



Minutes

Name of meeting	LOCAL OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD
Date and Time	THURSDAY 11 FEBRUARY 2021 COMMENCING AT 12.00 PM
Venue	VIRTUAL (MS TEAMS)
Present	Clrs D Stewart (Chairman), S Hutchinson, C Mosdell and G Peace
Officers Present	S Bryant, J Metcalfe, W Perera

23. **Election of Chairman for the Day**

Due to the delayed attendance of the Chairman it was necessary to elect a Chairman.

RESOLVED:

THAT Councillor Hutchinson be elected as interim Chairman.

24. **Minutes**

RESOLVED:

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2021 be confirmed.

25. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations declared at this stage.

26. **Public Question Time - 15 Minutes Maximum**

No public questions were received.

27. **Reports of the Local Outbreak Engagement Board**

27.1 **Update on Communications Activity**

It was noted that owing to a conflicting appointment, the Director of Public Health (DPH) would be delayed before he was able to present his update to the board. The Chairman, therefore agreed to alter the order of the agenda and the board firstly considered the update on Communications Activity.

The Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Strategy (ACX) advised communications had continued along the same vein as reported at previous meetings of the board, with activity focussed around three main pillars.

The first was reemphasising the key messages from Government around:

- Staying at home.
- Only undertaking essential journeys.
- Being clear about what those essential journeys are.

The second pillar related to the introduction of Covid stories, that related to Island residents who had been impacted by Covid and who had been prepared to provide us with information and undertake interviews and podcasts for us. These stories would provide a wider community understanding of how people were being impacted and how people were not alone in dealing with the pandemic, it was noted these had been well received.

The third pillar was regarding ensuring information we put out was very factual and very clear about Covid and vaccinations. It was highlighted that the importance of using facts about the virus was very important as this would counter any sense of panic or scaremongering within the community. It had been proven the public wished to receive information, in order to make informed choices and the activities of Island residents had been a good example of how the public responded to a crisis, through helping others over the last year.

It was acknowledged members had discussed previously had been the adherence to the behavioural regulations that were in place, and in fact adherence to those regulations had been good in the main across the Island. This was despite the fact we know people were suffering considerably financially and psychologically.

The Board were aware that reports of violations or non-compliance with the regulations were by default more memorable and newsworthy, which gave the impression there was a high level of such activity. However, in reality compliance across the Island had been generally very good and it was likely the impact on the spread of the infection would be presented in the figures provided by the DPH within their presentation.

Thoughts were now focussed on the future and the need for forward planning and in particular regarding half term. However, messaging had already commenced to reinforce the message that it was not a holiday in the normal sense and the guidelines of stay at home remained in place. It was accepted taking children on walks or to the playground were allowed, but precautions must continue to be applied.

The overall messages around hands – face – space had not changed. We still need to socially distance and we still need to ensure that we are not mixing outside of our bubbles.

The Board were also advised communications regarding the lateral flow device programme was underway, the programme being likely to come on stream early the following week. In summing up, the ACX highlighted thoughts continued to be

focussed on the anticipated government announcement on 22 February 2021, concerning the easing out of lockdown and to best respond to that situation moving forward, in conjunction with the Island community.

The Chairman highlighted that during the presentation, Cllr Stewart had joined the meeting, therefore Cllr Hutchinson vacated the chair. Cllr Stewart took the chair for the remainder of the meeting.

Cllr Mosdell advised she would be providing Cabinet later that evening with a more expansive report, but wished to highlight it had already been decided to continue to expand on the work that had already been undertaken over the past few years on improving the mental health of Island residents. Many of the improvements had been through integrated work with partners such as the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and healthcare. Cllr Mosdell stated that there was nobody who hadn't been affected by Covid and this included those who had experienced difficulty in leaving their homes due to domestic abuse.

Cllr Stewart commented that the pandemic was not over and that we were at an important stage. It was clear the numbers were decreasing however; they had not returned to the low levels previously. It was with that in mind, he reminded everyone, now was not the time to lose focus and take their foot off the pedal.

Cllr Peace stated as had been undertaken previously, contact and support of local businesses would be maintained, and the council would be hosting a number of webinars to advise on how businesses could remain Covid safe.

Cllr Hutchinson provided a personal account of his experiences when attending the West Wight Sports Centre vaccination centre, it being an extremely efficient and effective process with no queues. Following the vaccination, he had received printed guidance regarding the vaccine, which also advised clearly on the required continued social behaviours.

The Chairman adjourned the meeting until 1pm.

27.2 Update on current situation

Cllr Stewart welcomed everybody to the reconvened meeting and requested the Director of Public Health (DPH) to provide his update to the board.

As with previous meetings of the board, the DPH provided members with an overview of the current situation via a presentation, the key points of which included.

Members were advised on the current status of the pandemic across the country regarding infection rates per 100,000 population, which demonstrated overall that rates of infection had reduced, however those rates differed in different areas. This showed a really positive picture nationally and in regard to our local area, we had also seen infection rates reducing.

It was acknowledged that data concerning the Island, the latest data showed the Island infection rate was 123 cases as a seven-day rate across all ages. The case

detection rate stood at 83 per 100,000 population. The positivity rate during testing had also reduced to 4.1 and continued to fall. Such reductions were good news and mirrored trends across Hampshire.

It was noted that in wave one of the virus there was only pillar one testing in hospital, Island cases had peaked in early January and there were a couple of mini peaks prior, however case numbers continued to fall. The reduction in numbers was a result of the Island population following the guidance and for the Local Authority working together to reduce the spread of infection.

The highest age range testing positive was within the working age population, which was not surprising. Infection rates had fallen in the older population, this was good news as these were more likely to suffer severe consequences as a result, this would impact on the number of hospital admissions and the ITU capacity.

The number of hospital cases had levelled off and was beginning to decrease. This was after a large peak in cases, which modelling had shown would remain high briefly, before the data began to show reductions in this area as well. Sadly, in contrast the level of mortality had increased mid-January, although members were reminded that there was a delay between rates of infections reducing and the number of hospitalisations and deaths and the trend had started to reduce in those areas.

Moves were underway, subject to Department of Health approval on the establishment of a community testing programme. This would assist in the identification of those front facing workers who were asymptomatic. Identifying those individuals would help break the chain of transmission and offer another tool to help manage and control the virus. It was noted the portal for companies with employees over 50 was already available, with further changes in the programme concerning day setting staff and schools. These were delivered through lateral flow tests twice a week, 3-5 days apart, every week for a 6 week programme.

A number of vaccination sites had been set up across the Island and the NHS programme had been successful, the Island were nearly through the cohort of people eligible for a vaccination. It was acknowledged that people needed to be encouraged to take up the vaccination as there were a number of different variants of the virus, and the vaccine offered some protection.

Concern was raised regarding the beginning of April 2021 when hospitality started to reopen and asked if a strategy was in place to keep islanders safe as well as allowing the economy to recover. The Director for Public Health advised that the government was due to announce its plan on 22 February 2021 which would be closely watched. In the summer opening of businesses had happened and it was believed this needed to be replicated to help manage the spread of the virus, and get to a place where it became a way of living.

A series of webinars for businesses were being provided, on how to open up and remain Covid safe. A press announcement had been made to encourage businesses to engage.

Concern was raised that people were unsure if they were eligible for the vaccination and it was discussed that further information was required to ensure those people over 70 who had not been contacted should contact the NHS to receive their vaccination. The next cohort of people were the over 60's and extremely vulnerable, people were being invited according to eligibility.

The Chief Executive advised that if community testing was progressed, an increase in the number of cases may be seen on the Island, although it was noted that it would not be a bad thing as those not showing symptoms would be found, and it gave key workers security that they could go about their job and be confident when going home. It was important to continue the hands-face-space message, even if you had a vaccination which would help in getting on top of the virus.

It was noted that it was difficult to put any timeframes on reopening of businesses on the Island, we needed to be really cautious and look at the rate of infection and manage that. During February half term lock down would remain in place and people were required to stay at home. Reopening of schools would be the first stage, schools had access to Lateral Flow tests and would be rolling out similar programmes. There would be an impact as more people were vaccinated, with a reduction of infection to people not getting sick. This continued to be monitored and this board would remain to brief on decisions, it was anticipated that we might be able to look forward to some sort of summer.

27.3 Actions taken and required

In regard to actions taken and required, Cllr Mosdell sought further information regarding construction sites. She pointed out the press release concerning companies that had over 50 employees and the offer of testing. However, it was likely a construction site could contain 20 to 30 workers, all of which could be individual businesses, such as plumbers, electricians and decorators. The DPH was asked how those types of workers would be encouraged to be tested regularly and how they would be supported.

The DPH advised there was a simple online booking/registration system for getting a test, and that this would be operational shortly. This would allow such front facing workers, such as the examples given, who had to continue to attend work to book a 30-minute test at designated Island sites. It would be a case of promoting such an approach to businesses, through the provision of information to employees of those businesses. Advice would also be available through the workshops being provided through regulatory services, to compliment additional information to that included in the pack that would be sent to employers.

The Chief Executive stated that whilst pre planning for such an approach had been undertaken, it remained subject to confirmation from Government. Once the authority had been provided, the system was ready to go live. On that basis, the Board were advised businesses and frontline workers should keep up to date with announcements that may be released in the media over the coming days.

Regarding the comments by the DPH about Easter and Summer, the Chief Executive reinforced a word of caution. He highlighted the hard work undertaken to

reduce the Island numbers, and that this included the whole Island community. However, it would be necessary to know and understand the national picture, as that could have an impact in terms of businesses reopening, without experiencing the impact experienced in December and the subsequent increase in cases in January.

The Chairman provided a summary of the current situation, expressing for them things were beginning to feel more positive. He cited the case figures advised by the DPH, which was good news. It appeared the vaccination programme was going well and the Island was comparable with the national picture. It being stated that every vaccination contributed and therefore should be encouraged. It was clear people understood the need to stick to the rules and guidance and that the Island was moving forward positively, although any deviation from the rules could, as had been seen at Christmas have an impact.

The Chairman concluded by thanking those working so hard both front facing and those behind the scenes.

28. **Members' Question Time**

No Member Questions had been received.

CHAIRMAN