

## **Slough Outbreak Engagement Board – Meeting held on Tuesday, 9th March, 2021.**

**Present:-** Councillors Pantelic (Chair), Swindlehurst (Vice-Chair), Anderson, Bains, Carter, Mann and Nazir.

SBC Officers: Neil Wilcox (Executive Director, Corporate Services), Joe Carter (Director of Transformation), Alan Sinclair (Executive Director People (Adults)), Suzanne Foley (Public Health Representative), Kate Pratt (Communications Manager),

Partner Agencies: Tracey Faraday-Drake (ICS Place Lead), Ramesh Kukar (Slough CVS) and Supt Wong (Thames Valley Police)

**Apologies for Absence:-** Councillor Akram, Josie Wragg, Richard West, Stephen Gibson and Eleni Ioannides

### **PART 1**

#### **58. Declarations of Interest**

None were declared.

#### **59. Minutes of the Last Meeting Held on 9th February 2021**

**Resolved –** That the minutes of the meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

#### **60. Public Questions**

No questions from the public had been received.

#### **61. Communications Update**

The Communications Manager gave an update on the key communications activities and messages since the last meeting.

The latest edition of the Covid magazine had been produced and would be delivered to every household in Slough over the next ten days. It included a range of articles, including those suggested by the Board at the last meeting, such as information on how to access to mental health services, an update on testing and promotion of vaccine take-up. The weekly e-newsletter continued to be sent out to circa 32,000 residents and contained the latest information and key messages. The Board welcomed the recent communications to recognise the contribution of care providers locally.

Communications planning was underway for the easing of restrictions as part of the Government's 'Roadmap'. The Board discussed the key messages which included encouraging people to continue to be patient and to follow the guidance when it changed, not before. Members highlighted the importance

of communicating clear messages on 'vaccine complacency' to make it clear that vaccination did not offer complete protection and that people who had been vaccinated could still contract and pass on Covid.

A question was asked about the work being done with schools as they fully re-opened, particularly in terms of the messaging around the regular testing available for secondary school pupils. It was responded that schools themselves were the most effective communication channel for sending key messages to their pupils and parents. Information and support was available to them through the schools public health officer. The tests would soon be conducted in the home rather than at school and the important message was to take up the tests and, crucially, to act on the results. The Board asked that any widespread issues with securing parental consent to testing in schools be reported to the board if necessary. No major problems had been reported initially and the situation would be closely monitored.

The Board welcomed the proactive communications activity that had been undertaken and emphasised the importance of preparing for the next phase as restrictions were lifted over the coming months.

**Resolved** – That the communications update be noted.

### 62. Local Covid-19 Status Report

The Service Lead, Public Health gave a presentation that summarised Slough's current Covid-19 status.

The following points were noted:

- Covid-19 cases were now falling more rapidly to a weekly rate of 89 per 100,000 population. This was a significant fall on the 348 reported at the previous meeting, although Slough's rate was still the highest in the South East.
- Cases had plateaued in February but were now falling more quickly in line with the national trends.
- The percentage of tests that were positive was 4.5%, which compared to 14.5% a month ago.
- 11 Covid-19 deaths were reported in Slough in the week ending 26<sup>th</sup> February.
- No new outbreaks had been reported in the past week. The potential of outbreaks in schools following their full return on 8<sup>th</sup> March would be closely monitored.
- A total of 14,000 lateral flow tests had now been carried out as part of the community testing programme. Approximately 2% were positive.
- The new testing programme had been introduced on 22<sup>nd</sup> February which targeted testing at key workers. The Government had announced that the testing programmes would continue until at least June. Sites were being reviewed.

## Slough Outbreak Engagement Board - 09.03.21

- The Government required local authorities to review their Local Outbreak Management Plans and an update would be provided at the next meeting.
- Vaccine uptake locally remained very high with 82% of over 65 age group already receiving at least one dose.
- In relation to monitoring variants it was noted that Public Health England would inform a local area if variants of concern had been detected as part of their monitoring and surveillance. Assurance was provided that a plan was in place to react locally if required.

The Board discussed various matters including the importance of ventilation in reducing Covid risk in indoor settings, including in schools. The process for school testing and particularly the rules around isolating 'bubbles' on a positive test were summarised. There had been some confusion nationally about the use of confirmatory PCR tests following a positive lateral flow test and it was agreed that it was important the process was properly understood locally. It was recognised that pupils travelled into Slough schools from a wide area and it was suggested the Covid rates in neighbouring boroughs be monitored. The most effective way of minimising the Covid risk of such mixing was to follow the guidance, utilise the testing in schools and ensure school settings were fully risk assessed and as Covid secure as possible.

A question was asked about the vaccine take up amongst ethnic minority populations. This had been a major focus in Slough through the BAME Project to maximise take up and seek to overcome vaccine hesitancy. It would be a constant challenge throughout the vaccination programme and good data would be needed to pinpoint communities with low take up. Members commented that positive progress was being made as a result of the work to encourage vaccine take up and the work that GPs in particular had done was considered to be effective. The vaccination programme would be scaling up for the remainder of March with extended hours at vaccination centres to reflect the fact that more working age people were becoming eligible for vaccination. A suggestion was made to ensure information was given to people at the point of vaccination on the fact it would take some time to build some immunity, that vaccines would still not offer full protection and they would still need to follow the guidance in place.

The Board recognised the huge team effort that had contributed to the success of the vaccination programme to date, however, it was emphasised that there was no room for complacency. At the conclusion of the discussion the update was noted.

**Resolved –** That the local Covid-19 status report be noted.

### **63. National and Local Key Messages**

The key messages as discussed throughout the meeting were summarised as being that significant progress had been made in reducing infections and increasing vaccinations, but caution was still needed. People should continue to follow the rules as they changed, but not before. The opportunities for

## **Slough Outbreak Engagement Board - 09.03.21**

testing should be encouraged and people should take up their vaccination appointments when offered.

**Resolved** – The key messages were noted.

### **64. Members Attendance Record**

**Resolved** – That the Attendance Record be noted.

### **65. Date of Next Meeting - 15th April 2021, 5pm**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 15<sup>th</sup> April 2021 at 5pm.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 5.00 pm and closed at 5.45 pm)