

LOCAL OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD (PUBLIC)

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 8 NOVEMBER 2021

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

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

PART I

237 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2021 were approved as a true and correct record.

238 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

239 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:

- Covid rates had improved significantly in the last fortnight.
- The testing rate was around 640 per 100,000 population, with around 11.5% positivity.
- The latest data showed around 460 cases per 100,000 population.
- For the 60+ age group, there were around 250 cases per 100,000 population
- The highest rates were amongst residents aged 5-19 years.
- Cases within schools were lower than before half-term.
- Schools had been advised on measures they could put in place to protect pupils.
- There were 26 patients in Royal Berkshire hospital with Covid-19 and numbers had not increased significantly following the rise in infections.
- There had been no Covid related deaths reported in the last week.
- Due to time constraints, it was agreed that information on community testing would be circulated outside of the meeting.

Councillor Dominic Boeck noted that cases in schools had peaked before half-term and thanked the Public Health Team for their briefing to schools, which had been well-received by head-teachers.

Councillor Steve Masters noted that there had been some concerns about the effectiveness of the national test and trace scheme and asked if schools could implement their own test and trace schemes.

Matt Pearce noted that there had been an increased number of referrals from the national test and trace service to the local team, and the local role was currently being

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reviewed. He noted that national advice was for schools not to get involved in contact tracing and recognised that there was a balance between education and Covid.

Meradin Peachey noted that the numbers of Covid patients in intensive care were very low, but all were unvaccinated. This showed that the vaccines were still working, but the situation was being closely monitored due to potential fall-off in immunity. She also noted that the majority of hospital admissions were unvaccinated people.

The Chairman noted that there was an intention to gather anonymised data, but small numbers meant that numbers had to be collated at the Integrated Care System Level. This would help in terms of promoting the importance of vaccination.

240 Vaccination programme update

The Board considered a presentation from Katie Summers (Agenda Item 5) relating to the Vaccination Programme. Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- The EMIS database was not available, so ward / Super Output Area data could not be provided.
- 86% of eligible residents had received their first vaccine
- 86% of eligible residents had received their second vaccine
- These figures were above the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB) average and in line with the rest of England
- 52% of eligible residents had received their booster jab – this was slightly below the BOB and England averages
- 34% of 12-15 year olds had received their first dose, which was slightly behind BOB and national averages, but catch-up sessions had been arranged at West Berkshire Community Hospital from 20 November.
- A significant number of 12-15 year olds had missed their jab due to having tested positive for Covid.
- 71% of residents aged 65+, 28% of residents aged 50-64 and 23% of at-risk residents aged 16-49 had received their flu vaccine. These levels were comparable to the previous year.
- It was noted that two Primary Care Networks (PCNs) had not signed up to the vaccination programme, or were unable to support it due to capacity issues.
- Although a community pharmacy site was able to increase capacity in the Kennet Centre, some rural residents struggled to get to Newbury. A surge vaccination pop-up clinic would target the rural communities over a two-week period.
- PCNs that had not signed up to the programme had still visited care homes to ensure that the most vulnerable were still vaccinated.
- In terms of ethnicity, most of those who were unvaccinated or had not received their booster dose were white. There was also a significant number of unvaccinated people within the Asian / Asian British – Indian population.

The Chairman made the following points:

- The benefits of getting vaccinated in terms of preventing death and serious illness should continue to be promoted.
- Residents had previously been unable to book a booster jab in advance of the 180 day period lapsing, which had affected the figures.
- The Council should help to promote the details of the pop-up clinics to residents.
- 12 year olds were unable to record their vaccination because they were too young to get the NHS app.

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Katie Summers noted that people could now book their boosters after 5 months and she was working with the Comms Teams to get this message out. She also confirmed that Martin Dunscombe had been invited to relevant meetings about pop-up clinics. Regarding the NHS app, she noted that the constraint was at the national level, but everyone would still get a card with details of their vaccinations.

Councillor Lynne Doherty welcomed the additional work, but questioned why West Berkshire had to catch up, and suggested that it was a postcode lottery as to whether or not individual PCNs decided to participate in the programme, with the rural west of the district more affected than other areas. She had raised this as an issue with the Chairmen of the Health and Wellbeing Board and Health Scrutiny Committee. She also noted that the flu data excluded her local GP practice, and highlighted that local residents had expressed dissatisfaction with the service provided. She wanted to get to a situation where mitigation was not required in order to catch up.

Katie Summers recognised Councillor Doherty's concerns and indicated that the issue was wider than Covid vaccination. She offered to present to the Health Scrutiny Committee to articulate the wider support that would be going into primary care. She expressed disappointment that mitigation was required and noted that two of West Berkshire's PCNs had been quick to say that they were unable to support the vaccination programme, but other PCNs had since indicated that they were also unable to support it.

Councillor Steve Masters agreed with Councillor Doherty. He suggested there were wider staffing and funding issues affecting the PCNs and asked how the CCG was providing support. He asked which areas would have the pop-up clinics and whether Speen ward would benefit.

Katie Summers indicated that a detailed plan for the pop-ups would be available by the end of the week. She confirmed that only the most rural communities were affected. She also indicated that some people preferred walk-in clinics to pre-booking and she had requested a facility in West Berkshire. She noted that there was a general capacity issue in primary care, but other staff such as paramedics, pharmacists and community navigators could support GPs.

Councillor Masters agreed that there was a need for a walk-in clinic for people living in the far west of the district.

Katie Summers indicated that there would be an update within the next few days.

Councillor Martha Vickers noted that some older residents were confused about where to get their vaccine and highlighted a postcard with details of available locations. She noted that Boots had been offering walk-in jabs, but had subsequently turned people away. She felt that some people may not come back once they were turned away. She noted that the Kennet Centre was also offering walk-in vaccinations, but had been forced to restrict them. She thought they were looking for larger premises. She also highlighted that it was possible to get flu and Covid vaccines together. Finally, she expressed concern about national issues with vaccine protests outside schools and pregnant women refusing vaccines, and hoped that they were not prevalent in West Berkshire.

Councillor Graham Bridgman noted that the postcard had been produced by the Public Health Team. He also stated that when people booked online, the closest of the venues listed on the back of the postcard would be offered.

Katie Summers highlighted the 'grab a jab' website that promoted walk-in vaccination facilities. She noted that there had been some anti-vaccination protests planned at a Berkshire school, but this had not happened. She also confirmed that Royal Berkshire Hospital had produced vaccination information for pregnant women / new mums.

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241 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:

- The local contact tracing model was being reviewed following a recent increase in the number of referrals from the national service (more than 400 in the last fortnight).
- The success rate was around 78%.
- The hub was dealing with around 800 to 1,000 isolation calls per week.
- Staffing numbers had been increased to cope with the higher case load.
- The isolation pack was being updated.
- Local businesses were being contacted regarding cases and clusters in high-risk settings and advice was being offered.
- Advice was also being offered on a range of local events (e.g. fireworks, Remembrance Day and Christmas events).
- Event operators were cooperating well - risk assessments were being put in place and the public were encouraged to take appropriate measures.

Councillor Jo Stewart expressed surprise at the number of calls going through the hub and asked if there were any themes that could be addressed by the Comms Team.

Sean Murphy indicated that most of the calls were outbound, but there were still some incoming calls to the hub, and these had increased following the Immensa Lab closure. Most of the calls were to local residents checking to see if they needed support, with referrals made to local agencies as appropriate. Most people were positive about receiving the calls and the service had been extended to March 2022.

Councillor Steve Masters thanked Sean Murphy and his team who had been working very hard. He asked why the local test and trace service was more effective than the national scheme.

Sean Murphy noted that changes were being made to the national system. He stated that the local service benefited from the 01635 telephone service, and the Council was recognised and trusted by local residents. He indicated that options were being considered to draw down more / all of the test and trace calls to the local service.

242 Communications update

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

- Covid content on the Council's website was being updated with clear calls to actions and removal of any duplication across pages.
- The email newsletter was still going to 41,000 recipients, and the latest one had been opened 30,000 times, with 600 visits to the vaccine booster page.
- A winter Covid-19 comms plan was being developed.
- A new Covid-19 toolkit was being developed with parish / town councils.
- The self-isolation pack was being updated and would be made available on the website, as well as being emailed / sent to those who needed it.
- At least one social media post would be produced per week on Covid-19, keeping content topical and engaging.
- Social media had been used more with increasing engagement
- Over the last 18 months audiences had grown significantly - Tweets seen 3.2 million times / Facebook posts more than 4.4 million times
- For September 2021:

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- Engagement on Twitter was double that in 2019
- Facebook views were three times higher than in 2019
- Paid-for ads had been effective – 2.7 million views on Facebook
- Launched on Nextdoor
- Social media would continue to be a key part of the comms strategy throughout the winter.

Councillor Martha Vickers asked about the circulation of the postcard with details of the local vaccination centres.

Martin Dunscombe confirmed that it had been produced as part of the assisted testing service, which Healthwatch was helping to deliver and they were using it as part of their outreach programme. He undertook to see if there were other opportunities to roll it out more widely.

Councillor Jo Stewart thought the card was going to be sent out to all residents and undertook to check this with Matt Pearce.

243 Future meetings and agenda items

Meradin Peachey and Matt Pearce suggested that since Covid rates were consistent with the local / regional / national averages, there was no need for the Board to continue to meet. However, it could be stood back up if Covid rates were to rise or vaccination levels were to be lower than expected.

Councillor Steve Masters felt that the meetings were important in terms of engaging with the public. He suggested that the Board had been stood down prematurely last time and cautioned against doing so again.

The Chairman indicated that the Board had been stood up swiftly in response to changing circumstances.

Councillor Lynne Doherty agreed and was happy to go with the recommendation to stand the Board down. She suggested that if the Board was to continue with no clear messages to communicate, then it would become ineffective.

Councillor Martha Vickers suggested booking a provisional date for the next meeting in a fortnight. She noted that the booster uptake was low and suggested that this should be kept under review.

The Chairman suggested that given the standard agenda and lack of written reports, it was easy to stand the meeting back up at short notice.

Councillor Dominic Boeck recognised that the Board had shown that it could be stood up at short notice and could do so again as required.

Meradin Peachey noted that the criteria for standing the Board back up would be if West Berkshire became an outlier in terms of Covid cases, or issues with schools, or if vaccination rates were to fall off. She agreed that communications needed to be kept interesting and suggested that billboards be used to remind people about hand-washing and using face coverings. She highlighted that Covid rates were lower in Scotland where face coverings were mandatory.

Councillor Vickers agreed about the need to encourage mask wearing and had been struck by the difference when on a recent holiday to Scotland.

It was agreed that the Board be stood down until Meradin Peachey and / or Matt Pearce requested that it be stood back up.

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244 Any other business

No other items were raised.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.40 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature