

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

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 6 SEPTEMBER 2021**

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

**Also Present:** Martin Dunscombe (Communications Manager), Sean Murphy (Public Protection Manager), and Jack Karimi (Democratic Services Officer)

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Andy Sharp

### **PART I**

#### **206 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 August 2021 were approved as a true and correct record.

#### **207 Declarations of interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

#### **208 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 number of cases per week had increased to 354.7 per 100,000, with 156.2 per 100,000 for residents aged 60+.
- The percentage of positive tests had increased to 9.7% - this was higher than the national and regional averages and was the highest of the Berkshire local authorities.
- Case rates were highest amongst those aged 11-24 years. Cases amongst 15-16 year olds had increased by 143% to 1,771 per 100,000.
- Testing rates amongst 11-16 year olds had significantly risen, with the return to school seen as a factor.
- The number of admissions to the Royal Berkshire Foundation Trust hospitals had risen slightly. Six people had been admitted in the previous two weeks, and there were 43 people in hospital on 31st August. Zero deaths had been reported in the last two weeks.

The Chairman noted that West Berkshire's rates had increased significantly relative to other areas and asked why. Matthew Pearce said that the reasons were unclear. He suggested that Reading Festival may have been a contributory factor, but it was difficult to understand the exact reasons. He also suggested that because West Berkshire had previously enjoyed low rates of Covid infections, there may be less immunity within the local population.

Councillor Lynne Doherty asked about the correlation between Covid rates and when vaccinations were rolled out to each age group. Matthew Pearce noted that there was a correlation and he also noted that younger age groups were more likely to socially mix.

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Councillor Steve Masters noted that the number of cases amongst residents aged 19-24 had declined while younger residents had significantly risen. He suggested that cases amongst those aged 17-18 would be expected to fall as more were vaccinated. He asked whether the policy on not vaccinating school-age children would be reconsidered. Matthew Pearce responded that many of the outbreaks were starting in the community rather than schools, and an announcement was awaited from the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) in relation to the 12-15 age group. The JCVI did not consider there to be a particular health benefit for this group, but the CMO would look at the wider health impact and make the decision. He noted that once a decision was made, the priority for the Council was ensuring the correct information was provided on the issue, and that preparations for vaccinating the 12-15 age groups were underway in preparation for any decision.

Councillor Lynne Doherty asked whether hospitalisations were of unvaccinated residents. Matthew Pearce responded that they were mostly unvaccinated or had received a single dose, and many of the individuals had additional risk factors. The Chairman agreed.

Councillor Doherty asked whether the 16-17 age group would be offered a second vaccination. Matthew Pearce responded that there were no plans for a second vaccination for this age group at this time.

### 209 Vaccination programme update

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

- 233,009 vaccinations had been given to residents of West Berkshire.
- 87.2% of residents aged 16+ had received at least one dose, and 80.2% had received both doses.
- 64.6% of 16-17 year olds had received their first vaccination.
- Clinics at Northcroft and Kennet School had been popular.
- Vaccines had been offered in Lambourn, targeted at the racing community.
- Vaccines had also been offered at the Community United cricket match.
- Some residents from West Berkshire had gone to neighbouring areas to get their vaccine, including Reading and Basingstoke.
- Only 29% of 16-17 year olds in the most deprived areas of Greenham had received their vaccine compared to 42% in the most deprived area of Thatcham Central, but the cohort was very small and although the percentage difference appeared significant, the difference was just three people.
- Planning was underway for vaccinating vulnerable 12-15 year olds, and third doses for severely immunosuppressed patients, and shadow planning was underway for a universal offer to 12-15 year olds, and booster doses.

Councillor Lynne Doherty asked why 16-17 year olds West Berkshire in West Berkshire did not have the same vaccination opportunities as those in Reading and Bracknell, and noted that Boots and the Kennet Centre were not offering vaccinations to this cohort. Jo Reeves responded that local Primary Care Networks (PCNs) had been involved in Phase 1 of the vaccination programme, but not Phase 2. People aged 18-50 had been given their vaccination at a mass vaccination centre, a pop-up clinic or a community pharmacy. Because the PCNs were not participating in Phase 2, they were unable to mobilise at short notice to cover the 16-17 age group. However, she noted that most surgeries would be opting into Phase 3 to give booster jabs.

Councillor Doherty asked why the PCNs had not agreed to be involved in Phase 2. The Chairman suggested that it was something to raise at Health and Wellbeing Board or with

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the Chairman of the Health Scrutiny Committee. Jo Reeves noted that the vaccination centre at Newbury Racecourse had been a huge undertaking and surgeries had been keen to get back to patient care.

Councillor Jo Stewart asked whether it would be possible for somebody living in West Berkshire to be vaccinated in a walk-in centre outside of the district. Jo Reeves responded that it would be possible, as boundaries did not apply when using the national booking service, and residents were encouraged to be vaccinated at the centre nearest to them. However, if they were using their local service, they had to wait for their GP to invite them to visit a local site, which may be shared between surgeries.

Councillor Steve Masters asked if there was a timetable for future pop-up vaccination centres. Jo Reeves responded within the presentation that there would be two vaccination dates at Newbury College on 13-14th September, Hungerford Town Hall on 16th September, and Riverside Community Centre on 25th September.

Councillor Doherty asked if there was a plan for the vaccination bus/van to return in eight weeks for second vaccinations.

Councillor Dominic Boeck asked if it was beneficial for people to make bookings at pop-up clinics. Jo Reeves responded that it was advised to book, but the centres were prepared for drop-in residents.

Councillor Masters asked whether there would be pop-up clinics in rural parts of the east of the district. Jo Reeves responded that there was a conflicting demand between pop-up centres for second doses and finding new sites. She confirmed that analysis was being done to see where facilities would be most effective.

The Chairman noted that West of Reading Villages PCN was operating out of Pangbourne while the other PCNs were reliant on walk-in sites, pop-ups or the vaccine van. Jo Reeves observed that there were still parts of Newbury Town Centre with low take-up rates. She noted that a combination of mass vaccination, localised approaches through the PCNs and neighbourhood approaches utilising the van had worked well.

The Chairman asked if there was a difference between a third primary dose and a booster dose. Jo Reeves and Meradin Peachey confirmed that there was not.

### **210 Public Protection Partnership update**

The Board considered a presentation from Sean Murphy (Agenda Item 5) on the work of the Public Protection Partnership (PPP). Key points were as follows:

- Over the course of the month of August, the number of contact tracing cases for PPP had increased from 59 to over 150.
- There had been a number of outbreaks in early years settings and some isolated cases in high-risk settings such as care homes.
- The number of isolation calls had increased, and resources had been directed to those with confirmed cases rather than contacts of confirmed cases.
- The number of calls to the hub had increased from one or two per day to 10 per day.
- Positive feedback had been received in relation to isolation calls made and the isolation packs. The packs were in the process of being updated.
- Business support was ongoing, including offering masks to services such as taxis, encouraging use of ventilation and testing amongst staff.
- Visits had been made to hotels accommodating refugees settled in the district from Afghanistan to discuss protecting them from Covid-19.

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- The number of cases linked to events had been relatively low. A number of larger events were planned in the local area and the PPP continued to work with organisers who were mostly following the guidance.

### 211 Communications update

Martin Dunscombe provided a verbal update on Covid-19 related communications (Agenda Item 7). Key points from the presentation were:

- Communications activities had been focused on the importance and availability of community vaccines, and promotion of vaccination opportunities via a new web page: <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/covid-vaccination>.
- A digital campaign had been launched for 16-17 year olds, working with other teams (e.g. Education and Newbury College) to promote details.
- An online booking form had been launched and had received almost 500 bookings for the Northcroft pop-up clinic.
- The newsletter was still being read 36,000 times.
- Paid ads had been run on social media across three platforms.

### 212 Revised terms of reference

The Chairman presented the item on the draft Revised Terms of Reference (Agenda Item 8). These set out the proposed change of the Local Outbreak Engagement Board from a regular meeting to meeting only when required to respond to changes in circumstances, such as a significant outbreak, a rise in community cases, a major change in national policy with local implications, or a major incident across the Thames Valley. The opportunity had also been taken to update the membership of the Board. The Chairman noted that his portfolio needed to be updated to remove Culture and Leisure.

**Resolved that:** the revised terms of reference be approved.

### 213 Future meetings and agenda items

The Chairman noted that under the revised Terms of Reference, in addition to requiring a majority of the Members to be in favour of standing the Board down, Matthew Pearce or Meradin Peachey (or both of them if they were both present) must also be in favour of doing so. He noted that the Board could be stood up again by the Chairman or Matthew Pearce as Service Director - Communities and Wellbeing, without the need for a vote.

Matthew Pearce noted that the Covid rate in West Berkshire was above the national average for the first time. He advised not to stand the Board down immediately and to review the situation again at the next meeting. Councillor Steve Masters endorsed this assessment, citing the rising number of Covid cases. Councillor Jo Stewart agreed, noting schools had returned and the pending guidance in relation to vaccinations for 12-15 year olds. The Chairman accepted the advice to proceed with fortnightly meetings. He indicated that the frequency of meetings could be varied based on the advice of Matthew Pearce and Meradin Peachey.

In terms of future items, Councillor Steve Masters asked for an update from the Education Department on cases in the first two weeks at schools. Councillor Dominic Boeck suggested that it may be premature for this to come to the next meeting, but agreed in principle that it was a good idea.

Councillor Dominic Boeck asked for an item on vaccinations for 12-15 year olds, to better understand the policy and the potential reaction of parents to a universal offer.

The Chairman set the next meeting for 20th September 2021 at 6 pm.

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**214 Any other business**

No other business was raised.

*(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.30 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

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