

AT A MEETING of the Hampshire Local Outbreak Engagement Board of
HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL held remotely on Monday, 15th March, 2021

Chairman:

* Councillor Keith Mans

Councillor Liz Fairhurst

* Councillor Patricia Stallard

* Councillor Judith Grajewski

Also present with the agreement of the Chairman:

Councillor Keith House

Councillor Ken Rhatigan

Laura Taylor

Councillor Roger Huxstep

74. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Liz Fairhurst and Judy Gillow.

75. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were mindful that where they believed they had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter considered at the meeting they must declare that interest at the time of the relevant debate and, having regard to the circumstances described in Part 3, Paragraph 1.5 of the County Council's Members' Code of Conduct, leave the meeting while the matter was discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with Paragraph 1.6 of the Code. Furthermore, Members were mindful that where they believed they had a Personal interest in a matter being considered at the meeting they considered whether such interest should be declared, and having regard to Part 5, Paragraph 5 of the Code, considered whether it was appropriate to leave the meeting whilst the matter was discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with the Code.

There were no declarations of interest.

76. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 February 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

77. DEPUTATIONS

There were no deputations received.

78. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman noted that this was the last formal meeting of the Board prior to the election in May and confirmed that briefings would continue as needed. The Board will then continue to meet until lockdown is lifted in June 2021 at the earliest and review summer events and engagement as required.

79. OUTBREAK CONTROL POSITION REPORT

The Director of Public Health shared the weekly update with the Board outlining the current position in term of managing the outbreak in Hampshire including data on current infection numbers, the position for care homes and death rates across the county.

Members heard that Hampshire is in a good position with rates now lower and falling well. This can be linked to local demographics, actions taken, and levels of compliance. District rates continue to be monitored at the granular level and the overall R rate for the Southeast is between 0.6-0.8.

In terms of the impact on population over the course of the pandemic, the number of cumulative cases has gone up but is now slowing down. Seven-day case rate is now 35.2 per 100,000 bringing the total number of cases to 61,000 over the pandemic. District rates continue to come down over time and while there are slight variations, they are falling overall across the patch with the pandemic under control.

With regards to infection rates by age, over 60s are more likely to face complications and hospitalization and this rate has now been falling. There has been a positive effect from vaccinations and age groups affected decreasing across all age bands. Asymptomatic programmes in place for younger populations more likely to be out at work. Hospitalization rates have been falling across all areas and hospitals, though there are still a significant number still in hospital. Less people requiring intensive care and mechanical ventilation, a decline due to less cases of Covid. As society opens up again, these areas will need continued monitoring alongside effects of vaccination. Very sadly, there have been 2703 deaths since pandemic the pandemic started and 52 this week. While there is a delay in data, rates are below the 5-year average for excess deaths.

Based on the current data, across Hampshire about 37% of residents have now been vaccinated and there has been encouraging progress in local vaccination programmes.

In response to questions, Members heard:

With the opening up of economy, working populations not yet vaccinated and areas with younger population will be receiving key messages in preparation to encourage testing and prevent potential spread by those vaccinated to those not. Similarly, safety in school but also outside of school including community testing for parents and clear understanding of guidance. With more testing, there is

likely to be more positive cases who are asymptomatic but will allow isolation to break the infection chain.

The Hampshire Local Outbreak Engagement Board noted the current data and implications.

80. ACTIONS OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

The Director of Public Health confirmed key actions recently taken forward.

Members heard that community testing is in place for those without symptoms, including front facing workers as nearly a third of cases are asymptomatic. There is a proposal to extend and continue testing at the beyond 31 March and up to June. Community collect programmes for parents of children at school can collect tests to take at home. It has been a priority to ensure access for people to collect their tests. Work continues with the government on a pharmacy model to ensure further access. Encouraging testing allows residents to know when to isolate to break the chain of infection, keeping in mind those not yet vaccinated.

Surge testing in tracing the South African variant in the Bramley area was successful with many thanks to Basingstoke colleagues and Leader. If needed again, a different model will be used due to the complexity of implementing a door-to-door model. If needed again, testing will be taken forward in new ways based on new learning.

The government roadmap has been clear with schools and colleges now back on. New changes are expected on 29 March and 5-week gaps will measure changes from opening up the economy. Steps 2, 3 and 4 will be based on close monitoring of changes from the previous step.

In partnership with district relationships and the Insight and Engagement team, encouragement continues to ensure those least likely to take the vaccination will not be left behind.

In response to questions, Members heard:

With community testing, it has been difficult to ascertain the confidence level with home testing in terms of compliance and working around the behaviour change aspect. Easy access to take the test at home is accompanied by clear instructions for use, and a PCR test if the results are positive. It requires a shift in thinking to ensure effective testing becomes a regular part of society.

In regards to the UK mechanisms for vaccine risks and safety, while it is critical to monitor and ensure there are no side effects of adverse reactions, the most recent information shows that blood clots are no more likely with use of AstraZeneca and it is important for residents to take up the vaccine if offered.

81. COMMUNICATION ENGAGEMENT UPDATE

The Executive Member of Public Health updated the Board on communications and engagement noting the recent period covered.

Key themes included testing, vaccination, and rapid testing among others. As there was no change in lockdown status, “Stay at Home” and “Hands Face Space” messages were addressed in new and different ways, keeping people engaged and informed. The most successful posts were around vaccination.

Physical messaging is also in place, and on radio and local press as well. The main area of inquiry pertains to information around return to school. This includes safety not only at school but at school gates, journeys to and from, and an overall safe return to school.

The “Keep Going” campaign to encourage people via radio, animations, ads, targeted posters, etc. have been translated into various languages, including Bengali, Hindi, Polish, and Nepali. The “Act Like You’ve Got It” campaign encouraged young people to stay safe and protect others around them. Revised messaging and rules will be addressed as they change. New Hampshire faith leaders’ videos will give residents more confidence to take the vaccine.

The key message to organizers is to engage early in planning stages for summer events and safety. Support is available for families over the Easter break and targeted messaging circulated around public safety over Ramadan and Holi festival, as well as voting by proxy or in person. All communications have been shared with key partners. Many thanks to the Insight and Engagement team for their creativity and imagination with key messaging.

In response to questions, Members heard:

Vaccine hesitancy and reluctance in some population is an issue but work continues on this in terms of understanding the rationale and working with communities. While the numbers are small, it is imperative to work harder to ensure they are not excluded or missed and to get right for everyone.

All manner of communication to the public is being reviewed carefully alongside promoting a number of issues. While some printer materials such as Council tax bills have already been printed or sent electronically, conversations with relevant colleagues will continue to see if Covid safety messaging can be included. Postal votes have been encouraged though all voting options will remain available for residents.

The next formal meeting of the LOEB will take place after the elections and briefings will continue as necessary.

The meeting ended at 10:39am.

Chairman,