

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

**LOCAL COVID OUTBREAK
ENGAGEMENT BOARD
WEDNESDAY,
27 AUGUST 2020**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LOCAL COVID OUTBREAK
ENGAGEMENT BOARD HELD ON WEDNESDAY 27 AUGUST 2020 AT
1400 HOURS ON-LINE**

PRESENT: -

Dr Manir Aslam, GP Director, Sandwell and West Birmingham CCG
Councillor Matt Bennett, Opposition Spokesperson on Health and Social Care
Brian Carr, BVSC
Andy Cave, Chief Executive, Healthwatch Birmingham
Chief Superintendent Stephen Graham, West Midlands Police
Elizabeth Griffiths, Assistant Director of Public Health
Paul Jennings, Chief Executive, NHS Birmingham and Solihull CCG
Councillor Paul Tilsley
Dr Justin Varney, Director of Public Health, Birmingham City Council
Councillor Ian Ward, Leader of Birmingham City Council and Chairman for the LCOEB

ALSO PRESENT:-

Errol Wilson, Committee Services

NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

- 30 The Chair advised, and the Committee noted, that this meeting would be webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site (www.civico.net/birmingham) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there are confidential or exempt items.

APOLOGIES

- 31 Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Brigid Jones, Deputy Leader of the City Council; Councillor Paulette Hamilton, Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care and Deputy Chair of the LCOEB; Stephen Raybould, Programmes Director, Ageing Better, BVSC

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

- 32 The Chair reminded Members that they must declare all relevant pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests arising from any business to be discussed at this meeting. If a disclosable pecuniary interest is declared a Member must not speak or take part in that agenda item. Any declarations will be recorded in the Minutes of the meeting.
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WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- 33 The Chair welcomed everyone to the Local Covid Outbreak Engagement Board meeting.
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MINUTES

- 34 **RESOLVED:-**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2020, having been previously circulated, were confirmed by the Chair.

COVID-19 SITUATION UPDATE

TEST AND TRACE IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

TEST AND TRACE ENGAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

- 35 Dr Justin Varney, Director of Public Health shared a slide presentation on the *Covid-19 Situation Update*.

(See document No. 1)

An extensive discussion took place and the following is a summary of the principal points made:-

- a. Dr Varney noted the Leader's query concerning the ethnicity of those tested and advised that the data had been requested from the Government as part of the additional engagement Public Health had with the Government over the last two weeks as Birmingham joined the National Watch List. Public Health had reiterated this as a specific request.
- b. Councillor Bennett voiced concerns in relation to comments made by former City Councillor John Clancy in the media about *dodgy data and lockdown lunacy* etc.
- c. The Leader commented that the comments about lockdown lunacy was not helpful and the measures Dr Varney will outline in his presentation was very much to avoid a lockdown. Birmingham economy had re-emerged and recovered and the city did not want to go backwards on that. The City Council was saying to all businesses and the whole

Local Covid Outbreak Engagement Board – 27 August 2020

systems across the city to follow all of the guidance in order to keep ourselves and everyone safe. The businesses were to carry out a risk assessment and to stick to that risk assessment in order that they could keep people safe. This was the way to avoid a further lockdown in Birmingham.

- d. Dr Varney reiterated the points made by the Leader and stated that several individuals had taken to the media and social media to express their opinions on the national statistics and national threshold. Although everyone is welcomed to express freedom of speech, it was unhelpful at a time when the city was facing a global pandemic which puts people in hospital and had cost Birmingham more lives than was lost in the blitz bombing to create that kind of story.
- e. Dr Varney stated that from his perspectives the clear public health picture across the city which raised concerns that the virus in the diagrams he had shared clearly seemed to be rising and spreading at a significantly fast rate.
- f. If we look at the pattern of spread in cities like Leicester, this was exactly how it started and continued to climb. It was unhelpful for people who were not deeply involved and had the additional access that the Director of Public Health had with some of the restricted data start to give commentary from their armchairs at a time when everyone needed to be working closely together to keep the city safe and to keep us moving forward.
- g. Councillor Tilsley stated that he endorsed the comments made by Councillor Bennett and the Leader and that he had complemented the Leader on his exposure on the *News at One*. He was not in favour of comments made by Mr Clancy as whereas Members may know the postcodes in Birmingham to start trying to close down parts of the city by postcodes would be a recipe for disaster. This message should be sent out clearly so that we were unified in our approach to in what we were trying to do.
- h. The Leader commented that what was needed was for everyone to wear a face covering when they go out, for people to wash their hands regularly and to maintain the 2-metre social distancing when they go about their business which was the best chance of keeping everyone safe.

Dr Varney continued the slide presentation and advised that the rest of the information in the presentation covered the *Test and Trace Implementation Update* and the *Test and Trace Engagement Plan Update*.

- i. The Leader reiterated the positive discussions had with Government over the last week or so which had led to some of the changes that Dr Varney alluded to in his presentation.
- j. In relation to the pilot concerning Drop and Collect the Leader emphasised what Dr Varney had stated in his presentation and highlighted that if anyone had been contacted and asked to pay for a test, there is no need to do so. If people had any of the symptoms and they needed a test Public Health will arrange for them to get tested. There is no need for anyone to pay to get tested as the test was free of cost.

Local Covid Outbreak Engagement Board – 27 August 2020

- k. Councillor Paul Tilsley referred to the homelessness issue and stated that he had a couple of cases in his Ward and that he had pointed out to constituents that this had been a lifestyle choice for the individuals concerned. Given their lifestyles they were not only at risk themselves but were at risk of spreading the virus. Councillor Tilsley enquired whether they could work with the Police and the City Council's homelessness section to try and get them reengaged, so they were not on the streets.
- l. Dr Varney highlighted that Public Health was working with them closely and there was a strong partnership approach across the city with the Police, Council and the voluntary and community sector. As part of the work being done with national government, there was a support visit over the weekend and the Chief Executive of St Basil's had met with the government team who was visiting specifically to talk about our approach to homelessness and were reflecting how strongly the approach was.
- m. Dr Varney advised that individuals could be offered support, but we cannot force it. It was important to recognise that the homeless population themselves represent a specific additional risk to anyone else in the city. The risk was more to each other within that community by individuals bedding down together in the streets.
- n. The City Council had worked to get people off the streets into accommodation as quickly as possible and to ensure that accommodation had wrap around support for individuals to try and address their concerns and the issues they had. A report could be provided outside the Board to members concerning the success the City Council had achieved.
- o. Councillor Bennett referred to an enquiry he had received from a resident in relation to a gathering they wish to have and whether it was permissible. He added that it might be worth reviewing the information on the website so that it was accessible to members of the public. The second question concerned facemasks as a number of people were seen in supermarkets not wearing a face covering/mask which could be down to their sensitivity or they could be exempt. There was also the issue of supermarkets being reluctant to enforce the rule which was a national issue. Councillor Bennett queried whether there was anything that could be done locally to address the issue.
- p. The Leader commented that in relation to the second issue it was not helped that the guidance on wearing face coverings was yes in one venue and not necessarily in another. The messaging to be put out across the West Midlands that was agreed by all seven Metropolitan Leaders was that people should wear a face mask whenever they leave home. If a face mask was worn in places like supermarkets, requires the corporation of the supermarkets to make this happen. Overall this has to be enforced by the Police, but their resources were stretched.
- q. In terms of gatherings it needed to be ensured that this was crystal clear on the website, but in any event all gatherings had a maximum of 30 people which include weddings and funerals, but did not include the gathering of communal prayers etc.
- r. Chief Superintendent Steve Graham stated that they were grateful that people appreciate some of their resourcing challenges. We were in extraordinary times and in addition to what they had on over the

Local Covid Outbreak Engagement Board – 27 August 2020

weekend in terms of the night-time activities where the Police was dealing with some of these unlicensed music events or unlawful gatherings, the Police were also putting out more officers through the Bank Holiday.

- s. To deal with some of the issues around the wearing of masks this would not be operated like a speed trap, but the Police had a role to play as a primary enforcement agency recognised by society generally but the Police will do their bit in trying to clampdown on the infection rates and all the issues Dr Varney had discussed earlier.
- t. The Leader reiterated that the measures were being taken in order to get back on top of the numbers here in Birmingham, particularly to drive down the positivity rate ideally down to the regional average or below. All of this was being done with one eye on the re-opening of schools next week as it was important that children and young people were back in education.
- u. Children and young people had already suffered a loss of six months in their education and we cannot afford for that to go on. We did not want our future generation in this city to be defined by the virus and the pandemic. It was absolutely crucial to get children and young people back to school next week and that parents were given the confidence to send their children back to school.

The Board noted the slide presentation.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS SUBMITTED IN ADVANCE

- 36 The Leader introduced the item and advised that there were no public questions submitted for this meeting.
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TEST AND TRACE BUDGET OVERVIEW

- 37 Dr Justin Varney, Director of Public Health apologise for the paper not being shared in advance of the meeting and suggested that this be not be discussed in detail at the meeting today. He undertook for the paper to be circulated and place on CMIS. As colleagues will understand, there was relative minimal spend against the budget in the last month primarily because Public Health was in the process of recruiting to roles in the structure that was presented to the Board previously. A new Assistant Director had been appointed in Public Health to lead the test and trace function and will join the Council in the early part of September and the majority of other posts that had been appointed to wee also coming on board in September. At the moment there were no significant new capacity in spend against the budget. At the next Board the paper should be ahead of time and published which will show progress in spend.
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OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

- 38 No items of urgent business were raised.
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Local Covid Outbreak Engagement Board – 27 August 2020

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

- 39 It was noted that the next Local Covid Outbreak Engagement Board meeting would be held on Thursday 1 October 2020 at 1400 hours as an online meeting.
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EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

- 40 **RESOLVED: -**

That in view of the nature of the business to be transacted which includes exempt information of the category indicated the public be now excluded from the meeting:-

Exempt Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Schedule 12A
