

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

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

**Present:** Councillor Dominic Boeck, Graham Bridgman (Chairman), Tracy Daszkiewicz, Lynne Doherty, Nigel Lynn, Steve Masters, Matt Pearce, Jo Reeves (Substitute) (In place of Katie Summers), Joanne Stewart (Vice-Chairman) and Martha Vickers

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

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Andy Sharp and Katie Summers

### **PART I**

#### **245 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2021 were approved as a true and correct record.

#### **246 Declarations of interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

#### **247 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 testing rates had increased with 11.1% testing positive.
- The latest data showed around 543 cases per 100,000 population for all ages, which was slightly better than the South East average, but slightly worse than the national average.
- Rates remained very high, but were relatively stable.
- There were 156.2 cases per 100,000 population for those aged 60+, which was slightly down on the previous fortnight.
- There had been five community outbreaks, with primary schools featuring prominently.
- The highest infection rates were amongst 5-9 year olds (1,929 cases per 100,000 population) and 10-14 year olds (1,327 cases per 100,000 population).
- Cases were much lower amongst 15-19 year olds, due to vaccination and immunity.
- Numbers of Covid patients in hospitals on 30 November were as follows:
  - 35 people in Royal Berkshire Hospital, with 4 patients on mechanical ventilation
  - 32 people in Great Western Hospital with 2 patients on mechanical ventilation
- There had been one Covid related death in the last week and 275 since the start of the pandemic.
- The Omicron variant was a concern due to the number of variations and potential for evasion of immunity.

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- It was thought to be more transmissible with a shorter window to becoming infectious.
- There were not yet large numbers of hospitalisations and deaths.
- There had been some pockets of community transmission in the UK.
- There was 1 confirmed case in West Berkshire.
- Restrictions were being put in place, but would delay rather than prevent spread.
- It was hard to draw comparisons with South Africa due to different demographics.
- When Delta had arrived, there was low Covid-19 incidence and it was summer – with Omicron the incidence was higher and it was winter, but most people were vaccinated, which was important.
- New control measures had been introduced.
- All close contacts of confirmed / suspected Omicron cases would be required to isolate for 10 days.
- Face coverings were compulsory in shops and on public transport.
- People were advised to stay at home if unwell and to get vaccinated / have a booster when invited to do so.
- People were advised to meet in well-ventilated areas.
- Testing guidance had changed – tests were advocated if an individual was to be in a high-risk situation that day or before visiting people at higher risk of severe illness.
- The advice was to use the NHS Covid-19 app and keep Bluetooth turned on to assist with contact tracing.
- In schools, face coverings were recommended for all staff, students (aged 11+) and visitors in communal areas.
- Secondary school pupils would be tested before returning in January.
- There were also new rules brought in for people travelling to the UK from 4am on 7 December.

The Chairman asked about the relative spread of the Omicron variant relative to the Delta variant. Matt Pearce noted that there was little data, but the R-rate in South Africa had jumped from 1 to 2, suggesting it was more transmissible.

Councillor Lynne Doherty asked if hospitalisations and deaths were still predominantly amongst the unvaccinated. Matt Pearce confirmed this was correct.

Councillor Dominic Boeck asked if there was evidence that the virus would become more transmissible, but less hazardous. Matt Pearce indicated that it viruses could evolve in this way, but it had not been confirmed for Covid.

Councillor Steve Masters noted that 1 in 5 of Covid patients on ventilation were unvaccinated pregnant women. Matt Pearce agreed that some 'myth busting' was required and offered to help develop comms to target this demographic.

Councillor Martha Vickers noted that testing kits seemed to be more difficult to obtain. Matt Pearce stated that they could be ordered online or from the mobile testing vehicle. He acknowledged that there had been some challenges with pharmacies which he was seeking to resolve. He indicated that Lateral Flow Devices seemed to work with Omicron, but stressed the need to get a PCR test after a positive Lateral Flow test, since this would allow the result to be sequenced.

### 248 Vaccination programme update

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

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- The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation guidance had been updated and recommended that the booster be updated to include all adults aged 18+, to be offered in descending age groups with priority to older adults and at-risk groups.
- Severely immuno-suppressed people should be offered a booster two months after their third primary dose.
- Moderna and Pfizer would be offered.
- Children aged 12-15 should be offered a second dose a minimum of 12 weeks from the first dose.
- Deployment guidance had just been issued.
- The National Booking System would be updated to reflect the three-month interval from second dose to booster and would go live no later than 13 December
- Capacity was being increased across existing sites and new sites were being invited to sign up.
- Guidance for the 12-15 year olds second dose would be published separately – this was likely to involve school immunisation teams again.
- Pharmacies had increased capacity – the Kennet Centre facility had moved to a larger unit and Graham Jones Pharmacy in Lambourn had increased capacity – both sites were bookable via the National Booking Service.
- A booster vaccine pop-up clinic would be in Hungerford between 8-17 December (bookable via [westberks.gov.uk/coronavirusvaccination](https://westberks.gov.uk/coronavirusvaccination)) – this would have limited walk-in availability and would only be dealing with boosters for people aged 40+.
- The Health on the Move Van would offer up to 200 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and booster doses per day for people aged 16+:
  - Kintbury Coronation Hall – 14-15 December 10am-6pm
  - Thatcham Catholic Hall – 16 December 10am-5pm
  - Riverside Community Centre – 17 December 10am-5pm
  - Woolhampton Village Hall – 18 December 10am-6pm

The Chairman summarised feedback received from Graham Jones:

- He considered it a worthwhile and fulfilling role, and he was pleased to be part of the vaccination programme.
- Patient feedback had been excellent.
- The community response (e.g. volunteers) had been great.
- Immunosuppressed patients found it difficult to book their booster, since the system did not recognise that they needed four doses.
- Patients were being sent to vaccination centres that were not local to them (e.g. Lambourn residents to Wantage and vice versa) – he wanted to tailor his programme to local needs.
- He had received NHS permission to do evening sessions for the clinically vulnerable and immunosuppressed, which would be outside the National Booking System.
- The pop-up clinic in Hungerford would help to relieve pressure in Lambourn.
- Some patients were getting boosters at pop-up clinics, but did not then cancel their booking at the pharmacy, so the pharmacy had to confirm and then contact people on the reserve list.
- There had been a limit on the number of vaccines available, but this pressure was easing.
- He was awaiting permission for a second vaccination pod.
- There did not appear to be any clinical evidence for asking people to wait 15 minutes after having received their vaccine.

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Councillor Dominic Boeck asked if the Health on the Move Van could serve communities in the east of the district. Jo Reeves explained that availability of sites was affected by Christmas bookings. She also noted that the Primary Care Network in the east of the district was participating in the vaccination programme, so there was less need for the mobile facility than in central and western areas.

The Chairman noted that the surgery in Mortimer was offering vaccinations in their own pharmacy, and the Boathouse Surgery in Pangbourne was also offering vaccinations.

Councillor Boeck noted that communities between Calcot and Thatcham did not have good access to surgeries or pharmacies.

Councillor Martha Vickers highlighted the information cards with details of local vaccination centres. She had put these in the library and Corn Exchange. She also asked if walk-in vaccinations would be offered in locations other than Hungerford. She thought that the Kennet Centre were offering walk-in appointments. She also expressed concern that appointments in Lambourn were being taken by people from outside the area. Jo Reeves indicated that the Van on the Move would offer walk-in vaccinations, but she would need to check with NHS England about the pharmacies. She had heard that Kennet Centre was offering walk-in appointments, but this was not being advertised.

Jo Reeves presented the latest statistics on vaccinations in West Berkshire:

- 128,540 residents had received their first dose
- 118,306 residents had received their second dose
- 52,281 had received a booster or third dose
- 35.6% of residents aged 12+ had received a booster
- 90% of the 70+ age group had received a booster
- Vaccine take-up amongst residents aged 12-15 was 62% and West Berkshire was identified as having a particularly high take up in a recent Guardian article, which was a credit to the School Vaccination Team, schools and parents.

The Chairman noted that people were booking a booster when they were able to do so. Jo Reeves agreed and indicated that the evidence suggested that people wanted sites to be as local as possible.

Councillor Masters asked if statistics related to the address of the vaccination centre or residents' addresses. Jo Reeves confirmed that the statistics were based on residents' addresses.

### 249 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:

- Activity was increasing for the Local Contact Tracing Service (176 cases in the week ending 24 November 2021).
- Contacts were mainly children and young people.
- The service had made 588 self-isolation calls in the last two weeks.
- Most risk setting notifications were from schools.
- There had been an increase in dedicated resource for local contact tracing.
- The service was looking at the future model / approach.
- New Covid measures had been introduced – requirement for face coverings in shops, staff at almost all premises to wear face coverings, compulsory signage for shops, face coverings required on public transport (including taxis and private hire), face coverings for driving lessons and tests.
- Enforcement was for the police and certain public transport operators.

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- Business requirements were a matter for local authorities.
- Point of entry signage had been distributed to premises where face coverings were mandated, and material for use of public transport, taxis and private hire.
- Taxi and private hire operators had been contacted about the new requirements and compliance checks had been carried out.
- Compliance checks had been carried out with high-throughput locations to ensure staff were complying with requirements and to advise on the implementation of other guidance. It was noted that compliance rates were high.
- Event risk assessments and site visits were also ongoing.

Councillor Jo Stewart praised the Shaw House Christmas event as being well-run and she was pleased that the Council was leading by example.

Sean Murphy noted that many people attending the Victorian Christmas Fair in Newbury had also been wearing masks.

The Chairman suggested that comms should reflect the fact that local residents were complying with the new restrictions in order to benefit everyone.

Councillor Martha Vickers welcomed the support offered to businesses. She noted that in some cases staff were told not to challenge people without masks. Sean Murphy indicated that advice varied depending on the setting, and premises with trained security staff were better placed to challenge people. Otherwise the advice was to report it to the relevant authorities to avoid putting staff in danger. He noted that guidance was continually evolving.

### **250 Communications update**

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

- Key comms activities had been focused on:
  - Restrictions – mask-wearing, travel and self-isolation
  - Vaccinations – Hungerford pop-up, Health on the Move Van and the expanded offer at Lambourn Pharmacy
  - Updated booster cohorts
  - Taking Lateral Flow Tests when entering risky environments (e.g. visiting high-risk people or going to a busy / indoor event)
  - The residents' newsletter was still well-received – the latest one had been issued two hours previously and had been opened 13,000 times, with 1,300 people clicking through to the booking page.

Councillor Martha Vickers expressed concern that the message about testing before visiting a busy event was not getting passed on to those attending these events. Martin Dunscombe noted that guidance had only recently changed and this would be a key focus for messaging on the run-up to Christmas. Sean Murphy indicated that they would pick this up directly with venues.

### **251 Future meetings and agenda items**

The Chairman indicated that the Board would be guided by Matt Pearce and Tracy Daszkiewicz as to when they should next meet.

### **252 Any other business**

No other items were raised.

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*(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 7.03 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

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