

Slough Outbreak Engagement Board – Meeting held on Wednesday, 7th July, 2021.

Present:- Councillors: Pantelic (Chair), Swindlehurst (Vice-Chair from 5.11 until 5.30pm), Anderson, Bains, Carter, Hulme (from 5.15 pm), Mann (from 5.05 pm)

SBC Officers: Joe Carter (Executive Director, Transformation) Suzanne Foley (Public Health Representative), Alan Sinclair (Executive Director People, Adults) and Richard West (Executive Director, Customer & Community).

Partner Agencies: Ramesh Kukar (Slough CVS), Stuart Lines (Director of Public Health, Berkshire) Supt Wong (TVP)

Apologies for Absence:- Stephen Gibson, Michael Jarrett, Josie Wragg, Tracey Faraday-Drake

PART 1

9. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

10. Minutes of the Last Meeting Held on 9th June 2021

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

11. Public Questions

No questions from the public had been received.

12. Local Covid-19 Status Report

The Public Health Service Lead gave an update of the current situation of the Covid-19 pandemic in Slough:

- Slough's case rates in comparison with the rest of Berkshire, were on the rise. The rate of infection amongst the over 60's remained stagnant and continued to be of concern. However, it was important to note that Slough had a large population of young people which could skew the figures for the over 60's.

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- There had been a rise in the positivity rate, but the rate was lower in Slough compared to the rest of South East England.
- There had been a rise in the 4 wards which lay on the borders of neighbouring boroughs, which was of concern.
- The number of individuals tested per hundred thousand of population was high, but it was important to note that these figures related to the three week period of the surge testing scheme. Surge testing had revealed that one school had an outbreak. There had been good engagement with surge testing from the community, schools & the Slough team. The return rate for surge testing was 73% and Slough's total return rate was 61%.
- Case rates at schools continued to be high. It had recently been announced that school bubbles would no longer be in place.
- Case rates were rising with the highest case rates among 19-24 year olds but this was a reflection of the lower vaccine uptake rates among this group as the vaccine had only recently been offered to them.
- Engagement with community youth groups and young people to encourage vaccine take up was ongoing.

Key messages continued to be as follows:

- To get the first and second dose of the vaccine - particularly young people.
- There were plenty of opportunities and venues for vaccination available.
- The Government proposed an end to restrictions on 19 July & 16 August. A detailed document was expected from Central Government regarding this, and the possible implications of lifting of restrictions needed to be evaluated and communicated.
- Social distancing measures and the hands, face, space & fresh air guidelines should be adhered to.
- Rapid testing would help keep case rates down, and if an individual was symptomatic or had a positive lateral flow test then this should be followed up by PCR test so that they may self-isolate if needed.

The Chair welcomed Stuart Lines, the new Director of Public Health for Berkshire, to the meeting.

Following questions from Members of the Board, the Public Health Service Lead advised that:

- There were still funds in the contain outbreak management fund, which would continue to be available and community testing would be reviewed at the end of September and there was an expectation that this would continue until the end of March 2022.
- The £500 payment self-isolation fund would continue till the end of September when it would be reviewed.
- The wider fund for self isolation would continue so that those who needed to self isolate would receive the support they needed. In

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addition, there were several covid grants to be accessed which would help to maintain the current levels of covid response.

- There was a contingency in the Communications fund for autumn and winter considerations i.e. vaccinations, the need for additional testing, and concerns regarding the variant. It was within the remit of The Board to inform Central Government that additional funding would be required to maintain current levels work.
- The reason for the current rates of positivity was not clear and the data needed to be further evaluated. Lower rates in Slough in comparison to the rest of Berkshire could be due to communications messages regarding surge testing and the importance of adhering to social distancing guidelines getting through to the public. With regard to the proposed lifting of restrictions, the Council should continue to emphasize the importance of testing, vaccination and social distancing guidelines.

A Member stated that it was predicted that lifting restrictions may lead to large outbreaks. During recent outbreaks it was noted that even those who had been vaccinated had become infected and it was asked, if there were large outbreaks as predicted, what merits there were in continuing to vaccinate and test.

In response it was noted that Slough's population profile and its low vaccination rates meant that its population was more vulnerable to getting covid and having a worse experience due to low vaccination rates, particularly among some ethnic groups.

A Member asked if there was any data showing what proportion of residents had been vaccinated and the possibility of mobile units visiting places of worship which would be open again from 19 July to encourage vaccine take up.

NHS colleagues were looking at increasing the options and opportunities for vaccination. Particularly targeting places where young people congregated, for example, fast food premises, sports arenas, music venues etc. As well as maximising the use of the mobile van and places of high footfall, for example, shopping malls and town centres. The Board could encourage those premises which had been reluctant to allow vaccinators on their premises to do so.

Resolved – That the Local Covid-19 Status report be noted.

13. Communications Update

The Public Health Service Lead provided an update on the key communications activities and messages since the last meeting of the Board.

The Communications team continued to encourage vaccine take up on various social media platforms, focussing particularly on those aimed at young

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people. The Council's webpages and its Facebook page were being updated and other avenues being explored.

The Chair was pleased to note that latest issue of The Citizen magazine had focussed on the wider aspects of health and wellbeing, particularly mental health which had signposted services and support available to residents.

A Member stated that the Government website showed that only 206 vaccinations had been given in Slough on the previous day and asked whether low vaccine take-up was due to limited supplies of the vaccine or the reluctance of residents to be vaccinated.

The Public Health Service Lead advised that there were sufficient supplies of the vaccine in the Borough, and that they were trying to increase the number of vaccinators. Community engagement was an ongoing priority. Following further questions and comments from Board Members, the following responses were given:

- Due to capacity issues within the volunteer team, currently only afternoon shifts were available at Salt Hill and consequently the numbers of vaccines being given had dropped. A number of strategies were in place and currently 300 volunteers were working on a regular basis, however, the process of administering the volunteer scheme was taking longer. The scheme was expected to continue until March 2022 and further discussions would be needed about how this and the rollout of the booster jabs from September onwards would be resourced and managed.
- With regard to the Police, the biggest operations demand related to travellers returning from overseas having to quarantine in hotels. The biggest concern was the large numbers of staff having to self-isolate due to positive test results. Messages reiterating social distancing guidelines seemed to be having a positive impact among the workforce.
- Work to engage with the homeless and encourage them to be vaccinated had already been undertaken.

The Chair requested that an update report regarding the Council's preparations for the autumn be presented at the August meeting of the Board so that any potential issues could be flagged up and mitigating measures implemented. A draft letter to Central Government from the Board flagging up any concerns and resourcing needs should also be presented at the next meeting.

(Councillor Swindlehurst left the meeting.)

A Member expressed concern about relying too heavily on volunteers and the prospect of dealing with volunteer fatigue. She pointed out that those volunteers who had been on furlough would now be returning to work. This would put additional pressure on existing volunteers, which was not

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sustainable. The Board should reiterate the need for Central Government to adequately resource and remunerate the volunteer initiative in the future.

It was important to note that many volunteers enjoyed volunteering and gained personal benefit from the activity. However, the scheme needed to be better resourced and funded in order to make the overall experience better.

The Chair emphasized the importance of acknowledging the significant contribution to the community by volunteers and expressing the Borough's gratitude to them.

Resolved - That the Communications Update be noted.

14. National & Local Key Messages

The national and local key messages were summarised as:

- Continue to encourage vaccination for those not yet vaccinated emphasising the fact that opportunities for those who had been 'double jabbed' were increasing.
- The importance of ensuring that Slough should be in a better position as the restrictions were lifted and thoroughly assessing the implications of lifting restrictions.
- Everyone should continue to follow the guidance regarding social distancing, testing and hands, face, space and fresh air.

Members who had been tested or had been vaccinated should let the Communications team know so this could be publicised to the community.

The Board thanked the Public Health Service Lead, who would be soon be leaving the Council, for her efforts and hard work in supporting Slough in putting in place systems and procedures to deal with the pandemic.

Resolved – That the National & Local Key Messages be noted.

15. Date of Next Meeting - 4th August 2021

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 4 August 2021 at 5pm.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 5.00 pm and closed at 5.39 pm)