



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

READING COVID-19 OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD

4 SEPTEMBER 2020

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

AGENDA ITEM

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READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

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QUESTION No. 1 in accordance with Standing Order No 36

Sue Pigott to ask the Chair of the Outbreak Engagement Board:

Covid-19 and People with Learning Disabilities and/or Autism

My questions relate people with learning disabilities and/or autism and I would like to know:

1. Do we have any data on how many people with learning disabilities/autism have died in Reading due to COVID 19?
2. How many people with learning disabilities who live with elderly parents have been affected by COVID 19?
3. How are Reading addressing the loneliness and isolation that is felt by many people who access social care services - where these have been reduced, paused or withdrawn- what plans are in the making- how do you know what people want?
4. Are there any plans to apply for schemes where technology can be made available for those in real need of connecting with others digitally?

Sue Pigott
Project Coordinator
Talkback

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Chair of the Outbreak Engagement Board):

Questions 1 and 2

Regarding your question about the impacts of COVID-19 on those with Learning Disabilities- We know there have been 166 deaths from COVID-19 in Reading and a total of 863 confirmed cases. However, at this point in time we do not have data on what number had a diagnosed learning disability or autism.

However, we are keen that the needs of this group are not lost within the “system”. So when someone with a learning disability develops possible symptoms, access to the testing is designed to be accessible - for example by allowing requests for testing to be made by a carer on an individual’s behalf. If someone tests positive and is identified as having support needs these are escalate to the Council by NHS Test and Trace. If they are from a setting at higher risk of an outbreak- such as a learning disability home - this situation can easily be escalated to Public Health England’s local expert team to support with the management of the outbreak.

Question 3

Reading Borough Council staff working in learning disabilities and older people’s day services continue to carry out welfare checks with people who use services who have a learning disability and their carers. They continue to offer support and advice to carers, who are struggling at home and work closely with colleagues in adult social care to ensure extra support in the home is available where needed.

A priority has been placed on ensuring that people who use our services continue to receive access to activities to mentally stimulate them during this time of isolation. Staff delivered

activity packs and staying well messages directly to homes, where digital access could not be accessed. People are now being offered limited access to the learning disabilities centre, where there is the highest need. This continues to be an offer for the most vulnerable who can't be cared for in the home without additional support and access to care and support staff. Staff in older people's day services continue to build relationships with their service users and carers by regular phone calls to offer support, guidance or a chat.

Discussions are taking place on when and how a safe return to services can take place. However, ensuring the safety of our most vulnerable residents is the highest priority and this continues to be a challenge for anyone in the vulnerable category, due to their risk of contracting the virus. We will continue to work with voluntary and statutory services, to seek the best way forward with minimise risk, while increasing social activity.

Question 4

Reading Borough Council leads on Loneliness & Social Isolation as a Health and Wellbeing Priority and chairs a regular meeting that is in partnership with many voluntary organisations across Reading, representing the views of our residents.

During Covid 19 outbreak the virtual meetings have focused on how do we ensure our most vulnerable residents are connected to the outside world and have the means to access family and friendships, support services and essential services like food supplies. The issue of digital inclusion has been identified as a key area of development and many partners are working together to address the issue, for example purchasing iPads for the most vulnerable persons and support to use the equipment.

In the meantime, Reading Voluntary Action and The University of Reading, along with other volunteer groups, continue to support people to utilise the technology they have, by offering over the phone technical support to use computers, smart phones, laptops and iPads. Reading libraries are also offering some digital support: As part of phase 1 reopening there are eight public computers available at Central Library, 10am - 3pm Mon/Tue/Thur/Fri/Sat, which can be booked in advance by calling Central Library on 0118 937 5950. Limited help is available from staff.

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QUESTION No. 2 in accordance with Standing Order No 36

Francesca Rolle to ask the Chair of the Outbreak Engagement Board:

Communications for People with Visual Impairment

Unfortunately no one is able to attend the meeting on the 4th September due to current furlough/annual leave arrangements. However, could we please put forward the question of how any “alert messaging” and other essential communications will be made sure to reach people with a visual impairment (who may not access the information in the same way as others), and in an appropriate format for them to be able to access the information depending on their needs?

We would also like to highlight our website pages detailing ways that individuals and organisations can support people with sight loss during the Covid-19 pandemic: <https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/covid19/assisting-people-with-sight-loss>

Many thanks,
Francesca Rolle
Engagement Officer, South West
The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Chair of the Outbreak Engagement Board):

One of our key priorities identified during the pandemic is to support the people who are most vulnerable and isolated in our communities.

We are working hard to ensure all our methods of communication are as assessible as possible - for example, we have worked closely with Reading Deaf Centre to provide BSL video translations and we have also created a page dedicated to information in other languages. We are also currently working on a project to provide audio and subtitled video information on coronavirus safety messaging, which would include translations.

