

LOCAL OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD (PUBLIC)

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 2021

Councillors Present: Councillor Dominic Boeck, Councillor Graham Bridgman (Chairman), Councillor Steve Masters, Councillor Andy Moore (Substitute), Meradin Peachey, Matt Pearce, Jo Reeves, Andy Sharp, Councillor Joanne Stewart (Vice-Chairman) and Katie Summers

Also Present: Martin Dunscombe (Communications Manager), Ginnie Garnett (Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust), Susan Halliwell (Executive Director - Place), Mark Lewis (Strategic Commissioning & Compliance Manager) and Sean Murphy (Public Protection Manager), Jack Karimi (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Martha Vickers

PART I

(The Chairman was unable to join the Zoom call. The Vice Chairman acted as Chairman.)

215 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2021 were approved as a true and correct record.

216 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

217 Education service update

Mark Lewis presented the Covid-19 Education Service Update, noting that it was a positive, but busy start to the term.

- 513 cases had been reported from the beginning of term, up to the previous week.
- The biggest cause of these cases were from secondary schools, with primary schools accounting for 27%.
- Schools dealt with cases professionally and were aware of guidance, and were able to manage the number of causes and implement risk assessments. A number of enquiries had been directed.
- Number of cases was likely to rise over the next few days as information came up.

Matthew Pearce commended Mark Lewis' work, and noted that schools were appreciative of the work that had been undertaken.

218 Covid-19 situational report

Matthew Pearce gave an update on Covid-19 cases, hospitalisations and deaths within the district.

- There had been a dramatic drop in the number of cases, with 178 cases per 100,000 and 4.6% of tests confirmed positive. 282 cases had been registered in the last seven days.
- In the space of a couple of weeks, West Berkshire has gone from one of the highest case numbers in the region to below the national average.

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- Case numbers in 17-18 year old and 19-24 year old groups were steadily falling and were now below 500.
- A large spike in the 11-16 year old age group had occurred in early September but had now settled.
- No new Covid-19 admissions occurred as of 12th September. There were 34 Covid-19 patients in hospital.
- No new deaths had been reported in the previous two weeks.
- Since March 2020, West Berkshire's mortality rate had raised by 16%, numbering 288 additional deaths.

The Vice Chairman noted that the Reading Festival could not be pointed to as a reason for the sudden rise in cases, due to attendees being from all over the country.

Councillor Steve Masters noted that it was reassuring that rates were significantly lower, and asked what could be done to ensure people were not too complacent. Matthew Pearce responded that a range of measures had been put in place, and national guidance was being followed. The Council recently published a Winter Plan, and the flu vaccine was being planned. Matthew Pearce noted that it was difficult to model, but would increase around Christmas due to indoor socialising.

(The Chairman was able to join the call and took over as Chairman.)

219 Vaccination programme update

Katie Summers presented the Covid-19 vaccine programme update.

- The vaccine offer was evergreen, and so people who had not claimed the vaccination for whatever reason would be able to get it at any point moving forward.
- Phase 3 consisted of the early booster vaccination programme. In Stage 1, all residents in a care home, frontline social care workers, those who are over 70, and those who were immunocompromised were first to be vaccinated. All of those within a care home would be offered the vaccination by 1st November unless it had been less than six months since their second vaccination.
- Stage 2 primarily consisted of those over 50.
- The Health on the Move van would continue to be used, however, it had been halted while 12-15 year olds were vaccinated.
- The lead GP programme for homeless vaccination was additionally underway.
- 90.1% of Phase 1 and 65.9% of Phase 2 had been fully vaccinated, and 64.7% of 16-17 year olds within Phase 2 had been vaccinated.

Andy Sharp asked whether there would be an arrangement for booster vaccinations for staff in care homes. Katie Summers responded that practices within care homes will have the option to vaccinate care staff, but it will be down to the individual PCN. There will not be a similar arrangement as with the initial vaccination programme due to the workload.

Andy Sharp asked what the arrangement was for vaccination within care homes not under a PCN. Katie Summers responded that there was an arrangement underway.

The Chairman asked if there was a different programme for care home residents and workers. Katie Summers responded that GPs all have an advanced service contract to deliver vaccinations for residents. Health and social care workers were vaccinated under the general vaccination programme. The Chairman noted that everybody in the building was vaccinated without distinction, and asked whether there was a difference. Katie Summers responded that it was, and it was a cause for concern.

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Ginnie Garnett presented an update on the expansion of the vaccination programme to 12-15 year olds.

