

LOCAL OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD (PUBLIC)

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 26 OCTOBER 2021

Present: Councillor Dominic Boeck, Councillor Graham Bridgman (Chairman), Councillor Lynne Doherty, Councillor Alan Macro (Substitute) (In place of Martha Vickers), Councillor Steve Masters, Matt Pearce, Jo Reeves (In place of Katie Summers), Andy Sharp and Councillor Joanne Stewart (Vice-Chairman)

Also Present: Martin Dunscombe (Communications Manager), Sean Murphy (Public Protection Manager), Gordon Oliver (Principal Policy Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Katie Summers and Councillor Martha Vickers

Absent: Meradin Peachey

PART I

229 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 21 September 2021 and 18 October 2021 were approved as true and correct records.

230 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

231 Covid-19 situational report

The Board considered a presentation from Matthew Pearce (Agenda Item 4) on the Covid-19 Situational Report. Key points from the presentation were:

- There had been a 100% increase in cases in the last week.
- West Berkshire had the highest case rates in Berkshire, with 906.6 cases per 100,000 amongst the total population and 275.8 cases per 100,000 amongst the 60+ age group.
- Case rates were significantly above national and regional averages.
- The positivity testing rate was 14.4%, which was also above national and regional averages.
- The latest data suggested that the rate of increase had slowed.
- The age ranges with the highest number of positive results were 10-14 and 15-19.
- Wards with the highest case rates were Ridgeway and Lambourn.
- There had been a number of significant outbreaks at schools.
- The data showed that people aged 25-59 were still getting the virus despite most being vaccinated.
- Local authorities in South-West England that used the Immensa lab had seen the biggest rise in case rates in the last week and so there may be a link.
- There was also a sub-variant of the Delta strain of the virus that was more prevalent in South-West of England - this may be more transmissible.
- A further explanation for the increase could be that the population had experienced less exposure to Covid previously and so had less immunity.
- Numbers of Covid patients admitted to Royal Berkshire Hospital remained low – there were 4 new admissions up to 17 October with 4 patients on mechanical

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ventilation. There were 23 confirmed Covid-19 patients in hospital as of 19 October.

- There were no Covid related deaths in West Berkshire in the last week.
- Communications were ongoing on a range of issues.
- Letters had gone out to parents about what they could do to protect themselves and their families.
- Work was underway with schools to look at additional measures.
- Key groups had been stood back up (e.g. Gold, LOEB and Health Protection Board).
- Community testing was focusing on high-risk / disproportionately represented groups.
- Local contact tracing activity was ongoing.
- The Safety Advisory Group continued to meet.
- There was no suggestion that Plan B would be deployed imminently – but if it was deployed it would include:
 - Urgent communication of the increased risk and the need to be more cautious.
 - Mandatory vaccine only certification in certain settings
 - Legally mandated face coverings in certain settings
 - Instruction to work from home for limited periods.

The Chairman noted that the acute NHS Trusts were stressing the importance of vaccination and that most of those who were seriously ill or dying had not been vaccinated or had only one dose. He suggested that messaging needed to promote this and encourage people to take up their booster jab once eligible.

The Chairman asked how vaccination of the 12-15 age group was progressing. Matthew Pearce acknowledged that there had been some challenges with the 12-15 age group and noted that significant numbers had tested positive and then needed to wait 30 days before they could get a vaccine.

The Chairman also asked if areas that had been more affected by Covid earlier in the pandemic may be seeing less community transmission now. Matthew Pearce agreed that this was a plausible theory.

Councillor Steve Masters noted that rates were higher now than a year ago and asked if this meant there would be major problems over the winter period. Matthew Pearce noted that there were significant uncertainties around the modelling. He agreed there was a risk with elevated rates going into winter, but vaccinations were helping to keep admissions low. He stressed that hospitals were planning for all eventualities and putting their Winter Plans in place.

Councillor Masters asked about engagement of hard-to-reach communities and testing rates amongst ethnic minority groups. Matthew Pearce confirmed that efforts were being more targeted and they were working with partners to engage these groups.

