

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

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 24 MAY 2021**

**Present:** Councillor Dominic Boeck, Councillor Graham Bridgman (Chairman), Nick Carter, Lynne Doherty, Councillor Alan Macro, Councillor Steve Masters, Meradin Peachey, Matt Pearce, Jo Reeves, Andy Sharp and Councillor Joanne Stewart (Vice-Chairman)

**Also Present:** Sean Murphy, Louise James, Gordon Oliver

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Councillor Martha Vickers

### **PART I**

#### **148 Minutes**

The minutes of the previous meeting dated 10 May 2021 were approved as a true and correct record.

#### **149 Declarations of interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

#### **150 Surviving to Thriving Grants and Community Physical Activity Fund**

The Board considered a presentation from Louise James of the Greenham Trust (Agenda Item 4) concerning the Surviving to Thriving Grants and the Community Physical Activity Fund. Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- Discussions with the voluntary sector had highlighted mental health impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions on already vulnerable groups, as well as those previously unaffected by mental health issues.
- The Surviving to Thriving Fund was established with £100,000 from West Berkshire Council and match-funding from Greenham Trust.
- The fund was intended to help organisations deliver activities that supported vulnerable communities as the District emerged from the pandemic.
- The fund was set up in late February.
- Applications were determined by a panel consisting of Council Members, and representatives from Greenham Trust, Public Health and GPs.
- Grants of £500 to £30,000 were available to registered charities, Community Interest Companies and voluntary groups.
- 26 applications had been received to the value of £388,000.
- £93,000 had been awarded to 13 different organisations.
- The Trust was keen to get the word out that funding was still available.
- Applications were made through the Good Exchange platform ([www.goodexchange.com](http://www.goodexchange.com)).
- Greenham Trust was running a wider appeal to raise additional funds - this had already secured £10,000 from the Miss Lawrence Trust and £400 from Hungerford Town Council (<https://app.thegoodexchange.com/project/18741/greenham-trust/surviving-to-thriving-post-covid-a-mental-health-and-wellbeing-fund-for-west-berkshire>).

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- Grants awarded to date ranged from under £2,000 to nearly £18,000, and had been allocated to a broad range of organisations and projects.
- The fund had a provisional end-date of September 2021, but this would be extended if funding was still available.
- If funds ran out before September, the Trust would continue their appeal to try and raise more funds.
- The Community Physical Activity Fund was about to be relaunched, with £40,000 available for projects to support physical activity in local communities.
- Initially targeted at particular wards, the offer would be extended across West Berkshire on a needs basis.
- Information would be posted on the Council's website and there would be joint communications with Greenham Trust.

Councillor Lynne Doherty noted that health was a key priority for recovery, particularly mental health. She noted the bid to the Surviving to Thriving Fund from Friends of Hungerford Primary School for an after-school activity and wondered if the fund had been promoted to schools through the Heads Forums. Louise James confirmed that Nikki Davies had promoted the fund through the schools newsletter.

The Chairman stated that the Physical Activity Fund would invite bids from local communities. He emphasised the links with post-Covid recovery and indicated that the Council wanted to see people who were currently stuck at home getting out and moving around. He indicated that the fund would target areas with higher levels of deprivation. He confirmed that the fund would be relaunched after the Bank Holiday.

### 151 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 latest data from NHS England showed that:
  - 91,443 West Berkshire residents had received their first dose and 41,505 had received their second dose,
  - 74 percent of adult residents in West Berkshire had received at least one vaccination, which was in line with the national average.
- The local data presented was for the week ending 20 May 2021 and covered 91 percent of West Berkshire's population (this was a little behind the NHS England data release).
- Local data showed that 67 percent of West Berkshire's eligible population had received at least one dose (up from 63 percent a fortnight ago), while 33 percent had received both doses (up from 23 percent a fortnight ago) – the priority was currently to target second doses.
- There had been good take-up amongst the over 40 age group.
- Vaccines were now being offered to the 30-39 age group.
- Take-up was below 80 percent for all or most age groups for the following ethnic groups - Chinese, White/Black African, White/Black Caribbean and Any Other Black Background.
- Around 80 percent of high-risks and housebound residents had received their second dose.
- Vaccine take-up amongst residents of the most deprived wards was lower for the 40-49 age group than other parts of West Berkshire, particularly in Greenham – this would be kept under review to see if targeted interventions were required.

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The Chairman noted that vaccine take-up in Thatcham Central and Greenham was broadly in line with other parts of West Berkshire amongst older age groups. He suggested that there may be a lag with residents of these wards coming forward, but they seemed to do so eventually. Jo Reeves agreed.

In relation to the at-risk groups, the Chairman asked why some older people had not come forward for their second dose. Jo Reeves reported that there had been some patients who had been unwell when they were due to have their second dose, so had postponed it until they felt better.

The Chairman sought confirmation that these people would come forward to receive their second dose in time. Jo Reeves confirmed that was the intention, and even where the 12 week period had lapsed, they would still be offered the second dose.

### 152 Covid-19 situational report

Following the Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3), the Chairman invited Matt Pearce to comment on the recent rise in Covid cases in West Berkshire and how future infections could be avoided. Matt Pearce explained that since mid-April, there had been a steady rise in Covid-19 cases in West Berkshire. The latest weekly rate (data released 20 May) was 37.2 per 100,000 population, which was higher than the regional and national averages.

He highlighted the following points:

- i) The current infection rate was much lower than at the peak of the second wave when it was 430 per 100,000 population (600 cases per week). Community transmission was also lower than in the second wave and was lower than current rates in Bolton and Blackburn.
- ii) The increase in cases was not translating to increased hospital admissions or deaths. This reflected the success of the vaccination programme, which was estimated to have saved 13,000 lives in the UK and have kept 40,000 people out of hospital.
- iii) Many of the recent cases in West Berkshire were amongst children and younger adults. While any increase in cases was undesirable, children were rarely seriously affected by Covid.
- iv) Due to the relatively low rate, any large outbreaks caused numbers to fluctuate significantly. If a recent outbreak at a school was removed from the figures, then West Berkshire's rate would be close to the national average.

He noted that Covid-19 would be present for some time, so we would need to learn to live with it and taken precautions to protect ourselves and others. While the easing of restrictions has brought much-needed relief, it was likely that the rate would rise as people mixed more.

He stressed the need for people to play their part and get vaccinated when offered, since evidence showed that two doses provided the best protection. He emphasised the importance of regular testing using lateral flow devices and highlighted ways to obtain these. He also urged people to continue to follow Government guidance of 'hands, face, space and fresh air'.

He provided reassurance that the Council and its partners were doing everything they could – monitoring data, looking at trends, making use of other intelligence from contact tracing and the community, and working with high-risk settings.

He concluded by thanking all those who had worked hard to keep people safe.

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

- West Berkshire's infection rates were higher than those in the other Berkshire authorities and higher than the South East and England averages;
- For the week to 18 May:
  - 1.3 percent of test results were positive;
  - There were 34.1 cases per 100,00 population (all ages);
  - There were 7.5 cases per 100,000 population (age 60+), which had remained unchanged from the previous week;
  - There had been 54 cases of which 20 were related to a large outbreak at a primary school.
- The number of cases had fluctuated significantly in the last few weeks.
- Current infection rates were well below the peak at the start of the year.
- The heat map showed the highest infection rates amongst 5–10 year olds.
- There was a correlation between infections amongst children aged 0-15 and adults aged 30-44, which implied household transmission between children and parents.
- 44 percent of local exposure events were in an education setting.
- Contact tracing was being used to triangulate the information and identify where the risks were.
- 82 percent of common exposure events were in education settings.
- The data did not show that schools were unsafe and it was important to remember that children had not yet been vaccinated.
- Data showed that the number of LFD tests carried out in West Berkshire was higher than the national and regional averages and could therefore be picking up more asymptomatic cases.
- There were two patients in the Royal Berkshire Hospital with Covid, with two new admissions in the last 7 days. No patients were on mechanical ventilation.
- There had been no Covid related deaths recorded in Royal Berkshire Hospitals since 7 May.
- West Berkshire's all-cause mortality rate was 16 percent higher than the previous 5 year average (equivalent to 233 additional deaths).
- Further information was available on [www.berkshirepublichealth.co.uk](http://www.berkshirepublichealth.co.uk).

Councillor Steve Masters asked if there would continue to be an underlying rate of Covid or could a zero rate be achieved. Matt Pearce suggested that it was likely there would be an underlying presence of Covid for the foreseeable future. He stressed the importance of minimising transmission of variants of concern.

Councillor Masters asked if there had been more referrals for Long-Covid. Matt Pearce confirmed that did not yet have the data, but he had contacted Public Health England and they were going to send him the latest modelling.

The Chairman noted that people in their 30s and 40s were currently being vaccinated, and many were not currently protected. He noted that the data implied that children were bringing Covid home and passing it to their parents, but asked for confirmation that once the 30-44 age group was vaccinated, their children would not infect them. Matt Pearce confirmed that was correct. He highlighted the low infection rate amongst older residents, which showed the vaccination programme had been successful. He expected infection rates to fall amongst other age groups as more people were vaccinated. He agreed it was likely that infections amongst the 30-44 age group would be predominantly parents

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of schoolchildren. He stressed the need for parents to regularly test themselves, since primary school children were not routinely tested.

Councillor Lynne Doherty asked if the data only showed recorded tests and suggested that residents were not always recording the results. Matt Pearce confirmed the figures were for recorded tests only and stressed the importance of residents recording test results on the NHS website, and getting a confirmatory PCR test if the LFD test was positive. This ensured that the Contract Tracing system was alerted, so others could be protected who may have been in contact with them.

### 153 Communications update

The Board considered a presentation from Martin Dunscombe (Agenda Item 7) concerning Covid related communications. Key points from the presentation included:

- Community testing remained a key theme - emphasising its importance and letting people know how they could access testing.
- Adverts had gone out in the Newbury Weekly News (NWN).
- Adverts had also gone out on social media, reaching 120,000 people, with people typically seeing the adverts 7 times.
- The residents' newsletter was being opened between 35,000 and 40,000 times each week.
- Parents had been contacted, to emphasise the importance of regular testing, targeting schools with outbreaks initially, followed by a letter to all parents.
- The mobile testing facilities had been promoted to parish councils and residents.
- NHS messages on vaccinations had been shared as they were released. These used key influencers to get the messages across to younger age groups.
- Discussions were being held with CCG colleagues to discuss how the approach should be adapted for a younger audience (e.g. use of Snapchat, TikTok, etc).
- Efforts were also being made to engage younger people who did not have access to digital channels.
- A new digital and physical campaign was to be launched around parks and open spaces, which were predicted to be well-used over the summer. This had been co-designed with local communities to ensure messages resonated with local people. Key messages were around: enjoying spaces safely, respecting others, and taking rubbish home.
- There had been promotions around mental health, including the Surviving to Thriving Fund and Mental Health Awareness Week, with adverts in NWN and on social media, a social media take-over day, and an article in the residents' newsletter.
- Planned future campaigns included:
  - Vaccine communications for 18-30 year olds;
  - Continued promotion of community testing;
  - Confirmatory PCR tests for positive LFD test results;
  - Social distancing at school gates; and
  - Informing communities about the increase in cases.

Councillor Jo Stewart thanked the Comms Team for their effective campaigns, particularly the Surviving to Thriving Fund. She welcomed the Parks and Open Spaces campaign, noting that these spaces were being used more than ever, and asked to be closely involved in looking at how to get the message across about taking litter home.

The Chairman acknowledged Councillor Stewart's litter-picking efforts and reported that he had been involved in litter-picking in Mortimer.

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Councillor Steve Masters asked if the Local Outbreak Engagement Board could be broadcast on Facebook and other social media, to increase engagement. He noted that the 'Ask Lynne' sessions had been popular. Martin Dunscombe confirmed that the meetings were not currently being streamed to Facebook, but he offered to look at available options.

Councillor Alan Macro thanked the Comms Team for their hard work. He asked whether anything was being done with the Reading media, since residents in the east of the District did not read the Newbury Weekly News. Martin Dunscombe replied that adverts had been run in the Reading Chronicle and in the Penny Post. He also reported that Facebook advertising had targeted people across the whole of West Berkshire and had reached 120,000 people.

### 154 Future agenda items

The Chairman asked that future meetings should include an item on the work of the Public Protection Partnership, since this was particularly important with the move to Step 4 in the Covid Roadmap, when restrictions would be further relaxed.

The Chairman proposed that meetings be scheduled for 7 June and for 21 June, which was the provisional date for lifting of restrictions. He indicated that the meetings served a useful purpose and, although the number of viewers was low, the media were picking up on key messages. He also suggested that the need for further meetings would be reviewed again on the 21 June.

### 155 Any other business

The Chairman asked for a brief update on the work of the Public Protection Partnership (PPP).

Sean Murphy gave a short verbal update covering the following points:

- Notifications were being monitored 7 days a week.
- Covid cases in high-risk settings were being investigated.
- The PPP was working closely with the Public Health Team and Public Health England.
- The PPP was looking at how the Local Contact Tracing service could be improved further.
- Recently, there had been a focus on readiness for Step 3 of the Covid Roadmap, with an online seminar for local businesses on changes affecting indoor hospitality.
- Advisory and compliance checks had been undertaken.
- Work had been done with parish councils around holding physical meetings safely following the expiry of the emergency regulations.
- There had been a recent meeting of the Safety Advisory Group to look at the latest set of event applications.

*(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 7.02 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

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