- The two special schools had been visited and fully vaccinated within the first two weeks of term.
- There have been administrative delays in the vaccinations of 12-15 year olds, and while there was a deadline to provide a universal offer to 12-15 year olds, there would be a delay.
- The vaccination programme coincided with the programme for childhood flu, and so added 50,000 vaccinations to the caseload. Inquiries as to whether both can be given at the same time confirmed that it could.
- Two webinars had been held for headteachers, covering issues such as a child consenting where a parent had not.
- Vaccinations were offered by academic year group, and therefore would be given from Years 8-11. While there was guidance to offer it to Year 7s, this would not go ahead as it was difficult to ascertain that a child had reached their 12th birthday.
- A digital, web-based consent process was in place, and Government guidance was that a child could self-consent, provided they were Gillick competent. The recent ruling in the Bell v Tavistock appeal had reaffirmed this practice.
- There would be a separate and direct process for vaccinating asylum seekers and homeschooled children.
- There was no process for parents to opt out to allow children to be vaccinated elsewhere, except in some cases. Children who are extremely clinically vulnerable would be referred to a GP, as were children who had recently tested positive for Covid.
- Staff would be reassigned from the mass vaccination programme to do school visits.

The Chairman asked how many 17-18 year olds had missed vaccination. Ginnie Garnett did not have that to hand, but responded anecdotally that most were very energetic about receiving their vaccinations. Katie Summers responded that 64.7% of 16-17 year olds within West Berkshire had been vaccinated.

The Chairman asked how many had responded to the digital consent process. Ginnie Garnett responded that 470 had consented to the vaccine through the process, and that it would be a closely-monitored to ensure safety and vaccine allocation.

The Chairman asked what the options were for parents and children who had missed the consent process. Ginnie Garnett responded that community catch-up clinics would be available.

Matthew Pearce asked whether there was pressure from schools who were concerned about the legal ramifications of the vaccination programme and self-consent. Ginnie Garnett responded that no schools in West Berkshire had objected. In cases of self-consent, there were legal restrictions on Gillick competence and it would be difficult to be clear on.

Katie Summers noted that 'anti-vaxxers' had distributed fake health advice that looked official, and asked for assistance from the Board to combat this and to properly advise people. Ginnie Garnett responded that abusive emails which contained threats to individual staff had been received and been forwarded to the Head of Security, and were not responded to. Advice had additionally been given to individual members of staff on ensuring their safety, and schools had been asked to provide them on-site parking to facilitate safety and easy transport of equipment.

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220 Public Protection Partnership update

Sean Murphy presented an update on the Public Protection Partnership.

- Fake official documents were a civil or criminal offence, depending on the intention.
- 189 local tracing cases had occurred in the last two weeks, of which 146 (77%) had been completed. 100+ isolation calls had been made per day, and 5-10 calls and referrals were made to the hub.
- Most cases reported were within schools, with no workplace outbreaks reported within the last week.
- New guidance on ventilation had been issued and communicated to workplaces. Extension of the licensing relaxations on off sales and numbers of Temporary Event Notices.

Councillor Steve Masters asked about the regular testing of staff, and asked whether there had been feedback that people were diligently registering their tests, particularly in hard-to-reach communities. Matthew Pearce responded that Communities United and HealthWatch were undertaking direct action on testing in difficult to reach communities, but feedback was difficult to ascertain. The Chairman noted that the 119 emergency number was available in over 200 languages.

221 Communications update

Martin Dunscombe provided a verbal update on Covid-related communications.

- Communications were out reminding people to remain vigilant with Covid-19.
- Additional resources were in place for winter, and informing people on avoiding Covid during that time.
- Health on the Move and other alternative vaccination programmes were continually being promoted.
- Misinformation from anti-vaxxers were visible on social media posts, and colleagues were being advised. Thames Valley Police had been approached and asked if they had any messaging.

222 Future meetings and agenda items

Matthew Pearce and Meradin Peachey stated the view that Local Outbreak Engagement Board be stood down based on the Revised Terms of Reference, and asked whether responsibilities be moved to Health and Wellbeing in the interim. Additionally, local decision making was best informed with clear guidance, and while there was a need for continued scrutiny and regular updates, the Board was unnecessary.

The Chairman noted that Health and Wellbeing was on 30th September, and could include a brief Covid Update. The Chairman suggested that the next meeting, on 4th October be pencilled in, and the decision be made closer to the time.

Councillor Steve Masters agreed, noting the fluctuating situation. Councillor Andy Moore additionally agreed, noting his position as an observer.

223 Any other business

None.

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(The meeting commenced at 18:00 and closed at 19:22)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature