

## READING COVID-19 OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD MINUTES - 26 FEBRUARY 2021

### Present:

Councillor Hoskin (Chair)	Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport, Reading Borough Council (RBC)
Mandeep Bains	Chief Executive, Healthwatch Reading (substituting for David Shepherd)
Councillor Brock	Leader of the Council, RBC
Councillor Challenger	RBC
Andy Ciecierski	GP and Urgent Care Clinical Lead for Berkshire West CCG
Councillor Jones	Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care, RBC
Eiliis McCarthy	Reading Locality Manager, Berkshire West CCG (substituting for Maureen McCartney)
Councillor McEwan	Chair of Adult Social Care, Children's Service & Education Committee, RBC
Councillor McGonigle	RBC
Gail Muirhead	Prevention Manager, Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service
Councillor Robinson	RBC
Rachel Spencer	Chief Executive, Reading Voluntary Action
Councillor Stanford-Beale	RBC
Councillor Terry	Lead Councillor for Children, RBC

### Also in attendance:

Amanda McDonnell	Media and Communications Manager, RBC
Lorraine Briffit	Managing Director, Connect Reading
Tony Cowling	Member of the Public
James Crosbie	Regulatory Services Manager, RBC
Dom Hardy	Chief Operating Officer, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust
Victor Koroma	General Manager, ACRE (Alliance for Cohesion and Racial Equality)
Tom Lake	Information Officer, South Reading Patient Voice
Joan Lloyd	Member of the Public
Aisha Malik	Reading Community Learning Centre
Frances Martin	Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services
David Munday	Consultant in Public Health, RBC
Vicky Rhodes	Director of Early Help, BFfC
Prem Sharma	South Reading Patient Voice
Nicky Simpson	Committee Services, RBC
Chris Stannard	Wellbeing Programme Officer, RBC
Tina Stevenson	Chief Executive Officer, Citizens Advice Reading

### Apologies:

Seona Douglas	Director of Adult Care & Health Services, RBC
Deborah Glassbrook	Director of Children's Services, Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC)
Paul Illman	West Hub Group Manager, Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service

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Maureen McCartney Director of Operations, Reading Localities, Berkshire West CCG  
Meradin Peachey Director of Public Health for Berkshire West  
Kate Reynolds Director of Education, Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC)  
Jan Rothwell Strategic Support, Citizens Advice Reading  
David Shepherd Chair, Healthwatch Reading  
Melissa Wise Assistant Director of Commissioning, Transformation & Performance, RBC

## 1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

## 2. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Questions on the following matters were submitted by members of the public:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>
1.	Tony Cowling	Ventilation
2.	Tony Cowling	Superspreading Events
3.	Tony Cowling	Spread by Touch
4.	Tom Lake	Isolation to Control Transmission
5.	Tom Lake	Testing Contacts

(The full text of the questions and responses was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

## 3. LOCAL COVID-19 DATA UPDATE

David Munday and Vicky Rhodes gave verbal updates, presented slides and answered questions on the latest situation in Reading on the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The presentation slides were made available on the Reading Borough Council website. The presentation included information on:

- A selection of information from the latest Berkshire data on Covid-19. This included cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 population - Reading had 85 cases per 100,000. In comparison, when the lockdown had been released in December 2020 the case numbers had been 150, but it was expected that, by the time this lockdown period was released, the case numbers were likely to have reduced to around half of that, so Reading would be in a stronger position. The positivity rate was 3.2 %, which was decreasing rapidly, for example in comparison with around 20% in mid-January 2021.
- A “heat map” showing cases in different age groups. Every age band had seen a significant reduction in cases and the numbers in primary school age were particularly low.

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- Comparative data showing case rates for Reading and other Berkshire authorities in comparison to regional and national rates. The spike of the second wave had taken place in early January 2021. The decline following the spike had taken a week later in Reading but there had then been a rapid decline and the rates had now reduced to the same as elsewhere.
- Information about the Kent variant, which was more transmissible than the original strain, and so had now become the dominant strain within the UK and in Reading. The new variant was still detectable on tests and vaccines would still be effective against it.
- Data on mortality rates in Reading - As well as the first wave spike in April 2020, there had also been a spike in Covid-related deaths in Winter 2020/21 and this was now past; there were still some Covid-related deaths but these numbers were expected to reduce further.
- Details of the national planned four step process for release from lockdown with key dates for Step 1 on 8 and 29 March 2021, Step 2 no earlier than 12 April 2021, Step 3 no earlier than 17 May 2021 and Step 4 no earlier than 21 June 2021. It was noted that, realistically, it was expected that even after release of lockdown there might be some restrictions, with people needing to live and work in Covid-safe ways.
- Information on the latest situation with regard to planning for children being able to return to schools, colleges and early years settings from 8 March 2021, with school attendance to be mandatory. Details were given on the planned testing regimes, face covering requirements and the government's plans for teacher gradings to replace GCSEs and A levels.
- It was noted that there had been a focus on getting improved school attendance for vulnerable children in lockdown, which had mainly been around reducing parental anxiety, and this had had positive results. For the current week, the numbers for on-site attendance had been 18.5% and 48% for children with a social worker.
- Additional support which had been mobilised for vulnerable children, including the winter support grant, food vouchers over the February half term and free school holiday activities planned until December 2021, with a focus on healthy eating.
- BfFC's imminent annual conversation with Ofsted which would review the impact of Covid and priorities for the following year, which were likely to focus particularly on the increases in child protection and complex cases.

**AGREED:** That the position be noted.

### 4. LOCAL COVID-19 COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

Amanda McDonnell gave a presentation on the latest situation in Reading on communications on the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The presentation slides were made available on the Reading Borough Council website.

Amanda McDonnell explained that the Covid-19 Communications Plan was continuing to evolve as expected and a strategic approach was being taken:

- Amplify national messages by sharing NHS, Public Health England (PHE) and Government resources eg the latest rules and vaccination programme
- Responding to emerging issues, such as free school meals and new testing centres

- Communicating messages of local significance

The presentation gave examples of insights being gained from research with local people, for example on vaccine hesitancy, failure to isolate, young people's concerns, people not following rules and how some groups or locations were more at risk.

It also gave details of recent communications activities and learning points from these, noting that locally produced materials were more popular than polished materials from central sources, and that there was being a better response to harder messages than previously. Careful planning was being carried out for communications regarding the expected steps towards lockdown release as everyone was mindful that the dates might change.

**AGREED:** That the position be noted.

### 5. RECENT COVID-19 OUTBREAKS - LESSONS LEARNED

James Crosbie gave a presentation on a recent Covid outbreak in a sports team, setting out a case study to illustrate the work involved for the Council. The presentation slides were made available on the Reading Borough Council website.

The presentation gave details of the case, which had involved notification to the Council on 11 December 2020 of an outbreak of 30 positive Covid cases within a professional and academy sport team. The academy played regularly at a secondary school and had students within the team and the secondary school had been closed due to a separate outbreak. At that point it had been unknown whether a formal link had been made between the school and club outbreaks.

The Council had made contact immediately with the Club's Covid officer. The Club had contacted all players/parents and had isolated all players (cases and contacts) since 6 December 2020; the Club had proactively closed all extended branches on 8 December 2020 to prevent further cases. The Council had carried out a remote inspection of Covid control measures and the Club had been deemed to be operating in line with current PHE Guidance, so no further action had been required on this occasion.

The presentation also gave examples of challenges that the Council was experiencing regarding outbreaks, which included:

- Companies not reporting cases and/or outbreaks to the Local Authority;
- Varying levels of information being provided to the Environmental Health Team regarding previous communication with businesses;
- Premises with outbreaks arising were not always previously known to the Council (eg if there had been no Health & Safety interventions) therefore contacting some businesses had been challenging;
- The Health and Safety Enforcement role was shared between multiple agencies;
- Public Health England had been successful in contacting Company Head Offices, but this may have not been communicated to local branches with whom the Council would initially speak;
- Verifying and securing information from anonymous complainants.

**AGREED:** That the position be noted.

## 6. COVID-19 VACCINATION - UPDATE

David Munday and Rachel Spencer gave a presentation on the latest situation on Covid-19 vaccinations in Reading. The presentation slides were made available on the Reading Borough Council website.

The presentation gave details of the local vaccination roll-out, which included:

- A GP offer to care home residents and staff
- Delivery via five Primary Care Networks;
  - Tilehurst Village Surgery
  - Watlington House
  - Circuit Lane Surgery
  - Emmer Green
  - University Health Centre
- Hospital Hubs for Health and Social care staff - Wokingham and Royal Berkshire Hospital sites, providing Dose 1 until the end of February 2021
- Triangle Pharmacy for all eligible groups
- Mass vaccination site at the Madejski Stadium, which went live on 22 February 2021 and was expected to have capacity for 10,000 vaccinations per week at full roll out

It gave details of the nine priority groups set nationally and it was reported that all those in Groups 1 to 4 in Reading had now been offered a vaccination, vaccinations were happening for those in Groups 5 and 6, and vaccinations had not yet started for those in Groups 7 to 9, but Reading was more advanced than many areas. It was reported that there had been an announcement on 26 February 2021 that those under 50 years old would be vaccinated in three age bands - 50-40, 40-30 and 18-30.

Around 30,000 people had been vaccinated so far in Reading and, although figures were not yet available in sub-borough detail or as a proportion of those offered, it looked as though around 90% of the older population had been vaccinated. Once more data was available on geographical areas or social groups with lower take-up, this would be key information to help increase take-up and avoid any further health inequalities.

Examples were given of vaccination communications being used to enhance the national message and encourage take-up. It was known from previous experience that some ethnic minority groups had a lower uptake of vaccinations generally and that there was increased risk for the BAME community and increased Covid-19 vaccine hesitancy. A proactive approach was therefore being taken to engage with all communities to increase confidence in the vaccine, ensure convenience in accessing the vaccine and address any complacency and further details were given. The presentation listed the key stakeholders working on this issue and the following key ongoing actions were listed:

- Identify influential leaders to co-produce communications materials
- Propose further briefing sessions with specific groups to address the concerns specific to that community
- Communications materials produced as per the needs of each group - eg easy read or translated, tackling specific myths or misconceptions
- Working closely with CCG/NHS to address communication and access barriers regarding Covid-19 vaccination

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- Continue to establish and build relationships with our ethnic minority communities via all communication channels such as email, social media, WhatsApp groups, phone calls

The presentation also addressed some of the common vaccine questions:

- Is it really effective? I hear different numbers quoted and it is confusing - *Yes it is effective*
- Will it work against new variants and if not is it worth it? *Yes - it is remaining effective against the new variants*
- Should people who have had COVID-19 still take the vaccine? *Yes - people should not rely on natural immunity from having had the virus as generally there is a stronger and more sustainable immune response from vaccination. If people have had Covid-19 within 28 days prior to their vaccination date, the vaccination will be given later*
- Is the vaccine safe? I've heard it's been rushed through without being tested. *Yes it is safe - none of the safety and quality control measures have been sidestepped. The funding had been provided up front and necessary information had been submitted as soon as available to streamline the vaccine development process.*

Details were given of the support given by Reading's voluntary and community sector to the vaccine rollout, explaining that volunteers had been supporting the neighbourhood vaccine hubs, working with the Primary Care Networks as wanted, for example welcoming, managing car parking, marshalling and carrying out administration tasks. Partners had worked on a "No one left behind" principle, with a partnership of voluntary and community groups offering support to:

- Register with a GP
- Make a vaccine appointment once eligible
- Arrange Readibus transport to and from the hubs
- Share information and updates to enable people to make an informed decision
- Provide buddy support when needed for people needing help, for example with language & welcome, Learning Disability, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, disability or communication impairment
- Central help line with Language Line support

As an example, from a sample of 50 people who were eligible but had not yet had the vaccine:

- 19 had a vaccine appointment booked.
- 3 were receiving other treatment that prevented having the vaccine.
- 8 were supported to make and access a vaccine appointment.
- 3 were unsure and had yet to decide if they would have the vaccine.
- For the remaining 19, volunteers had been unable to make contact.

In response to questions, it was reported that the Dose 2 of the vaccine was expected to be given 10-12 weeks after Dose 1. Data so far had shown that the vaccine was 75-80% effective with one dose and the second dose added an extra 5-10% effectiveness. The current strategy was therefore to focus on getting Dose 1 to as many people as possible, and then the boost of Dose 2 would give longevity. For those people who had

had their first dose in December 2020, Dose 2 vaccinations would be starting soon, subject to confirmation of vaccine supplies being available. The various vaccination sites had been working together to share supplies to ensure that those in the higher categories could be vaccinated first.

**AGREED:** That the position be noted.

### **7. LOCAL OUTBREAK CONTROL PLAN DEVELOPMENT - TESTING STRATEGY UPDATE**

David Munday explained that one of the things that had changed most since the last meeting was the local Covid-19 testing strategy and he gave a presentation on the latest situation. The presentation slides were made available on the Reading Borough Council website.

The Covid-19 testing rate in Reading remained good and monitoring of engagement with testing was ongoing to ensure good coverage across the Borough. The testing turn-around time averaged 1.5 days and Prospect Park had been converted to a 7 day a week Local Testing Site. There were deployment plans in place for any potential “surge testing” locally for variants of concern, and Lateral Flow Testing was increasingly being made available.

The presentation explained Lateral Flow Testing, which tested for the presence of the viral antigen and gave a result within 30 minutes, although it was less accurate than the lab-based PCR swab test. It was primarily used for those without symptoms and had an important role in “case finding” to isolate people to avoid transmission but it was important that other mitigations also remained in place. Lateral Flow Testing was widely available in Reading at the University of Reading, schools and colleges, nurseries and health and social care settings. It was available in outbreak situations if needed and for those unable to work from home, and twice weekly testing was recommended.

There were two sites in Reading for “key worker” testing at South Reading and Rivermead Leisure Centres, which had opened on 10 and 15 February 2021 respectively, and these were open to 14 essential worker groups who could not work from home, had contact with service users and the public and could not be tested by their employer. The testing had been promoted to eligible groups by various means and examples of these communications were given.

Advice from partners about emerging demand had informed the scale of the operation in Reading. The sites were currently receiving bookings at 50% testing capacity and further communications and engagement work was being undertaken to improve take-up and some eligible groups were now being offered home testing. In the period from 10 to 19 February 2021 (7.5 working days), 773 tests had been undertaken, only two of which had been positive. The presentation slides included links to details of all the testing sites available in Berkshire, and it was noted that people could attend wherever was most convenient.

In response to questions, David Munday explained that those who had been vaccinated were also being asked to have Lateral Flow Tests, as it took around 21 days to build up immunity and although the second vaccine dose would give fuller protection, even then the vaccine would not be 100% effective, so people could still get Covid-19 and testing would still be important. People did not need to interrupt their testing regime because

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of receiving vaccinations and it was still important for people to continue to follow lockdown advice once vaccinated. It was not yet known how long the testing regime would continue, as this would depend on the Government Covid-19 “roadmap”, but it was likely to be in place through the summer and beyond.

**AGREED:** That the position be noted.

### **8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**Resolved -** That the next meeting of the Board be held at 2pm on Friday 23 April 2021.

(The meeting started at 2.00pm and closed at 4.12pm)