Our main channels of communication with residents are accessible for people with a visual impairment. The Reading Council website www.reading.gov.uk is one of our main channels for providing up to date information for the public.

We strive to ensure our website is as easy as possible for everyone to access and supports the use of assistive technologies, for example, screen readers and browser controls eg text resizing (www.reading.gov.uk/accessibility). The website has information on our latest coronavirus updates and guidance at <https://www.reading.gov.uk/coronavirusinfo> . We also have a section specifically on wellbeing <https://www.reading.gov.uk/coronavirusadvice> which signposts residents to where to find information in alternative formats.

We are encouraging residents to sign up to our regular eNewsletter at www.reading.gov.uk/enewslettersignup Our news emails have a text size that can be increased by the reader if needed.

We use social media to regularly update residents who can follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. We follow best practice when posting on social media including the use of alternative text tags for images and the use of CamelCase for Hashtags.

We have also recently set up a Council Nextdoor App account which we would encourage residents to sign up to. Nextdoor is the neighbourhood hub for trusted connections and the exchange of helpful information, goods, and services: <https://nextdoor.co.uk/> Nextdoor is also accessible for screen readers and has dynamic font size for better readability: <https://engblog.nextdoor.com/accessibility-nextdoor-4f1375bf5240> We intend to use Nextdoor as another channel to make important announcements to residents.

In the event of a major outbreak in Reading, we would use as many communication channels as possible to reach as wide an audience as we can. Depending on the situation we may also include the use of radio and TV broadcast.

The Council holds a register of all the residents in the borough registered either as sight impaired (partially sighted) or severely sight impaired (blind). During the lockdown, in partnership with the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), we wrote to all those on the register to provide useful information about services/help specifically available to those with sight loss. We have also contacted everyone receiving a care package with a welfare call to ensure their wellbeing.

We are also always happy to provide all our material in alternative versions on request. If the material specifically relates to coronavirus, people can email cv19notifications@reading.gov.uk or call 0118 937 2707.

We are also very keen to work further with local partners at The Guide Dogs for the Blind, RNIB and Berkshire Vision and to explore ideas for improving the accessibility of our communications. We would also welcome linking up to use partner channels to communicate urgent messages via their channels and community links. The communications team can be contacted via cv19notifications@reading.gov.uk

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QUESTION No. 3 in accordance with Standing Order No 36

Tom Lake to ask the Chair of the Outbreak Engagement Board:

RBC Covid-19 objectives/Test & Trace/Guideline Conformity

1. What are the objectives of Reading Borough Council in respect of Covid-19?
2. Please explain the flow of data about people with positive test results for Covid-19 to our local Public Health team and our GPs. Are full personal contact details available to them? How long after a positive test result and in which cases? What are the consequences for contract tracing in Reading?
3. Informal observation indicates that record-keeping at some town centre pubs has become lax and the wearing of face coverings is also not well observed in some shops. Will the board and the Borough Council act to increase conformity with laws and guidelines? Could business organisations and business-related social organisations assist in improving the situation?

Tom Lake
Information Officer
South Reading Patient Voice

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Chair of the Outbreak Engagement Board):

Thank you for your questions Mr Lake. I'll answer them in order.

1. I'm not entirely clear what kind of objectives your question might be referring to. In strategic terms our overall aim at this point is to ensure Reading can be a thriving, virus-resilient community. To achieve this there are three strategic objectives:
 - 1) To ensure the Council itself is resilient and fit for the future
 - 2) To help people be safe and communities thrive
 - 3) To secure the economic future of Reading
2. People with a positive test result are automatically entered into the national test and trace programme. From there they are given advice re self-isolation and information obtained about those that are considered "contacts" and also need to isolate. The council receives data on a daily basis on those who test positive which includes postcode data so that any local clustering or outbreaks can easily be identified.

The role of Local Authorities in supporting the NHS Test and Trace system in local contact tracing is currently under review. In some high incidence areas, such as Leicester or Blackburn who have also had low completion rates on contact tracing, a role has been taken on by the councils to support a higher completion rate. In these areas of course, contact detail information is shared with councils so they can undertake this role. In Reading we already have, at the moment, a relatively well performing Test and Trace programme that consistently reaches, or is extremely close

to, the 80% completion target and as such at this time we have not taken on this role locally.

Personally I believe that the test and trace system should be almost wholly run locally rather than through large national privatised contracts but, clearly, we need to do the best with the situation as it is rather than as we would like it to be.

3. We have established a dedicated team made up of Environmental Health Officers and Officers from regulatory services to proactively inspect premises and work with owners to ensure all areas of their operations are “COVID Secure”. This includes, but is not limited to, complying with Test and Trace record keeping and face covering requirements. We have also written to all businesses in Reading to outline their requirements for being COVID secure and have established a reporting phone number and email address for members of the public to report to the council any establishments where they have concerns about their COVID practices.