

Date: 22 July 2021

Title: COVID-19 update and Local Outbreak Management Plan

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Report Sponsor: Dr Jane O'Grady

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

Related Priority: *Keeping infection rates low and residents safe from COVID-19*

Recommendations: *Board members are recommended to note and approve the attached Local Outbreak Management Plan.*

Content of report

- 1.1 Since the last Health & Wellbeing Board update (18 February 2021), the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to be the major focus of work across the health and social care sector. Local case numbers continued to decline through the first three months of 2021, reaching a plateau by April of 10-30 cases per 100,000 population. However, in late May rates began to rise again, driven by the spreading "Delta" SARS-CoV-2 variant, prompting concerns that we may be entering a third wave of the pandemic.
- 1.2 The Delta variant (the variant first identified in India) appears to be significantly more infectious than Alpha (variant first identified in Kent), and has rapidly become the dominant variant locally and nationally. There is evidence that the mutations which characterise this variant reduce the effectiveness of current COVID-19 vaccines to some extent, although getting fully vaccinated remains a very important form of protection. The same social precautions ("Hands, Face, Space and Fresh Air") also still work to prevent transmission of the Delta variant.
- 1.3 Vaccination coverage is now above 80% (herd immunity levels) in all clinical risk groups, and as a result the ratio of cases to hospitalisations and deaths should be lower in these groups in a third wave of the pandemic compared to the first or second wave. However, a small proportion of those infected after vaccination will still become unwell enough to require hospitalisation, and there are still significant numbers of people who have not had the required 2 doses of the vaccine. There are still uncertainties over the exact increased transmissibility of this variant and depending on the level of transmissibility and vaccine effectiveness which makes modelling of the impact on hospital admissions and deaths difficult at this stage.
- 1.4 A more immediate concern is the effect that a more transmissible variant of COVID-19 will have on the learning and wellbeing of children and young people. Schools and

universities remain largely unvaccinated populations, and cases can spread rapidly in these settings. In addition, under current guidance a single case can lead to many students having to self-isolate for ten days as contacts, thereby missing the educational and safeguarding benefits of face-to-face teaching.

- 1.5 In view of the above, current COVID-19 precautions are considered essential to protect our communities from both direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic. At a time when the country is still moving towards further easing of restrictions, many people may feel that it is no longer important to follow the rules. As a health and social care system, it is vital that we provide clear messaging that the risks associated with the pandemic are still present, that everyone should remain cautious and adhere to the national guidance on COVID-safe ways of living and working.
- 1.6 In order to ensure effective and coordinated action which protects the health of Buckinghamshire residents, we have a Local Outbreak Management Plan which is regularly updated. The Buckinghamshire plan was subjected to a regional peer review process which rated it as fully meeting all the requirements set out by PHE.

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 further COVID-19 updates, it is proposed that the outcomes of current planning for Winter and the 2021/22 Flu season are brought to a future Health & Wellbeing Board, in view of the uncertainties about how the first post-pandemic Winter will test local services.