

Notice of Meeting

Local Outbreak Engagement Board (Public)

Tuesday, 26th October, 2021 at 6.00 pm
Virtual Meeting

This is an informal meeting of the Council and no decisions are being made. Therefore, this Meeting is being held in a virtual format.

Please note: The Council will be live streaming its meetings.

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<https://www.westberks.gov.uk/councilmeetingslive>

Date of despatch of Agenda: 20 October 2021

For further information about this Agenda, or to inspect any background documents referred to in Part I reports, please contact Gordon Oliver on e-mail: Gordon.Oliver1@westberks.gov.uk

Further information and Minutes are also available on the Council's website at www.westberks.gov.uk



Agenda - Local Outbreak Engagement Board (Public) to be held on Tuesday, 26 October 2021 (continued)

To: Councillor Dominic Boeck, Councillor Graham Bridgman (Chairman), Councillor Lynne Doherty, Councillor Steve Masters, Meradin Peachey, Matt Pearce, Jo Reeves, Andy Sharp, Councillor Joanne Stewart (Vice-Chairman), Katie Summers and Councillor Martha Vickers

Substitutes: Shairoz Claridge, Councillor Rick Jones and Councillor Alan Macro

Agenda

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Sarah Clarke
Service Director: Strategy and Governance

If you require this information in a different format or translation, please contact Stephen Chard on telephone (01635) 519462.

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Item 1 – Apologies

Verbal Item

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Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

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.

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- 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.
- 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

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was vaccinated without distinction, and asked whether there was a difference. Katie Summers responded that it was, and it was a cause for concern.

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 vaccinate 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

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ensuring their safety, and schools had been asked to provide them on-site parking to facilitate safety and easy transport of equipment.

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

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Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

LOCAL OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD (PUBLIC)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON
MONDAY, 18 OCTOBER 2021**

Present: Councillor Graham Bridgman (Chairman), Councillor Lynne Doherty, Nigel Lynn, Councillor Steve Masters, Meradin Peachey, Matthew Pearce, Andy Sharp, Councillor Joanne Stewart (Vice-Chairman) and Councillor Martha Vickers

Also Present: Martin Dunscombe (Communications Manager) and Sean Murphy (Public Protection Manager), Jack Karimi (Clerk)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Dominic Boeck

PART I

224 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

225 Testing Discrepancies

Matthew Pearce presented the report, concerning Covid-19 testing discrepancies. Key points include:

- UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) update stated that following reports of negative PCR tests after positive Lateral Flow Tests, an investigation was undertaken and testing was suspended at Immensa Health Clinic Ltd., Wolverhampton.
- An estimated 43,000 people had been affected by testing discrepancies.
- There was no evidence of any faults with LFD or PCR test kits themselves, and the public should continue using them, and UKHSA have ruled out a new variant accounting for such discrepancies.
- This was not an issue with the testing facility at Newbury Showground, but with the laboratory it was sent to. People were still encouraged to book a PCR test if they have Covid-19 symptoms.
- NHS Test and Trace was contacting people that could still be infectious to advise them to receive another test.
- West Berkshire Council encouraged anybody who had a negative PCR result to have another test.
- Initial concerns and reports were reported through to DHSC/UKHSA and were escalated by the Council. Data analysis was conducted by Berkshire West Public Health Team and shared with DHSC.

Councillor Lynne Doherty then spoke on the communications role as fulfilled by Meradin Peachey and Martin Dunscombe.

The Chairman noted that Councillor Doherty had led on the public response and that all media enquires had gone through her, and that he was disappointed with an article in Newbury Today that featured criticisms from the Opposition, but did not allow them to reply. In fact, the Chairman noted that all information had been directed as soon as the Council had it, and West Berkshire's actions flagged the issue with UKHSA.

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Councillor Steve Masters asked if the testing lab could have been suspended earlier. Matthew Pearce responded that the lab closed on 12 October, and that he was unsure whether it was possible to have closed it earlier. Meradin Peachey noted that the UKHSA took some time to pinpoint which lab was responsible for the discrepancies, but acted quickly once it was clear which lab it was. She commended Dr Jenny Harries, Chief Executive of UKHSA, for noting that it came about as a result of reports from local government.

Councillor Steve Masters asked what the best approach was to restore confidence in Covid-19 testing. Matthew Pearce noted that the challenge was tougher in winter, where more people were socialising indoors, and that communication will be key. Meradin Peachey noted that death rates were not increasing, so the biggest impact had been disruption to schools. Katie Summers noted that communicating to schools was key.

Councillor Martha Vickers asked whether information about the testing discrepancies had been shared with the Leader of the Opposition. Councillor Lynne Doherty noted that Opposition members had been informed and that a briefing had been sent to all members.

Councillor Martha Vickers asked whether there were lessons to be learned from the situation that may be applied to other labs. The Chairman responded that the lab should have noted issues with the test results and raised it themselves. Matthew Pearce agreed, and that additional responsibility was with the commissioner of the lab.

226 Surveillance Update

Matthew Pearce presented the report, which showed the current situation on Covid-19 in West Berkshire. Key points included:

- There had been a 157% increase in cases in the previous two weeks, which was higher than the regional and national average.
- Rates remained highest around the youngest age groups, with 1,649 per 100,000 cases in the 10-14 age group.
- There were 9 new Covid-19 hospital admissions, with 2 on mechanical ventilation. 27 patients were currently in hospital. 1 death had been reported in the last week.

Sean Murphy updated on the work of the Public Protection Partnership. The vast majority of Covid-19 reports were coming in from schools, with some from high-risk businesses. A significant number of local contact tracing cases had come through since 14 October, with more people going in for additional re-testing. 710 Covid-19 isolation calls had come through in the last week, with the hub remaining open over the weekend.

Councillor Lynne Doherty thanked Sean Murphy for keeping the hub open over the weekend. She asked Katie Summers about the increase in cases in schools, and its knock-on effects on teachers, and asked where the vaccine programme was in that area. Katie Summers noted that there would be additional concern, and that additional support would be given to people accessing vaccines, including the flu vaccine. Councillor Doherty asked if any additional support could be provided. Katie Summers noted that communication needed to be done jointly, and aimed at parents, with particular attention paid to booster vaccines.

Councillor Steve Masters asked what the next steps were for precautions in schools to protect children from Covid-19. Katie Summers responded that 25% of the lowest age group had been vaccinated, and that there were improvements in take-up. Katie Summers noted that take-up of the vaccine amongst 12-15 year olds was as low as 4% in some areas, but more work could be done to improve this. Matthew Pearce noted that secondary schools could require masks in some contexts, and that options such as

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deploying a mobile testing unit or rolling out more regular asymptomatic testing were being considered.

Councillor Martha Vickers asked what could be done locally to encourage the wearing of masks, noting that mask wearing was the law in Scotland. Katie Summers noted that schools had sent out updates stipulating masks for parents and teachers, and noted it was worth asking all schools to do the same. Matthew Pearce noted conversations were ongoing with schools. Councillor Vickers asked what could be done about children. Matthew Pearce responded that it could be encouraged, but legislation did not support any further approach. Meradin Peachey noted that the lab failure could be used as part of the communications strategy on this issue, but businesses would need to sign up to any further approach.

227 Future meetings and agenda items

The Chairman noted that it was up to Matthew Pearce and / or Meradin Peachey to determine if further meetings of the Local Outbreak Engagement Board were required. In the event that further meetings were proposed, Members were advised to contact Democratic Services with details of any items they wished to see added to the agenda.

228 Any other business

Councillor Steve Masters asked Martin Dunscombe if individual members could be tagged in social media posts mentioning them, so they could get the issue out to their community. Councillor Lynne Doherty noted that members could set their own alerts.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 6.06 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature

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Item 3 – Declarations of interest

Verbal Item

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Item 4 – Covid-19 situational report

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Item 5 – Vaccination programme update

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Item 6 – Public Protection Partnership update

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Item 7 – Communications update

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Item 8 – Future meetings and agenda items

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Item 9 – Any other business

Verbal Item

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