

LOCAL OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD (PUBLIC)

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 7 JUNE 2021

Present: Councillor Dominic Boeck, Councillor Graham Bridgman (Chairman), Councillor Lynne Doherty, Meradin Peachey, Matt Pearce, Jo Reeves and Andy Sharp

Also Present: Martin Dunscombe, Sean Murphy and Gordon Oliver

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Nick Carter, Councillor Steve Masters, Councillor Joanne Stewart and Councillor Martha Vickers

PART I

156 Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting dated 23 May 2021 were approved as a true and correct record.

157 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were received.

158 Vaccination programme update

The Board considered a presentation from Jo Reeves (Agenda Item 4) concerning the vaccination programme. Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- The latest data from NHS England, which covered 91 percent of West Berkshire's population and was accurate to 27 May, showed that:
 - 73 percent (82,557) of West Berkshire's eligible population had received at least their first vaccination, up from 67 percent two weeks ago.
 - 46 percent (52,171) of West Berkshire's eligible population had received their second vaccination, up from 33 percent two weeks ago.
 - 95 percent of West Berkshire's over-50 population and 53 percent of those aged 18-49 had had at least one vaccination.
- 30-33 year olds became eligible for vaccination on 26 May, and 25-29 year olds would become eligible on 8 June.
- Vaccination rates in ethnic minority groups were lower, but increasing quickly, particularly amongst the younger age groups.
- Vaccination take-up in at-risk groups was high, and comparable with the national picture.
- Take-up was lagging in more deprived areas of West Berkshire - Jo Reeves to raise with the West Berkshire Vaccine Inequalities Group.
- The Chairman noted that take-up within the more deprived areas appeared to catch up with the rest of the district over time. He asked whether the number of people who had received their first dose but not their second had reduced. Jo Reeves confirmed that it had amongst at-risk groups, but she did not have the data for the deprived wards, but overall the number not coming forward for their second dose was very small.

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Councillor Alan Macro asked what could be done to encourage people to receive their vaccinations, particularly their second. Jo Reeves responded that people need to be reminded that second doses were still available even if people miss their appointment, and that vaccines were very accessible through the NHS website and booking system and to refer to their GP if they were encountering difficulties.

Councillor Alan Macro noted that availability on the website was constantly changing and suggested that people should be encouraged to keep trying if vaccines were not accessible at their local centre. Jo Reeves agreed that this point needed to be made within communications.

159 Covid-19 situational report

The Board considered a presentation from Matthew Pearce (Agenda Item 5) on the Covid-19 Situational Report. Key points were as follows:

- Data released 1 June 2021 showed that weekly case rates were increasing in four of the six local Berkshire authorities, with a high prevalence of the Delta variant.
- West Berkshire saw a slight reduction to 21.5 cases per 100,000 population, and had the second lowest rate in Berkshire.
- West Berkshire's 7-day case rates has fluctuated since March, linked to local outbreaks.
- No Covid related deaths had been recorded in West Berkshire since the week commencing 7 May.
- There were three Covid patients in Royal Berkshire Hospital, but none were on mechanical ventilation.
- Due to vaccination rates and a higher rate of social mixing, younger age groups constituted the majority of new Covid-19 cases in West Berkshire.
- There were no geographical 'hot-spots' in West Berkshire.
- It was noted that all viruses mutated over time, with variants of concern being those that spread more quickly or had more severe effects.
- Of the five Variants of Concern, the Delta variant (originating in India) was most concerning. It was estimated to be 40 percent more transmissible. It would likely become the dominant strain over the coming weeks, and accounted for 73 percent of sequenced cases.
- Most of the Delta variant cases were amongst people yet to be vaccinated
- Two doses of the vaccine had been shown to provide good protection against the Delta variant and for those who were infected, fewer required hospitalisation.
- Surge testing (enhanced contact tracing and door-to-door testing) had begun in areas of Reading and Wokingham to identify asymptomatic cases.
- Uptake of the vaccine across all age groups should be encouraged, and individuals that lived, worked or studied in Reading and Wokingham should get PCR tested.

Meradin Peachey added that only 60 percent of Covid cases were sequenced and prevalence of the Delta variant was thought to be an under-estimate. Nearly all outbreaks in Reading and Wokingham were linked to the Delta variant. She noted that sequencing data took up to three weeks to be reported. The Delta variant was dominant in the North of England and was expected become so in the South, with higher hospitalisation rates expected. She confirmed that cases in Reading and Wokingham were not linked to travel and surge testing was underway to identify asymptomatic cases. She noted that outbreaks in schools in these areas appeared to start with parents.

Andy Sharp asked whether there was any modelling around hospital admissions and whether there would be issues around other respiratory problems. Meradin Peachey

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responded that there was no systematic modelling, as it is very difficult to know the criteria for modelling Covid-19 variants. Matthew Pearce added that modelling had been attempted, but it was too limited to be useful.

Councillor Lynne Doherty asked how a West Berkshire resident working in an affected area of Reading would go about getting a PCR test, and what advice and information was being offered to them. Meradin Peachey responded that information on up to sixteen testing centres was available on the Reading and Wokingham Borough Council websites, and that the Councils were approaching schools and local businesses to discuss dropping off PCR test kits for people to test themselves.

Matthew Pearce and Meradin Peachey noted that it would be useful to inform residents of the difference between PCR and lateral flow testing, as only PCR tests could be sequenced.

Councillor Alan Macro asked for confirmation that PCR testing could be accessed through Reading and Wokingham Borough Council's websites. Meradin Peachey confirmed this, and noted the need for this to be communicated through West Berkshire Council's website.

The Chairman noted that around three percent of people who had received both vaccine doses had contracted Covid. He questioned whether the incidence of the Delta variant correlated with vaccination data. Matthew Pearce responded that it did, as the younger age groups who had not been fully vaccinated accounted for the majority of cases. Meradin Peachey indicated that it was reasonable to expect infection rates of up to five percent amongst fully vaccinated patients. The Chairman asked whether those who had been vaccinated were less ill, which Meradin Peachey confirmed.

160 Public Protection Partnership update

The Board considered a presentation from Sean Murphy, Public Protection Manager (Agenda Item 6) on the work of the Public Protection Partnership in relation to COVID-19. Key points were as follows:

- The PPP was seeking to contain outbreaks through:
 - 7-day monitoring of cases in high risk settings, such as workplaces, schools, care settings and early years
 - data and information from test and trace and from settings
 - looking for clusters, outbreaks and trends
 - outbreak investigation and Incident Management Teams
 - contact tracing (low levels in April and May)
 - intelligence-led audits of settings with common exposure
 - quarantine facilities
- In terms of compliance, the PPP had advised on Step 2 (retail, hospitality and close contact) and Step 3 (indoor hospitality) with business briefings, working with the Newbury Business Improvement District.
- 330 intelligence-led and risk-based compliance visits had been made in April and May to settings such as hospitality, retail, gyms, hairdressers, barbers and nail bars.
- 85 service requests on COVID-19 matters had been received from businesses and the public in April and May.
- Compliance was generally good, and follow-up visits and notices were made where appropriate.

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- The PPP had been notified of 67 events, and 12 had been considered by the Safety Advisory Group - these included markets, theatre, arts, sports and music events, and events at the Newbury Racecourse.
- A significant amount of work with event organisers had been conducted, including risk management and wider safety matters, as well as Covid-19, and compliance checks had been carried out based on risk.
- Many organisations were awaiting the announcement on the move to Step 4 of the Covid roadmap and preparations were being made for changes to Covid-19 restrictions on 21 June.

161 Communications update

The Board considered a verbal update on Communications from Martin Dunscombe (Agenda Item 7). Key points were as follows:

- Surge testing had been a focus over the past few days, with testing underway in areas of Reading and Wokingham. Communications were concerned with residents' questions about Delta cases and what the Council's decision was with regards to surge testing.
- The Communications Team had put out a statement in cooperation with Public Health, on the Council's position not to commence surge testing. Links to surge testing information in Reading and Wokingham Borough Councils were included as part of the statement. The statement also acknowledged that some West Berkshire residents worked or studied in Reading and Wokingham and Education colleagues were disseminating this to schools.
- Communications had been informing residents on the importance of receiving their vaccinations over the past few weeks. With 25-29 year olds becoming eligible, attention was being given to informing younger residents and encouraging them to take up the offer.
- Communications had continued to remind people to undertake community testing and the importance of a PCR test where lateral flow tests were positive.
- People using Parks and Open Spaces were being reminded to use these spaces responsibly and continue to be mindful of social distancing regulations.
- In advance of the Step 4 announcement and changes to lockdown policy on 21 June, the Communications Team was considering what further activity would be needed.

Councillor Alan Macro questioned whether students living in areas with surge testing and studying in West Berkshire were being encouraged to get tested. Martin Dunscombe replied that the Communications Team was working with colleagues in each council and that information flow between them was working both ways. He undertook to follow up with Matthew Pearce to confirm that.

The Chairman noted communications for the Let's Get Active campaign, encouraging people to get outside as lockdown was eased.

162 Future meetings and agenda items

The Chairman proposed that the meeting on 21 June be held, regardless of the decision around Step 4 of the Covid Roadmap, and the further lifting of restrictions. He suggested that further meetings would be reviewed on a rolling basis from 21 June.

163 Any other business

No other business was raised.

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

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature