenda Item 7) concerning the Covid-19 Situational Report. Key points from the presentation included:

- Community testing had been a key focus for messages, including the community testing centre, the mobile service, pharmacies, etc.
- The Comms Team had been working with schools to get messages out to parents and a letter was being drafted to go out to schools where there had been recent Covid cases.
- The weekly Covid newsletter was still going out to residents.
- There were regular media briefings.
- Messages were going out through social media.

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- The website was being regularly updated.
- Adverts had been placed in Newbury Weekly News and on social media.
- The vaccination programme was being promoted to encourage take-up amongst the under-50s, and to highlight guidance to pregnant women, advising that they should be vaccinated alongside the rest of the population.
- Messages were going out about changes to the Racecourse Vaccination Centre.
- The test and trace service had been promoted.
- The team continued to promote the ‘hands, face, space and fresh air’ guidance.
- With the change of Council Chairman, the opportunity was taken to thank the local community for doing the right thing and to thank community groups and public service workers for their efforts during the outbreak.
- The local Covid booklet highlighting work undertaken and future steps had been made available online, with printed copies to be distributed via community testing centres, libraries, Shaw House and West Berkshire Museum.
- Communications would be developed around the Step 3 changes, advising residents about what would / would not be permitted from 17 May.
- A campaign was being developed around safe use of parks and open spaces, maintaining social distancing, respecting spaces and taking rubbish home – design concepts had been tested with community groups.

Councillor Martha Vickers highlighted that some people, particularly older residents, may be frightened about the relaxation of restrictions and the return to normal life. She asked how they could be helped. The Chairman indicated that there was a role in explaining the situation to residents and backing up messages coming from Government about the current situation, what was happening in the District with regards to Covid, and what the rules were. He indicated that people should be encouraged to venture out and be more active, and emphasised the mental health benefits of connecting with nature (e.g. through walking). Matt Pearce agreed that individuals should be supported. He stated that good relations has been developed with local community groups, including befriending and voluntary sector groups. He suggested that it was important to explain the risks against the overwhelming benefits of connecting with people in a safe way. He indicated that he would work with the Comms Team to address this.

### 146 Future agenda items

The Chairman indicated that following a conversation with Councillor Stewart around Mental Health Awareness Week, it had been proposed to invite someone from Greenham Trust to talk about the Surviving to Thriving Grants and the Community Physical Activity Fund which was about to be relaunched.

He noted that a paper had been taken to Gold that morning, which suggested that the future of the Local Outbreak Engagement Board should be linked to the Government’s roadmap, with a final meeting on 5 July. He suggested that at the LOEB meeting on 21 June, which coincided with the move to Step 4 of the roadmap, the Board could consider the need for future meetings.

### 147 Any other business

No other business was raised.

*(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 6.58 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

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