

**Date:** 18 February 2021

**Title:** Priority 1 – Keeping Residents Safe - COVID-19 Update and Public Health Action Plan

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**Report Sponsor:** Cllr Gareth Williams

**Report for information/decision or approval:** For information and assurance.

**Related [Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) Priority:** Keeping infection rates low and residents safe from COVID-19

**Recommendations:** Board members are recommended to note and approve the attached action plan update. Also, to agree to receive a further update at the July meeting.

### **Content of report**

- 1.1 The COVID-19 pandemic has now been a major focus of work across the health and social care sector for more than 12 months. During that time both organisations and individuals have had to deal with unprecedented challenges in responding to the most significant public health crisis of the last hundred years. Events since the beginning of 2021 have made it clear that new challenges will continue to arise, even while the COVID-19 vaccination programme provides hope for ending the crisis.
- 1.2 The emergence of new variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus was a predictable but unwelcome development at the end of 2020. Viruses mutate rapidly, but only mutations which are either neutral or beneficial to the virus will survive within the population. The significance of the B.1.1.7 (Kent), B.1.351 (South African) and P.1 (Brazilian) variants currently identified is that they appear to have mutated in ways which increase their transmissibility, making it more likely that they will be passed from person to person.
- 1.3 Evidence is still emerging, but there is some data to suggest that the B.1.1.7 variant (which currently accounts for over 99% of COVID-19 infections in the South East) may be associated with slightly higher mortality, but this is not conclusive. At the time of writing it is unclear if any of the new strains might require different preventative measures, or whether they affect the usefulness of our current tests or vaccines.
- 1.4 Due to the spike in case numbers caused by the new variant the South East was put into Tier 4 on December 20<sup>th</sup>, and then on January 6<sup>th</sup> the whole country was put into a third national lockdown. At the time of writing, COVID-19 case numbers have been declining steadily across Buckinghamshire since the beginning of January, suggesting that the Tier 4 and lockdown restrictions are effective against the new variant.

- 1.5 Current precautions are considered essential to protect our communities and prevent health systems from becoming overwhelmed, until infection rates fall further and while the vaccine roll-out continues to provide a more sustainable form of protection. Although case numbers are reducing and hospitalisations have levelled out, weekly death numbers in Buckinghamshire are currently higher than they were at the peak of the first wave (as of the latest mortality data for January 16<sup>th</sup>–22<sup>nd</sup>).
- 1.6 An update of current developments in testing and vaccination will be provided via a verbal update to the board. A high-level update for the thematic priority ‘Keeping infection rates low and residents safe from COVID-19’ Action Plan can be found in Appendix 1.

#### **Consultation and communication**

- 1.7 Communication remains a crucial aspect of the Council’s COVID-19 response, and the public health team will continue to work closely with the communications team and elected members in order to keep the public informed about how best to protect themselves during the pandemic.

#### **Next steps and review**

- 1.8 In addition to responding to the COVID-19 pandemic as it continues to unfold, it is proposed that the elements of the Health and Wellbeing Recovery Plan be brought to the Board for the consideration of key activities as part of the planned themed meetings.