

Slough Outbreak Engagement Board – Meeting held on Tuesday, 9th November, 2021.

Present:- Councillors Pantelic (Chair), Akram, Bains, Carter, Hulme and Mann

Dr Sohail Bhatti

Interim Service Lead Public Health

Kate Pratt

Group Manager, Communications

Alan Sinclair

Executive Director of People (Adults)

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Swindlehurst and Anderson

Dr Vanita Dutta

Public Health

Representative

Cl Lee Barnham

Thames Valley Police

Representative

PART 1

1. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting Held on 12 October 2021

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

3. Public Questions

No questions from the public had been received.

4. Communications Update

The SBC Communications Manager provided an update on the key communications activities and messages since the last meeting of the Board and provided an overview of the Frimley Health Care draft Communications and Engagement Plan Flu and Winter 2021/22.

- Frimley ICS and CCG were taking the lead in promoting messages regarding uptake of the Covid and flu vaccines, as well as the covid booster jab.
- Her team had contributed to the Frimley Communications Plan and held weekly meetings with partner organisations.
- Both teams were targeting vaccine-hesitant hard-to-reach demographics.

The SBC Communications Manager and the Director of Operations, Slough Frimley Collaborative responded to questions as follows:

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- Supplies of the flu vaccine had been pooled at vaccination centres.
- Information regarding covid testing and covid and flu vaccinations would be included in Council publications in the run up to Christmas, and through digital means.

Resolved: That the Communications Update be noted.

5. Local Covid-19 Status Report

The SBC Interim Public Health Service Lead provided a summary of Slough's current Covid-19 status. He advised that:

- The positivity rate in Slough was higher than in the rest of England and slightly lower than in the South East.
- The case rate among those over 60 years of age continued to be of concern as the rates of hospitalisation and death rate among them was higher than in younger people.
- Nearly twenty five thousand people in Slough had been infected with Covid since the outbreak of the pandemic.
- The high case rates among school-aged children and their families mirrored the national picture. It was difficult to carry out modelling regarding how infection rates in this group would impact on infection rates among older people. It was important to note that vaccine memory in older people tended to be weaker and therefore they were more at risk of contracting the virus.
- Incorrect reporting by the Immensa Lab recently may have inflated some of the current figures relating to case rates in Berkshire.
- The highest case rates continued to be among South Asians and those who described themselves as 'White other'.
- It was important to monitor the case rates in Slough and the risks posed to those working in the healthcare sector.
- There had been more than 24 covid related deaths in Slough since August 2021.
- The long term risks of contracting chronic covid were not yet fully known and were being researched.
- Vaccine uptake in areas of deprivation was lower and was higher in less deprived areas.
- One in eight covid cases related to new covid variants, particularly the delta plus variant, which were more transmissible. Vaccine-resistant variants were also of concern due to the possibility of co-infections, where an individual may become infected by more than one strain of covid.

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

6. Vaccine Update

The Director of Operations, Slough Frimley Collaborative advised that:

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- A vigorous flu vaccine campaign had been launched and had led to improved uptake rates.
- It was now possible to book the booster jab online, in person or through GP practices. The booster had been rolled out to care homes and to the housebound.
- The parents of 12-15 year olds pupils had the choice to get their children vaccinated either at school or at the local vaccination centres. The flu vaccine was being rolled out after half-term holidays. Younger children with underlying health conditions had been offered the covid vaccine and toddlers had been offered the flu spray at nurseries and through GP practices.
- The mobile unit would continue to be deployed as it often reached the vulnerable and hard-to-reach.
- Vaccine uptake rates among NHS staff were good.

Action 1: Board members to be advised of any actions they could take related to further promoting and publicising vaccinations.

Resolved: The update be noted.

7. Interim Plan for the Autumn of 2021

The SBC Interim Public Health Service Lead stated that:

- Current data showed that there had been a drop in the number of recorded cases but this was mirrored by a drop in the number of people being tested. The positivity rate continued to rise and the pandemic was ongoing.
- The Government had released its autumn and winter plan. The Plan emphasised the need for the public to continue wearing masks, undertake regular testing, self-isolating where necessary and that community testing and contact tracing should continue through the app. Local authorities would be permitted to implement prohibitions and restrictions on indoor and outdoor venues if deemed necessary. The Government would offer additional support to areas of enduring transmission. The Government's Plan B related to tackling 'unsustainable' pressures on the NHS but it had not yet defined what this would mean in practice. It would continue to promote vaccine certificates and may rely on local authorities to help with compliance and enforcement. The vaccine passport would need to be framed diplomatically in Comms messaging.
- Communications, vaccinations and contact tracing were key to improving identification of those who were infected and preventing further transmission. Fifty percent of all positive cases in Slough had been self-reported through the online form. The national team would attempt to contact these individuals in the first instance and Slough would do so only if the national team were unsuccessful. This meant that there was often a 2-3 day delay while the individual awaited guidance and advice after self-reporting. If all cases were immediately referred to Slough then this would provide live data regarding outbreak patterns. There were proposals to use a local test, track and trace system, create a Slough specific covid

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management hub, use local knowledge and local phone numbers to help deal with cases. This would ensure that the local intelligence gathering and modelling process was more robust.

- Targeted communications should continue to focus on the vaccine-hesitant and hard to reach groups. To overcome vaccine and testing hesitancy, the council should use local voices and keep deploying the vaccine bus to areas where people congregated and alert residents that the bus would be in their area. Some residents may prefer the vaccine bus as it was more discreet and healthcare professionals were available to provide guidance and advice.
- Fifty seven thousand people over age of twelve had yet to be vaccinated in slough. The Communications approach could be to emphasise compliance rather than coercion and focus on a One Slough approach and the message should be about protecting the NHS and other people.
- There were in fact two pandemics - covid and long covid both of which may impact economic activity and the people's long-term physical and mental health for many years to come.
- It should be noted that from an epidemiological perspective, the vaccine had a minor impact on transmission, but had a considerable impact on reducing hospitalisation rates, the death rate and was also effective in preventing long covid.
- There were proposals to pilot a vaccine event where there would be cultural activities, or vouchers given out to attract more attendees.
- There needed to be a wider conversation with all Councillors regarding what more they could do to promote the Communications messages and how they could use their networks to reach out to the community.
- It was important to understand why flu vaccine uptake had improved in 2021 as this may help with promoting the covid vaccine.
- Covid related funding would be available until March 2022.

Action 2: All Councillors be invited to a meeting to discuss what more they could do to promote the Communications messages and how they could use their networks to reach out to the community.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted

8. National & Local Key Messages

The national and local key messages were summarised as:

- Continue to encourage vaccination take up for those not yet vaccinated
- Consideration and support for those concerned eg masks

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

9. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Tuesday 14 December 2021 at 5pm.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 5.00 pm and closed at 6.07 pm)

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