

Slough Outbreak Engagement Board – Meeting held on Wednesday, 9th June, 2021.

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

SBC Officers: Suzanne Foley (Public Health Representative), Kate Pratt (Group Manager Communications), Stephen Gibson (Director of Place), Alan Sinclair (Director of People, Adults) and Richard West (Director of Customer & Community).

Partner Agencies: Ramesh Kukar (Slough CVS and Supt Wong (TVP)

Apologies for Absence:- Josie Wragg and Tracey Faraday-Drake

PART 1

1. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting Held on 18th May 2021

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 18th May 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

3. Public Questions

No questions from the public had been received.

4. Communications Update

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

Recent activity had focused on:

- Communications and operational plans were put in place for surge testing. The plan would be submitted to Government for approval following their decision to include Slough in that programme.
- Wokingham, Reading and Bracknell had already started surge testing and it was expected the programme would begin in Slough later in June.
- Data was being analysed to put the programme together and it was likely to be targeted on specific postcodes.
- It was likely to include home and mobile using and the best practice from other areas would be incorporated into the programme for Slough.
- Communications were working with NHS colleagues on surge vaccinations with plans being put in place for drop-in sessions, not

requiring pre-booked appointments, as the vaccination programme expanded to the 18+ age group. A series of smaller scale drop-in sessions in the community was considered to be more effective than a single mass vaccination event.

- Support was being provided to schools in their communications with parents, particularly on the Delta variant.

An update was provided on the work Hitch were doing to better understand the feelings, conversations and emotions about Covid-19 issues in Slough's communities. For example, this included work with eastern European communities in which there was a relatively higher degree of vaccine hesitancy and the work highlighted some of the specific barriers and challenges that could shape programmes in Slough. Detailed work was being undertaken to use this information to reach communities that had so far proved hard to reach.

Several councillors had recently been vaccinated and this was being used in the communications activity to promote uptake. In relation to surge testing the Board discussed how community leaders would be engaged. It was noted the proposal would be for specific postcodes and a wide range of methods to reach people would be used including community champions, media, faith leaders and centres, printed materials and door knocking. Any and all communications techniques would be used to raise awareness.

At the conclusion of the discussion the communications update was noted.

Resolved – That the communications update be noted.

5. 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:

- The Covid-19 case rate had risen to 72.2 weekly cases per 100,000 population. This compared to a low of 27.4 reported last month.
- The case rate was rising fastest in younger age groups and schools and there was significant work to respond to this trend.
- Cases across the rest of Berkshire had increased, especially Reading and Wokingham, hence the introduction of surge testing.

There was concern about the rise in cases and the data was being closely monitored, albeit the levels were from a low base and were much lower than parts of the North West of England. The focus was on encouraging testing and promoting vaccination and the most effective tools in containing the spread. There were encouraging early signs that vaccine uptake would be high in younger age groups.

The Board discussed the work being done with schools, headteachers and parents to respond to the rising number of cases amongst school aged children. Schools were doing an excellent job of managing the situation despite the challenging circumstances and the Council was working closely with them on data, information, communication and to promote testing.

A question was asked about the reasons for and response to Slough's relatively low level of vaccination compared to the national average, particularly given the rise in cases of the Delta variant. It was responded that Slough's vaccination rates generally were historically low and the Covid-19 vaccine uptake was high relative to other immunisation programmes. Conversion from first to second doses was good. There had been a significant amount of work done to understand vaccine hesitancy locally and the various reasons included perceptions of safety, access and the fact Slough's young population meant a relatively large proportion had only recently become eligible for vaccination. The national vaccination system had sometimes offered appointments at vaccination sites at Heathrow rather than the centre at Salt Hill Park and it was hoped the upcoming drop ins would help overcome this and therefore be more accessible to local residents. It was also stated that the reported cases of rare blood clots from the AZ vaccine had had an impact on take up in some groups. It was important to get the message out that everyone would be eligible to receive a vaccine, irrespective of whether they were registered with a GP for example, and a vaccine bus was seeking to reach people who may not otherwise be reached.

A question was asked about the specific issues identified and recommendations from the Hitch study. The report would be shared with the Board and a plan was now being put together to commission Hitch to deliver the actions considered to be most effective in Slough. The NHS were running a campaign called 'People Like Me' which aimed to counter hesitancy and it was suggested members of the Board be actively involved in advocating vaccination in practical ways such as videos or using their social media channels.

The Chair emphasised the importance of people taking up the offer of regular testing either at sites in Slough's community programme, workplaces or home testing. It was suggested that signage for the testing sites could be increased. The Board placed on the record their continued thanks and appreciation for all those working at and volunteering on the testing and vaccination programmes.

Resolved – That the Covid-19 Status Update be noted.

6. Vaccination Programme Update

A number of issues relating to the vaccination programme had been discussed earlier in the meeting. The key message was the likelihood at surge and drop in vaccination sessions to increase uptake. It was emphasised that social distancing rules still applied to those vaccinated as the Government's Roadmap was at Step 3.

Resolved – That the updates on the vaccination programme as raised throughout the meeting be noted.

7. National & Local Key Messages

The national and local key messages were summarised as:

- Continue to follow the rules, even following vaccination as people could still catch and transmit Covid.
- Be tested regularly and act on the result.
- Hands, face, space and fresh air.

Resolved – That the key messages be noted.

8. Date of Next Meeting - 7th July 2021

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 7th July 2021 at 5pm.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 5.01 pm and closed at 5.44 pm)