Councillor Masters expressed concern that there could be an explosion of cases associated with major events (e.g. fireworks at the racecourse) and suggested that mobile testing sites could be deployed. Matthew Pearce indicated that mobile testing sites could be considered. Event organisers were advised to encourage attendees to test beforehand.

Councillor Alan Macro asked if West Berkshire Council had been consulted on the roll-out of Plan B. Matthew Pearce was not aware that the Council had been consulted, but suggested that it may have gone through Meridan Peachey as the Director of Public Health.

232 Vaccination programme update

The Board considered a presentation from Jo Reeves (Agenda Item 5) relating to the Vaccination Programme. The main points from her presentation were as follows:

- 84.7% of the eligible population in West Berkshire had received their first jab and 78.2% had received both doses. This was better than the Berkshire West and Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB) averages.
- 69.1% of 16-17 year olds in West Berkshire had received one dose of the vaccine. Again, this was better than the averages for Berkshire West and BOB.
- Only 24.6% of 12-15 year olds in West Berkshire had been vaccinated. This was markedly lower than Wokingham (38.3%), but higher than Reading (16.6%). This variance was thought to be related to the schedules of the school-based immunisation team, which covered the six Berkshire local authorities.
- Boosters had been given to 25% of eligible care home residents across Berkshire West – data for individual local authorities was not available.

The Chairman asked why boosters could not be booked in advance. Jo Reeves offered to take that question away and report back.

The Chairman asked why Wokingham was faring so much better than West Berkshire in terms of vaccinating 12-15 year olds and when this gap would close. Jo Reeves offered to contact Ginnie Garnett to find out more about the vaccination team's timetable.

Andy Sharp asked if there was data about vaccine declinations amongst young people. Jo Reeves offered to raise the question at the Berkshire West Vaccine Action Group. She suggested that take-up rates should increase now the mass-vaccination centres had opened up to 12-15 year olds.

Councillor Lynne Doherty noted that local performance was being compared to BOB, but suggested that it should also be compared against the national average. She was surprised at how far West Berkshire was behind in vaccinating 12-15 year olds and asked for more information on the vaccine opportunities in West Berkshire compared to those in Wokingham. She also noted that care home residents in West Berkshire were amongst the first to be vaccinated and expressed surprise that the booster rate was so low. She asked what was being done to address this. Jo Reeves explained that the CCG was challenging colleagues in the PCNs to provide schedules for when they would be going into Care Homes.

The Chairman noted that Reading and Wokingham were expressing similar concerns and officers were liaising on comms.

Councillor Jo Stewart asked if West Berkshire numbers could be provided for care home resident booster jabs. Jo Reeves undertook to share this once it was available.

Councillor Stewart also noted that delivery of booster vaccines appeared to be a bit 'hit and miss', and people may struggle to arrange an appointment if they had limited mobility or were in the later stages of dementia and their carer was not 'tech savvy'. Jo Reeves explained that those who were house-bound would receive boosters at home. Also, people could call 119 rather than going online to book their vaccine and could get details of accessible locations.

Councillor Alan Macro noted that residents would not be able to book their booster jab online until 6 months and one week after their second jab and agreed that this was an unnecessary delay. He also shared concerns expressed about the low vaccination rates in care homes, since these were the most vulnerable individuals. He asked if booster jabs would be delivered at the walk-in hub in the Kennet Centre. Jo Reeves confirmed that walk-ins would be accepted, but the hub had been over-subscribed, so booking was

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advised. She highlighted alternative options at Boots, Lambourn Pharmacy and Broad Street Mall.

The Chairman sought clarification that boosters would not be delivered to someone who was not eligible. Jo Reeves confirmed that was correct.

Councillor Steve Masters noted that there had been a very high positivity rate for Covid tests amongst young people and wondered if the need to leave 30 days between a positive diagnosis and getting the jab could be a reason for the low take-up. Matthew Pearce suggested that a relatively small number of children would be affected, but processes were in place to follow up with children who were unable to get their jab.

Councillor Masters also asked who administered the vaccines in schools and if they had sufficient staff. Jo Reeves confirmed that it was the School-Based Immunisation Team who were part of Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust, with support from Oxford Health Trust. She noted that the team was also delivering the flu programme, but they had sufficient staff.

Councillor Masters asked if there were guidelines for ensuring that eligible patients leaving hospital got their booster. Andy Sharp noted that the guidance about returning to care home settings remained unchanged and there was no requirement for patients to have a booster. He offered to provide a summary of the protocols to Board members outside the meeting.

233 Public Protection Partnership update

The Board considered a presentation from Sean Murphy (Agenda Item 6) relating to the work of the Public Protection Partnership (PPP). Key points from the presentation were:

- Events were assessed by the Safety Advisory Group (SAG), which included Public Health representation.
- Between April and September, there were 129 event plans and notifications and this was expected to reach 150 by Christmas, including fireworks, Remembrance Day events, Christmas lights, Santa runs, Christmas markets, etc.
- Each event had a Covid risk assessment, which covered staff and volunteers as well as attendees, and covered cleaning, testing, mitigations and messaging.
- Covid testing had been offered at the Michaelmas Fair and could be considered for other major events.
- It was stressed that the public needed to play their part in preventing the spread of Covid.
- In the last week, the PPP had dealt with 223 unique local contact tracing cases, 980 isolation calls and 27 hub calls.
- 80 Common exposure points were being investigated, including schools and other settings.
- The team was also looking at the need for further advice and follow-up visits.
- Workload had stabilised, but the Team expected to remain busy on the run-up to Christmas.

234 Communications update

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

- Key messages were:
 - Keep up to date with vaccinations
 - Twice weekly testing

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- Booking a PCR test and self-isolate if feeling unwell
- Face coverings, social distancing and regular hand washing
- Another residents newsletter had gone out with calls to actions:
 - 41,000 recipients
 - 30,000 opens
 - 1,000 clicks-throughs to information about booster bookings
 - 400 click-throughs to information about lateral flow tests
 - 200 click-throughs to information about vaccines generally
- Postcards had been printed to give out to hard-to-reach communities with information about where to get a vaccine
- Next steps:
 - Additional resource was being brought into the Comms Team.
 - Messages would be kept simple and fresh.
 - Covid pages on the website would be updated.
 - Flu boosters would be promoted to vulnerable residents.
 - Support would be provided for the Education Team and schools.
 - Mask wearing would be promoted and work was progressing with Newbury Business Improvement District on a campaign.

The Chairman noted that residents valued the newsletter.

Councillor Steve Masters noted that there had been very little Covid-related comms from the Council on social media since the news had broken about the Immensa lab. He asked if anything had been done to target young people and what the plan was to reach people who were not on social media or who had not registered for the newsletter. He suggested that targeted advertising should be considered. Martin Dunscombe stated that there had been a message around community testing. He explained that social media engagement around Covid had dropped off and the messaging needed to be reviewed to keep it fresh and reach more people. He stated that a Digital Communications Officer would be joining the Comms Team shortly. He also noted that a work experience student had given some ideas about running a competition to engage young people.

Councillor Jo Stewart noted that young people were not interested in following West Berkshire on social media and agreed about the need to push messages into their feeds via advertising, as well as going through schools and parents. She acknowledged the challenge of getting messages out to all residents.

Councillor Masters stressed that paid advertising was essential and could be specifically targeted. He suggested that there should be specialist expertise in the Comms Team who should aim to reach young people.

Councillor Alan Macro agreed that targeted ads could be an effective means of reaching young people and that others could share messages too.

Martin Dunscombe welcomed people sharing and commenting, but engagement had dropped off, so they would be refreshing the messaging. He confirmed that targeted messaging had been used in the past and would continue to be used. He noted that very few young people had Facebook accounts.

235 Future meetings and agenda items

It was agreed that the Board should meet again on 8 November, which would be a week after schools returned from the half-term break.

236 Any other business

No other items of business were raised.

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(The meeting commenced at 18:00 and closed at 19:15)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature