

LOCAL OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD (PUBLIC)

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 19 JULY 2021

Present: Councillor Dominic Boeck, Graham Bridgman (Chairman), Nick Carter, Lynne Doherty, Steve Masters, Matt Pearce and Jo Reeves

Also Present: Martin Dunscombe (Communications Manager) and Sean Murphy (Public Protection Manager), Christine Elsasser (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Meradin Peachey and Councillor Martha Vickers

PART I

181 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2021 were approved as a true and correct record.

182 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

183 Covid-19 situational report

The Board considered a presentation from Matthew Pearce (Agenda Item 4) on the Covid-19 situational report. Key points were as follows:

- The latest data showed a reduction in testing rates at national and regional levels and in all areas of Berkshire apart from Bracknell Forest.
- The positivity rate for infection in West Berkshire was 6.4 percent, which was lower than the regional and national averages.
- Cases in West Berkshire were 215.2 per 100,000; also below regional and national averages. (The most recent data was 250 per 100,000.)
- Cases amongst the 60+ age group had risen to 49.7 per 100,000.
- The highest weekly rates were amongst young people aged 15-29, but rates were increasing in older age groups.
- There had been a significant rise across all age groups across the District with a total of 7,788 confirmed cases from the start of the pandemic.
- The epidemic curve graphs clearly indicated the UK was experiencing a third wave of the pandemic. In West Berkshire, there had been a 58 percent rise in cases from the 2 weeks previous and a 257 percent increase from the week previous to that.
- There had been 255 Covid-19 related deaths in West Berkshire since the start of the pandemic, but there had been no deaths reported in the last 2 weeks; it is clear vaccinations were having a positive impact on the death rate.
- There was a slight increase in hospital admissions in the District with 18 new Covid-19 admissions between the 5th and 11th of July and 6 confirmed patients in hospital with 1 on mechanical ventilation.
- It was stressed that the pandemic was not over yet and there was still a need for caution and restraint. There was uncertainty in the modelling around this because much was dependent on our behaviour.

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- The key messages were around protective measures and interventions rather than restrictions. These included: testing, isolation, vaccination, face covering in crowded areas.
- Differential in 2 types of tests - the Lateral flow was for those with no symptoms and the PCR was for those with symptoms, and were sent away for processing. Home testing kits were available online or in pharmacies and various areas in communities on the Council website.

Discussion occurred around the number of cases and around age ranges affected. Matt Pearce said there had been rises in cases across all age ranges and this was likely due to increased socialisation from easing of restrictions; he concluded that the message should be encouragement of a more gradual mixing with caution still in place.

A question was posed on how hospitalisation and vaccination rates were correlated and if there was any data to suggest that the unvaccinated groups would require more hospitalisations. Matt Pearce confirmed that the data was not available to the public but that the most important thing everyone could do to protect themselves was to get vaccinated.

Questions were also asked around further measures of surge testing and if contingencies were in place for a drastic surge in cases requiring hospitalisations. Matt Pearce said that the modelling for that was difficult because so much of it was dependent on the new variants and National government frameworks; however, he said this would always be under review.

Discussion occurred around Lateral Flow Test availability and whether it would meet the demand. Matt Pearce confirmed that as far as he was aware there were sufficient tests available and that there was more of a problem with people collecting the tests and determining their use and requirements for them.

Discussion also occurred around how there appeared to be little clarity surrounding regulations for large events, testing, vaccine passports and cross-border issues and whether there should be a communication plan around this. Matt Pearce and Sean Murphy said that details were still being worked through, but much of the responsibility was on venues and businesses, and although this action was not compulsory, the Council would provide local business advice to those who required it.

184 Vaccination programme update

The Board considered a presentation from Jo Reeves (Agenda Item 5) on the Vaccination programme update. Key points were as follows:

- Latest data showed that 116,601 first doses of the vaccine and 89,491 second doses of the vaccine had been given to West Berkshire residents. With just over 122,000 adult residents able to receive the vaccination, that meant that only 5,000 adult residents had not been vaccinated based on GP systems data. Therefore 86.1 percent of adults over 18 in West Berkshire had now received the vaccination – similar to the rest of England.
- There had been an increase in take-up for the vaccine among the younger age group. From the 5 July 2021 there had been an increase of 7 percent for first vaccinations amongst both the 18-24 and 25-29 age groups.
- The largest increase of take up of the vaccine in West Berkshire had been between 18-19 year olds. And 68 percent of residents aged 18-29 had been vaccinated which was up by 47 percent from 2 weeks ago.
- In regards to ethnicity, Asians and British Asians had the highest percentage vaccine take up amongst 18-24 year olds. Uptakes of the vulnerable and at risk

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groups has increased to 80 percent with growth continuing in the take up for second doses.

- In terms of the more deprived wards in West Berkshire, the gap in uptake amongst people in their 20s remained large and therefore this was being monitored carefully with further community engagement encouraged.

Jo Reeves concluded that in the coming weeks she would be able to report back on boosters for vulnerable age groups and would have more information on a possible vaccination program for vulnerable over 12s.

Discussion occurred around how difficult it was to now find out information on what was going on and where to go for vaccines due to all of the micro popup clinics. It was noted that although there were now more places to go, there appeared to be less guidance. Advice to those having difficulties finding out this information was to use the national booking website or alternatively, the CCG website instead because the popup clinics were very specific to communities.

185 Public Protection Partnership update

The Board considered a presentation from Sean Murphy (Agenda Item 6) on the Public Protection Partnership update. Key points were as follows:

Business Update

- The Council still maintained No.3 regulations which gave power to enforce restrictions on premises and venues that the Council felt were of concern and these would stay in place until the end of September despite other business related regulations being revoked on 19 July.
- Guidance provided appeared to have been very helpful to businesses when undertaking their risk assessments.
- An emphasis had been given to businesses on continuity and issues around perceptions and expectations of the customer that business were following measures to keep them safe.
- 50 events were due to take place over the coming months and the Council was still receiving event management and risk assessments sent through despite the change in restrictions, which was reassuring.
- Primary focus was being given to businesses where previously there had been issues with compliance.

Outbreaks and Tracing

- Most problem areas were within schools and early years. There had been a small number of clusters in retail settings, with those being examined thoroughly for common exposures, etc.
- Isolation call numbers were up significantly from 470 in May to 1,200 so far in July and therefore more support was required as one officer was dealing with this at the moment.

Contact Tracing

- Rates were increasing rapidly especially within the last 7 days and the team were looking for more short-term support to help deal with this increase.

186 Communications update

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

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Move to step 4

- Local support given to national message regarding Step 4 of lockdown easing, whilst considering the impacts on the Council's own services.
- There had been a shift to personal responsibility and making good choices rather than national guidance: good hygiene, masks and ventilation for businesses.
- There had been promotion of sensible key messages such as: self-isolation when required, sensible precautions (face masks and distancing), get the jab, and get tested when necessary.

Coming up

- National campaign around personal choices.
- New videos on 2nd jabs and work with local leaders.
- Encouragement of compliance with the rules.
- Awareness of long-Covid (the Council was looking for people willing to be case studies).
- Vaccinations.
- Community testing.

187 Future meetings and agenda items

It was agreed that the Board should meet again on 2 August 2021, with a further meeting pencilled in for 16 August 2021.

Members were encouraged to email the Chairman with requests for additional agenda items.

188 Any other business

It was highlighted that Government was looking at Covid passports for crowded venues, but there was no definition on what constituted a crowded venue. **Action Point: Matt Pearce and Sean Murphy to look into the Government guidance and report back to the next meeting on 2 August 2021.**

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 6.59 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature