

## READING COVID-19 OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD MINUTES - 23 APRIL 2021

### Present:

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| Councillor Hoskin<br>(Chair) | Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport, Reading Borough Council (RBC) |
| Mandeep Bains                | Chief Executive, Healthwatch Reading   |
| Councillor Brock             | Leader of the Council, RBC   |
| Andy Ciecierski              | GP and Urgent Care Clinical Lead for Berkshire West CCG                      |
| Councillor McEwan            | Chair of Adult Social Care, Children's Service & Education Committee, RBC    |
| Rachel Spencer               | Chief Executive, Reading Voluntary Action                                    |
| Councillor Stanford-Beale    | RBC  |

### Also in attendance:

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Niki Barton      | Strategic Communications Manager, RBC                          |
| Karen Buckley    | Assistant Consultant in Public Health, RBC                     |
| James Crosbie    | Regulatory Services Manager, RBC                               |
| Gabby Haffner    | Health Protection Specialist, Berkshire East Public Health Hub |
| Tom Lake         | Information Officer, South Reading Patient Voice               |
| Joan Lloyd       | Member of the Public   |
| David Munday     | Consultant in Public Health, RBC                               |
| Meradin Peachey  | Director of Public Health for Berkshire West                   |
| Kate Reynolds    | Director of Education, Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC)    |
| Nicky Simpson    | Committee Services, RBC  |
| Chris Stannard   | Wellbeing Programme Officer, RBC                               |
| Brenda Watterson | Health Protection Team, Public Health for Berkshire            |

### Apologies:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Lorraine Briffit<br>Councillor<br>Challenger | Managing Director, Connect Reading<br>RBC                             |
| Seona Douglas                                | Director of Adult Care & Health Services, RBC                         |
| Deborah Glassbrook                           | Director of Children's Services, Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) |
| Dom Hardy                                    | Chief Operating Officer, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust         |
| Paul Illman                                  | West Hub Group Manager, Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service         |
| Janet Lippett                                | Chief Medical Officer, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust           |
| Nicky Lloyd                                  | Acting Chief Executive, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust          |
| Frances Martin                               | Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services     |
| Eiliis McCarthy                              | Reading Locality Manager, Berkshire West CCG                          |
| Gail Muirhead                                | Prevention Manager, Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service             |
| Councillor Terry                             | Lead Councillor for Children, RBC                                     |

## 1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

## 2. LOCAL COVID-19 DATA UPDATE

David Munday gave a verbal update, 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 25 cases per 100,000, in comparison with 85 in February 2021. The positivity rate was now only 1%, down from 3.2% in February 2021.
- A “heat map” showing cases in different age groups, with low rates across all age bands; there was a slightly higher rate in the 11-16 year old age group, but still under 100 per 100,000. There were very low rates in the over 60s.
- Comparative data showing case rates for Reading and other Berkshire authorities in comparison to regional and national rates. All the Berkshire authorities had low rates and whilst Slough was showing slightly higher numbers overall and Wokingham had had a slight increase, all were below 100 per 100,000.
- Information about the Kent variant, which had become the dominant strain, with the original variant now being almost completely not detected.
- Data on mortality rates in Reading - In March 2021 there had been a couple of weeks with no Covid-related deaths in Reading, for the first time since early September 2020, and since then there had only been one or two per week. The mortality rate in Reading was below the usual death rate for the current time of year.
- Data on Contact Tracing - over a 6 week period, 78% of the 238 positive cases had responded to the National Test and Trace programme within 24 hours and, of the 23.1% passed on to the Reading local contact tracing team, 61.5% had been successfully contacted to give advice - this gave an overall 89% success rate.
- Isolation Support activity - A support programme had been started, contacting all those with positive tests in Reading after a few days to re-issue advice on the importance of isolating and to identify any support needs making isolation difficult, such as services from the One Reading Community Hub, help with prescriptions etc. The majority of those contacted had not needed any assistance.
- Information on vaccinations giving the percentage of people vaccinated with at least one dose across different age groups. Uptake increased by age from 76% in 50 to 54 year olds to 92% in over 80s. Reading numbers were around 3-6 percentage points lower than the England average, probably affected by Reading’s mobile population and some vaccine hesitancy in certain parts of Reading. The uptake was still 20% higher than for the flu vaccination programme and was considered a successful programme. There was some variation across the town, with up to 15% differences in different areas and ethnic groups. The vaccination was currently available to 45s and over, and details were awaited of when this would be extended to 40s and over.
- Details of communication and community engagement activities supporting the vaccination programme, including a popular video by a Kenyan nurse from the Royal Berkshire Hospital encouraging her community to get vaccinated, pop up clinics held in a mosque and a church, and the development of a Ramadan communication kit to disseminate to all Muslim communities across Berkshire.

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- Information showing the potential benefits and harms of the Astra-Zeneca vaccine, showing that blood clots were very rare and in most age groups the benefits of preventive intensive care admission outweighed the risk of serious harm from blood clots by a significant factor. The vaccine also reduced transmission and the risk of Long Covid. For under 30 year olds, where the risk/benefit balance was closer, they would be offered an alternative vaccine.
- The presentation also presented the national planned four step process for release from lockdown with key dates for Step 3 no earlier than 17 May 2021 and Step 4 no earlier than 21 June 2021.

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

### 3. LOCAL COVID-19 COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT UPDATE

Niki Barton and James Crosbie gave a presentation on the latest situation in Reading on communications and engagement on the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The presentation slides were made available on the Reading Borough Council website.

Niki Barton 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 cohorts
- Responding to emerging issues, such as new testing centres and local outbreaks
- Communicating messages of local significance

The presentation explained that the current focus was on coming out of lockdown safely, and gave examples of the audience, key messages and channels being used. Communications were being used to explain the Government guidance and the reasons behind it, and examples were given of explaining the roadmap, testing, vaccines, self-isolating and signage being used in the town centre, parks and open spaces.

James Crosbie gave details of ongoing work engaging with higher risk settings:

- Working with the Town Centre BID to provide advice and support to businesses, including on ventilation, and, if necessary, enforce compliance
- Working with PubWatch and the wider hospitality industry to provide guidance and support
- Continuing work with Thames Valley Police on compliance across the town, mapping breaches to help the police target resources and decrease levels of positivity
- Investigating complaints in high risk settings
- Working with Public Health colleagues to investigate outbreaks or follow up on a lack of information following positive case identification

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

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

James Crosbie gave a presentation on a recent Covid outbreak in a retail business, setting out a case study. The presentation slides were made available on the Reading Borough Council website.

The presentation gave details of the case, which had involved a report from Public Health England (PHE) of 8 of 15 staffing testing positive from 4-7 April 2020. PHE had been able to determine some information from the management team of the store but wanted an on the ground view, so officers had contacted the store and regional management and had established that all staff in contact with positive cases had been tested, a Covid risk assessment had been put in place and a deep clean of the store had been arranged prior to re-opening. The main outcomes resulting from the Council's involvement had been a review of face-to-face staff one to one meetings and a meeting room had been re-designated as a staff room as the space was bigger, with lowered capacity for both rooms. Rapid lateral flow test kits had been ordered by the Head Office and would be used routinely.

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

### 5. UNIVERSAL TESTING

Gabby Haffner gave a presentation on the current recommendation for universal Covid-19 testing, the benefits of doing so and the channels for obtaining test kits. The presentation slides were made available on the Reading Borough Council website.

The presentation explained the difference between the PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) and LFD (Lateral Flow Device) Covid tests and that universal testing had been available from 9 April 2021, with everyone able and encouraged to access asymptomatic testing through using a test site (Community or Employer), collecting home-test kits or ordering home-tests to be delivered to their home.

It was recommended that everyone tested twice a week. If a lateral flow result was positive, confirmation was required using a PCR test. The universal offer was not for specific testing policies (such as international travel, care homes etc). Self-test kits were available from employers, pharmacies, Covid-19 testing sites, schools (for pupils) and to be ordered on-line and delivered.

The presentation set out the benefits of testing and explained how variants of concern could be identified by certain tests to help improve tracing and stop the spread of variants. It was noted that it was important for people to report all test results, including negative ones, so that the data collected would be accurate and not skewed to show proportionally more positive results because of lack of reporting.

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

### 6. LOCAL OUTBREAK CONTROL PLAN DEVELOPMENT - UPDATE

David Munday gave a presentation on the development of the Local Outbreak Control Plan to plan action to prevent outbreaks and how to respond as and when outbreaks occurred. The presentation slides were made available on the Reading Borough Council website.

David Munday explained that, in June 2020, Reading had developed a Local Outbreak Control Plan, the executive summary of which had been published on the Council's website at <https://www.reading.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/reading-covid-19-outbreak-control-plan/>. Since that time, there had been waves of the pandemic and

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response work had evolved and in March 2021 the Department for Health and Social Care had asked Reading to update the plan.

The Control Plan had had the following themes:

1. **Care homes and schools**  
Prevent and manage outbreaks in specific individual settings (eg schools and care homes)
2. **High risk places, locations and communities**  
Prevent and manage outbreaks in other high-risk locations, workplaces and communities
3. **Local testing capacity**  
Deploy local testing capacity optimally
4. **Contact tracing in complex settings**  
Deliver contact tracing for complex settings and cohorts
5. **Data integration**  
Access to the right local data to enable the other 7 themes and prevent outbreaks
6. **Vulnerable people**  
Support vulnerable people and ensure services meet the needs of diverse communities
7. **Local Boards including Communication & Engagement**  
Take local actions to contain outbreaks and communicate with the general public
8. **Workforce**  
Keeping our workforce safe

The themes of the Plan had now been updated and some new themes added, with the updated themes now being:

1. **High risk places, locations and communities**  
Prevent and manage outbreaks in high-risk settings, workplaces and communities
2. **Testing and responding to variants of concern (VoC)**  
Sufficient and accessible local testing (both symptomatic and asymptomatic)
3. **Local Contact Tracing Partnership**  
Efficient contact tracing of index cases and their close contacts
4. **Surveillance and data integration**  
Ensuring access to accurate and timely epidemiology data
5. **Vulnerable people and inequalities**  
Support vulnerable people and ensure services meet the needs of diverse communities
6. **Communication & Engagement (Including community resilience)**  
Take local actions to contain outbreaks and communicate with the general public
7. **Compliance and Enforcement**  
Ensuring settings comply with measures outlined in Covid-19 regulations and guidance
8. **Vaccinations**  
Ensuring high and equitable uptake of vaccinations across the Borough
9. **Enduring Transmission**

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Act on enduring transmission to reduce risks of VoC and any on-going transmission in certain parts of town

David Munday explained that, where a Variant of Concern (VoC) was identified and the person had not acquired it abroad, surge testing was used to identify and isolate any positive cases to prevent spread of the variant. Reading had not yet been required to apply surge testing, but plans were in place if needed.

A new theme on vaccinations had been added, to work on ensuring high uptake of and equality of access to vaccines. It was possible that, like the flu, regular booster vaccinations would be needed in future, and there might end up being a joint flu and Covid vaccination programme.

Work under the new theme on enduring transmission would involve gathering of data at neighbourhood level to pick up on areas of the town or communities where there was ongoing transmission of Covid. There would also be enhanced, or reverse, contact tracing, where information would be sought on activities at least seven days before the test, to see where the “index case” had got the virus and to gather information on common exposures, such as a shop or workplace.

Once the new Outbreak Control Plan had been finalised, an updated summary would be provided.

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

### **7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

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

(The meeting started at 2.00pm and closed at 3.08pm)