

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	3 AUGUST 2020		
TITLE:	ESTABLISHMENT OF THE READING COVID-19 OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLORS BROCK/ HOSKIN	PORTFOLIO:	LEADER OF THE COUNCIL/ HEALTH, WELLBEING AND SPORT
SERVICE:	LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out a proposal to set up a Reading COVID-19 Outbreak Engagement Board (OEB) to involve the public and partners in the evolution of the Reading COVID-19 Outbreak Control Plan, and to support swift and effective local communication with all residents potentially impacted by a local outbreak.
- 1.2 The report also deals with the membership, terms of reference and arrangements for holding meetings of the OEB.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Reading Covid 19 Outbreak Engagement Board (OEB) be set up as a Sub-Committee of Policy Committee with the terms of reference set out in paragraph 4 of the report and the following membership:
 - 10 Councillors (Labour 6; Conservative 2; Greens 1; and Lib Dems 1) (Group Leaders will make nominations at the meeting);
 - All non-Councillor members of the Health & Wellbeing Board (including co-opted members) to be co-opted onto the OEB;
 - Other appropriate officers, Ward Councillors or other people to be co-opted onto the OEB as necessary;
- 2.2 That the OEB determine its frequency of meetings as necessary.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 On 23rd May 2020, the Department of Health and Social Care issued a letter to all local authorities in England setting out the requirement to develop Local Outbreak Control Plans as part of the continuing response to the COVID-19 virus. A national Test and Trace service has been launched, alongside which local systems will play a critical role in helping to contain the spread of the virus and enable a gradual resumption of many of the activities which have been restricted in the first phases of the national COVID-19 response.
- 3.2 Councils need to involve partners in the development and implementation of Local Outbreak Control Plans, providing strategic direction and building on local expertise and activity already in place. An agreed initial Plan was put in place by 30 June 2020, agreed by the Chief Executive through the Decision Book to meet the required deadline, but the Plan includes arrangements for the Plan to be refined, adapted and reviewed via a public-facing partnership Board.
- 3.3 The Outbreak Control Plan was approved by the Health Protection Board for Berkshire West, which is another component of the new governance arrangements required to establish a local response mechanism to complement the nationally driven arrangements. The Health Protection Board will provide oversight of local outbreak management and review the latest data on infections at a local level. It will direct resources at a sub-regional level as required to support the actions taken by Reading Borough Council's Gold Command emergency response forum in accordance with the Reading COVID-19 Outbreak Control Plan.
- 3.4 The Reading COVID-19 Outbreak Control Plan provides for the establishment of a Reading Outbreak Engagement Board to involve the public and partners in the evolution of the Plan, and to support swift and effective local communication with all residents potentially impacted by a local outbreak.

4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 It is proposed to establish a Reading Covid-19 Outbreak Engagement Board to involve the public and partners in the evolution of the Outbreak Control Plan, and to enable effective communication with the public in the case of a local outbreak.
- 4.2 The Reading Health and Wellbeing Board is an existing partnership board that brings together the Council, NHS, police, fire and rescue service, local voluntary sector infrastructure organisation and the Local Healthwatch provider. With an established focus on reducing health inequalities, early intervention, and the prevention of poor health, the members of this Board are well placed to be involved with the work of the OEB, and so it is recommended that these partners are co-opted onto the OEB.
- 4.3 The proposed Terms of Reference for the Reading Outbreak Engagement Board are:

“The Reading Outbreak Engagement Board will function to ensure that:

 - Reading residents and partners have a voice in the development of the more detailed Plan and the ongoing approach to delivering it;
 - System leaders are accountable for the policy and operational decisions taken in support of the Plan;
 - A Reading Outbreak Communications Plan is developed and kept under review to ensure it is building public trust and participation in the Control Plan;
 - The Reading Plan respects and promotes equality and diversity and demonstrate how disproportionate impacts on vulnerable groups can be mitigated; and

- There is appropriate scrutiny of decisions taken in support of the Reading Plan either by the Berkshire West Health Protection Board or by Reading’s Gold Command emergency planning forum.”

4.4 It is proposed to set up the Outbreak Engagement Board as a Sub-Committee of the Policy Committee, which has itself been set up during the Pandemic as a smaller group of Councillors to make decisions on behalf of other Committees, in accordance with Urgency Procedures in the Constitution.

4.5 In order to make the Councillor membership of the OEB proportional and allow each Political Group to be represented, the Sub-Committee would have 10 councillors based on 6 Labour; 2 Conservative; 1 Green; and 1 Liberal Democrat. This allocation will require the Labour Group to give up one seat to enable the Liberal Democrat Group to be represented (and, because of this variance from the proportionality of seats on the Council as a whole, it will need to be agreed without dissent). The Group Leaders will make nominations at the meeting for the Councillors from each Group to be appointed to the OEB.

4.6 The membership of the Health & Wellbeing Board is

- 4 Councillors - the Leader of the Council, and the Lead Councillors for Health, Wellbeing & Sport, Adult Social Care and Children
- The Director of Adult Social Care & Health *
- The Director of Children’s Services *
- Director of Public Health for the Local Authority or his/her representative *
- Two representatives from the Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)
- A representative from the Local Healthwatch organisation

(* the Members asterisked do not have voting rights)

The following are co-opted as non-voting additional members:

- The Chief Executive of Reading Borough Council (or his/her representative)
- A representative of Reading Voluntary Action
- A representative from Thames Valley Police’s Reading Local Police Area
- A representative from Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service

4.7 It is proposed that the non-Councillor members of the Health & Wellbeing Board are co-opted onto the OEB, technically as non-voting members of the Sub-Committee (OEB), but to allow it to run in practice in the partnership working way that the Health & Wellbeing Board does currently. The Council officers, who cannot be members of a Council committee set up under the Local Government Act 1972, will be advisors to the OEB.

4.8 The membership of the Board could be extended as necessary by the OEB co-opting further officer advisors, Ward Councillors or other appropriate people onto the Board as felt necessary in the case of a local outbreak or incident.

4.9 The quorum of the Health & Wellbeing Board is currently 3 voting members, and this is also proposed for the OEB.

4.10 The meetings of the Board will initially be held on-line, in a way that allows public access to them, but it is possible that the meetings might be held in the Civic Offices

in future if committees are able to do this whilst remaining compliant with COVID-19 guidance.

- 4.11 The existence of the OEB will be time-limited, for the period that it is needed for the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 4.12 The frequency of meetings of the OEB and the details of how the engagement with the public is carried out will be determined by the OEB itself.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The work of the Outbreak Engagement Board will build on the contribution to the Councils' Corporate Plan priorities made by approving the Reading COVID-19 Outbreak Control Plan:
- *Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable* - by supporting those who are vulnerable to be able to self-isolate as required, and by preventing and managing outbreaks in care homes or within other high risk communities;
 - *Providing the best start in life through education, early help and healthy living* - by focusing on the prevention and management of outbreaks in schools;
 - *Keeping the town clean, safe, green and active* - by helping to reduce the spread of infection and supporting a safe return to physical activity; and
 - *Providing infrastructure to support the economy* - by establishing a localised response system which allows more businesses to resume trading.
- 5.2 The work also contributes to the Council's strategic aim *to promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all* by putting in place local health protection arrangements specific to COVID-19 but which recognise and address the risk which the virus poses to exacerbating health inequalities.
- 5.3 The work will also support the three-point strategic framework that the Council has adopted in response to COVID-19:
- *support and protect vulnerable children and adults by ensuring the social care system continues to function effectively;*
 - *support the people who are most vulnerable and isolated in our communities; and*
 - *support businesses and the local economy, and secure Reading's economic recovery.*

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 6.2 There are no direct environmental or climate implications of setting up the Reading COVID-19 Local Outbreak Engagement Board.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 The purpose of the OEB is to lead engagement with the public and partners regarding Covid risks and prevention and will involve the public and partners in the evolution of the Outbreak Control Plan, and to support swift and effective local communication with all residents potentially impacted by a local outbreak.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

8.2 It is imperative that in responding to the Covid emergency we look to protect the most vulnerable and marginalised in our society. The Council’s revised priorities in the Covid 19 pandemic facilitate this, and the members of the OEB will have this in mind when carrying out their work, ensuring that the local plan respects and promotes equality and diversity and demonstrates how disproportionate impacts on vulnerable groups can be mitigated.

8.3 The setting up of the OEB is considered to be of neutral effect to the public sector equality duty.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Under the provisions of Sections 101 and 102 of the Local Government Act 1972, a local authority may arrange for the discharge of any of their functions by a Committee or Sub-Committee. That committee may include persons who are not members of the appointing authority or authorities or, in the case of a sub-committee, the authority or authorities of whom they are a sub-committee.

9.2 The Coronavirus Act 2020 received Royal Assent on 25 March 2020 and contained provision for the Secretary of State to make Regulations in relation to the arrangements for holding local authority meetings (Section 78), during the current pandemic.

9.3 The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020’ [The Regulations] came into effect on 6 April 2020 and enable local authorities to hold online meetings.

9.4 Regulation 5(1) states that a meeting of a local authority is not limited to a meeting of persons all of whom, or any of whom, are present in the same place and any reference to a “place” where a meeting is held, or to be held, includes reference to more than one place including electronic, digital or virtual locations such as internet locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers.

9.5 Regulation 5(5) states that the provision applies notwithstanding any prohibition or other restriction contained in the standing orders of the local authority and Regulation 5(6) allows a local authority to make other standing orders and other rules relating to the arrangements for and attendance at online meetings of the authority.

9.6 Sections 15-17 of the Local Government & Housing Act 1989 deal with the duty to allocate seats to political groups in accordance with the proportionality of the groups’ representation on the Council. Section 17 allows an exemption to the proportionality requirement where no member of the committee dissents to disapplying the rule.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of setting up this Board.
- 10.2 However, to support its overall COVID-19 control activity, Reading Borough Council has received a one-off grant of £901k. This is ring-fenced for the following purpose “*to provide support to local authorities in England towards expenditure lawfully incurred or to be incurred in relation to the mitigation against and management of local outbreaks of COVID-19*”. To support the response work occurring at a Berkshire wide and at a Berkshire West level, the Council has committed to contributing £386k of this money to the Berkshire Shared Team to support the following roles and functions:
- Dep Director of Public Health
 - Covid Surveillance Specialist
 - Analytical capacity
 - Health protection cell project management support
 - Public Health Expertise - capacity for Health Protection Cells
 - Capacity for out of hours triage of notifications and response to organisational queries
 - Specialist public health Comms & Engagement.
 - Social media management and delivery of campaign work
 - Comms and engagement budget
- 10.3 That leaves a further £515k for Reading Borough Council to use at its discretion, within the conditions of the grant, to support local COVID-19 response and outbreak control. Further work will be undertaken to determine the most cost-effective use of these monies on local priorities.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 None