

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

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 10 JANUARY 2022**

**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), Andy Sharp, 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:** Katie Summers

### **PART I**

#### **261 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2021 were approved as a true and correct record. The Chairman requested that the start and end time of the meeting be noted in the minutes.

#### **262 Declarations of interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

#### **263 Covid-19 situational report**

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

- Testing rates had decreased, but the positivity rate had increased sharply to 32.8% – this was the highest rate since the start of the pandemic.
- There were 1,449.5 cases per 100,000 population – this was similar to the regional average, but lower than the national average.
- Amongst the 60+ age group, the rate was 656.5 per 100,000 population, which was significantly lower than the regional and national averages, and analysis was being undertaken to understand why.
- There had been over 300 cases per day in the last week.
- The epidemiology curve showed that there were more cases than at any other time in the pandemic – it was hard to predict when the peak would occur, but there was evidence that cases had peaked in London and West Berkshire was considered to be a few weeks behind London.
- There were high case rates across all age groups.
- There was some uncertainty regarding the impact of the Omicron variant on older people, but the vaccine appeared to be effective.
- Schools had just returned, so transmission data was not yet available.
- There had been a significant increase in the number of patients in hospital – the latest figures showed 75 patients in Royal Berkshire Hospital, with 8 new admissions and 5 people on mechanical ventilation.
- Patients in hospital were not as seriously ill as in previous waves.
- Of those who were in intensive care, the majority were unvaccinated / part-vaccinated.

## LOCAL OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD (PUBLIC) - 10 JANUARY 2022 - MINUTES

- There had been no Covid related deaths in the last week.
- Over the course of the whole pandemic, there had been 283 Covid related deaths in West Berkshire and there had been a 16% increase in all-cause mortality vs the 5 year average, which equated to around 361 additional deaths.
- Changes to Government guidance were to be introduced on 11 January – this was a temporary measure while Covid rates were high.
- People with a positive lateral flow test result would be asked to self-isolate and report their result on the [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website.
- The change would ensure that PCR tests were available for those who most needed them, including critical workers who ran essential services.
- Exceptions included:
  - People applying for the £500 Test and Trace Support Payment
  - Individuals advised to take a PCR test because they were in a vulnerable group who may need early access to treatment
  - Individuals advised to take a PCR test as part of a research project
  - People arriving to the UK from abroad whose Day 2 LFD test was positive.

The Chairman noted that the Royal Institution Christmas Lecture had provided a fascinating reflection on the pandemic, including the epidemiology of the virus and how vaccines worked.

Councillor Martha Vickers asked about the availability of LFD test kits and noted that the Kennet Centre was not currently giving these out.

Matt Pearce explained that there were still supply issues, so Government was prioritising those who were self-isolating and hospital / social care staff. The Kennet Centre was only doing assisted testing. However, provision to pharmacies was improving and stocks should be better in a week's time. He suggested that people should persist with online ordering, since kits were released in batches.

The Chairman noted that production was being increased from 100 million to 300 million test kits for January and February. Also, Royal Berkshire Hospital was fully stocked in kits for staff. He indicated that he had not experienced problems in obtaining test kits.

Councillor Steve Masters indicated that access to test kits was the main concern amongst residents and asked what the Council was doing to get the message back to Central Government.

Matt Pearce confirmed that he was in regular contact with regional and national teams and all parties recognised the issues. He urged caution about looking at case numbers in the coming days, as it may not represent the true picture. The Public Health Team had allocated kits to Primary Care and key / essential workers. Opportunities were also being taken to make use of mutual aid across local authority boundaries to ensure that tests were provided to people who needed them and to keep the economy going.

### 264 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:

- All residents aged 18+ had been offered a booster dose by 31 December.
- Vaccine centres were very busy before Christmas, but demand tailed off between Christmas and New Year, with some appointments not filled.
- There had been a significant number of patients not attending appointments – this was thought to be due to testing positive for Covid, or patients using the walk-in facilities and not cancelling their appointment.

## LOCAL OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD (PUBLIC) - 10 JANUARY 2022 - MINUTES

- Appointment and walk-in availability remained good – Broad Street Mall had reopened for walk-ins, Strawberry Hill would offer walk-ins on Wednesday and the Kennet Centre would offer walk-ins at the weekend.
- 12-15 year olds were eligible for their second dose 12 weeks after receiving their first one.
- They would need to wait 12 weeks following a positive Covid test result.
- They could either book an appointment on the national booking system or wait for a school visit by the immunisation team.
- There was a focus on encouraging take-up of vaccines / boosters amongst groups that experienced health inequalities.
- The Hungerford pop-up clinic had delivered over 7,500 vaccine doses – more than double the forecast number.
- Thanks were given to the Cricket Club and local community.
- Thanks were also given to the Newbury Racecourse Volunteer Coordinators who had been used again at Hungerford.
- As of 5 January, 81.7% of the eligible population had received a booster, with take-up significantly higher than the national level.
- In terms of inequalities:
  - Thatcham Medical Centre had visited the soup kitchen twice.
  - Strawberry Hill Medical Centre had offered walk-ins for adult social care workers.
  - Lambourn Pharmacy had been supporting racehorse industry workers.
  - Tilehurst Village Surgery had visited the Afghan refugee hotel.
  - Healthwatch West Berkshire and Solutions4Health had supported community engagement.
- Going forward, there would be a multi-faceted approach to identify and address the 3Cs of vaccine hesitancy:
  - Confidence
  - Complacency
  - Convenience
- There would be a greater focus on shared communications and engagement.
- The Health on the Move Van would be used when geographical access was perceived to be a barrier or if there was an opportunity to vaccinate multiple people.
- Opportunities would also be explored to make every contact count and promote health literacy, carry out health checks, etc.
- The locations of vaccination sites in West Berkshire and neighbouring areas was displayed.
- It was noted that the JCVI had recommended:
  - Boosters for 16-17 year olds
  - Boosters for 12-15 year olds in a clinical risk group or who are a household contact of someone who is immunosuppressed and who have had a third primary dose.
  - First doses for 5-11 year olds.
- Government had accepted the recommendations and operational guidance was awaited.

The Chairman observed that most people who had received two doses had also received a booster jab. Also, Graham Sims (Chair of Royal Berkshire Hospital Trust) had recently stated that most people in intensive care were unvaccinated or part-vaccinated, which reflected the view of this Board. The Chairman asked about fourth doses of vaccines and anti-viral drugs for patients who were immunosuppressed.

## LOCAL OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD (PUBLIC) - 10 JANUARY 2022 - MINUTES

Jo Reeves explained that immunosuppressed patients with certain conditions would get three vaccine doses, followed by a booster after 12 weeks. These would be available from walk-in centres, or patients would be invited by their hospital / GP. These patients would also be eligible for anti-viral drugs if they contracted Covid. Guidance and a webinar had been organised for GPs.

Tracy Daszkiewicz indicated that she was categorised as an immunosuppressed patient and had received a special PCR test. In the event of a positive result, she would be fast-tracked into the latest treatment, with an option to take part in trials.

Councillor Lynne Doherty asked about cancellation of appointments if patients had managed to get a vaccine at a walk-in centre. She had tried to cancel her son's appointment, but the NHS website would not let her. Also, she noted there was a national campaign around vaccinating pregnant women and wondered if this was a particular issue in West Berkshire.

Jo Reeves indicated that appointments could be cancelled via the website or by calling 119. She undertook to provide feedback regarding the website. She also indicated that she would ask colleagues about vaccination of pregnant women.

The Chairman suggested that if people were booked to receive a vaccination at a pharmacy then they should call the pharmacy as a minimum.

*Post Meeting Note: The issue of not being able to cancel vaccination appointments on the National Booking System was raised with the Berkshire West lead after the meeting. It was confirmed that this is a known issue with the system. However, there are no plans to fix this at the present time.*

Councillor Steve Masters asked if Strawberry Hill surgery would be offering walk-in vaccinations to people other than social care workers and asked about the opening times.

Jo Reeves indicated that it would be for anyone aged 18+ for Moderna first and second doses and boosters. Opening times were confirmed as 09:00 – 13:00 and 13:30 – 17:30.

Councillor Martha Vickers asked if this would be a one-off.

Jo Reeves indicated that there was not a significant need for additional clinics, but further dates would be announced once the clinic schedule had been confirmed.

Councillor Vickers asked about provision for people with needle phobias.

Jo Reeves indicated that she would need to do research about pathways, but she did not think that there were any non-needle options. She stressed that clinics were good at making reasonable adjustments and would look after all patients.

### 265 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 PPP had monitored all notifications from settings such as care homes over Christmas and New Year.
- Contact tracing was handed over to the national service over Christmas, but the local team resumed duties through the New Year.
- The local team had dealt with 198 cases in the last week.
- The team was now covering additional postcodes and 80 cases had been received on the day of the meeting – capacity had been increased to cope with the increase in demand.

## **LOCAL OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD (PUBLIC) - 10 JANUARY 2022 - MINUTES**

- The effect of changes to Government guidance around confirmatory PCR tests was still unknown.
- People were urged to log lateral flow tests on the Gov.uk website, since this assisted with contact tracing and allowed the team to have a conversation with residents around support requirements, accessing grants, etc.
- The local team had dealt with 768 isolation calls in the last 7 days, which resulted in 450 discussions – feedback from the conversations was good.
- Visits were still being made to settings with outbreaks.
- Plan B rules had come into force before Christmas and were likely to remain in place to the end of January.
- The team had worked with Newbury Racecourse around Covid certification and had supported the race meeting on 29 December.
- Between April and December, there had been 309 events within the PPP area, of which 164 were in West Berkshire – the team had reviewed event management plans and risk assessments and the Public Health Team was thanked for their support.
- Most events had gone off without any Covid related incidents.
- New event management plans were already coming in for 2022 and it was pleasing to note that most were still thinking about Covid mitigation.

### **266 Communications update**

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

- Communications had been focused on supporting operational issues, particularly vaccinations and testing.
- There had been a big uptake in boosters pre-Christmas.
- Messages had advised residents where they could get testing kits.
- They had also promoted the pop-up / walk-in clinics, including Hungerford, which had delivered around 7,500 vaccinations and the extended operation of the facility had also been promoted.
- Looking ahead, the focus would be on changes to Government guidance, including the temporary suspension of PCR tests from 11 January.

Councillor Martha Vickers noted that Councillor Graham Bridgman had sent out a powerful email about protecting the NHS by getting a booster jab and asked if the Council could produce posters and look at other ways to get this message out.

Martin Dunscombe indicated that there were no plans for posters, but it had been circulated to Councillors and other stakeholders. He also indicated that they were looking at ways of how to spread the message more widely (e.g. via the Residents' Newsletter).

### **267 Future meetings and agenda items**

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Board should be on Monday 24 January 2022 at 6pm.

The Chairman indicated that it was important to know the extent of the Omicron variant in the District in order to inform the local response, and to keep the hospitalisation rate and pressure on the NHS under review.

### **268 Any other business**

No other items were raised.

**LOCAL OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD (PUBLIC) - 10 JANUARY 2022 - MINUTES**

*(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 6.52 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

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