

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### READING COVID-19 OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD

4 SEPTEMBER 2020

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and isolation that is felt by many people who access social care services - where these have been reduced, paused or withdrawn- what plans are in the making- how do you know what people want?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.