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## **Report to West Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board**

**27 January 2022**

### **West Sussex COVID-19 Local Outbreak Engagement Board**

**Report by Alison Challenger, Director of Public Health**

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#### **Summary**

This report provides a quarterly update on the West Sussex COVID-19 Local Outbreak Engagement Board (LOEB).

The Board was established as part of the Government's requirements for the COVID-19 National Test and Trace Programme and is accountable to the West Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board, as a sub-group of the Board, providing formal updates at its quarterly public meetings.

#### **Recommendation(s) to the Board**

##### **The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to;**

- (1) Provide feedback on the progress of the West Sussex COVID-19 Local Outbreak Engagement Board (LOEB) since the last quarterly report to the Health and Wellbeing Board in October 2021.
- (2) To consider how the LOEB can continue to maximise its' strength in partnership working, maintaining and increasing engagement with residents and communities across the county, aligned to the Government's plans set out in the COVID-19 Response: Autumn and Winter Plan 2021, and any future policy updates.

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#### **Relevance to [Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#)**

West Sussex Public Health's COVID-19 response aims to minimise the impact of the virus on the population of West Sussex by controlling the COVID-19 rate of reproduction (R), reducing the spread of infection and saving lives. In line with the West Sussex Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy priorities, this preventative approach also aims to improve the overall health outcomes of West Sussex residents and reduce inequalities, supporting our local population during these challenging times.

#### **1 Background and context**

- 1.1 The West Sussex member led Local Outbreak Engagement Board (LOEB) is a sub-group of the West Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board, providing political ownership and public facing engagement and communication for outbreak response during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 1.2 The LOEB is a key part of the governance structure for the West Sussex COVID-19 Local Outbreak Control Plan (LOCP). The Director of Public Health drives this local plan through the West Sussex COVID-19 Health Protection Board in collaboration with the West Sussex County Council (WSCC) Strategic Management Group (Gold command) and the LOEB.
- 1.3 The LOCP was refreshed and published in October 2021, to reflect changes in national guidance and the Government's updated 'COVID-19 contain framework: a guide for local decision-makers.'
- 1.4 Since the last formal update from the LOEB was provided to the West Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board in October 2021, the Board has met twice; 18 October and 13 December.
- 1.5 At the October meeting of the Board, the group discussed reducing the frequency of the meetings, highlighting the extremely good relationships and other ongoing partnership working groups also taking place across West Sussex. Board members agreed to reduce board meetings to every two months, noting the need for flexibility and preservation of the ability to regroup if required.
- 1.6 The next meeting will take place on Monday, 14 February 2022.

### **Local Outbreak Engagement Board Progress Update**

- 1.7 The LOEB remains focused on its role in bringing together key systems leaders across the County Council and the wider health and social care system, applying its collective strength and resources to reduce the spread of infection and save lives across the county.
- 1.8 The Board continues to regularly receive updates from a broad range of areas throughout the COVID-19 response, enabling them to remain informed and contribute widely.
- 1.9 At the Board meeting in December, the drive to rapidly increase the vaccination offer to residents across the county and the need to further draw upon systems partnerships to increase uptake where possible, particularly in response to the risks of the Variant of Concern (VoC) Omicron, was acknowledged and fully supported by the Board.
- 1.10 Key partners and stakeholders will continue to work very closely with the Sussex Health and Care Partnership (SHCP) who are delivering the programme, to increase vaccine uptake, focusing on reducing health inequalities and working with our communities across West Sussex. Further information on the NHS COVID-19 vaccination programme can be found on the [SCHP website](#).
- 1.11 It was emphasised that the seasonal influenza vaccination programme also led by the SHCP, continues to run alongside the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme. Those eligible are encouraged not to delay, and to book in their vaccination as soon as possible.
- 1.12 Communications remain a fundamental part of the COVID-19 response, engaging with local communities across West Sussex in a variety of ways including social media, press releases, the residents' newsletter, and many

more, to deliver national messages at a local level, and to sign-post residents to local information and support services, such as the Community Support Hub and Asymptomatic Testing Programme. [Further information can be found on the West Sussex County Council \(WSCC\) website here.](#)

- 1.13 WSCC, district and borough councils, and the Sussex Resilience Forum (SRF) continue to encourage event organisers to follow Government guidance and apply good practice measures. The SRF has developed an agreed guidance document for use across Sussex that provides clear guidance for event organisers to prevent transmission of the virus, for example, encouraging attendees to wear face coverings, practice good hand hygiene, and take a lateral flow test before attending the event.
- 1.14 An update on support provided throughout the pandemic to early years and childcare settings, schools, and the university was provided. This included highlighting that the Council continues to work closely with schools to provide support and guidance, communicating regularly with headteachers to update them on national guidance, which they are encouraged to follow. A key component of this is a risk assessment which each headteacher must have in place and regularly review and update, as circumstances in school and public health advice changes.
- 1.15 Further advice and guidance are available from the West Sussex Public Health team, the Department for Education, and for larger outbreaks, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA). The West Public Health team also offer regular question and answer sessions for headteachers providing the opportunity to raise any issues.

### **Key Policy Changes**

- 1.16 A number of key policy changes have been announced by the Government over recent months.
- 1.17 On 8 December 2021, the Prime Minister announced that England would move to Plan B in response to the risks of the Variant of Concern (VoC) Omicron. This includes face coverings required by law in most indoor public places (other than hospitality), and on public transport, office workers who can work from home should do so, and the NHS COVID Pass required by law at certain venues and events for visitors aged 18 years and over.
- 1.18 On 5 January, in a statement to the House of Commons, the Prime Minister announced that Plan B will remain in place for another three weeks and will be further reviewed before regulations expire on 26 January 2022.
- 1.19 The COVID-19 Vaccination Programme has been significantly expanded, including the acceleration of the booster programme to protect against the spread of Omicron, making a huge difference to local communities. The Council's Public Health team work closely with local NHS partners, SHCP, to tackle inequalities, including access to vaccination, to increase uptake across the local population,
- 1.20 The LOEB will continue to use its voice to engage with residents, communities, key partners, and businesses to deliver national messages to help keep West Sussex safe.

## **2 Proposal details**

- 2.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide feedback on the progress of the West Sussex COVID-19 Local Outbreak Engagement Board (LOEB) since the last quarterly report to the Health and Wellbeing Board in October 2021.
- 2.2 Views are sought from the West Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board on how the LOEB can continue to maximise its' strength in partnership working, maintaining and increasing engagement with residents and communities across the county, aligned to the Government's plans set out in the COVID-19 Response: Autumn and Winter Plan 2021, and any future policy updates.

## **3 Consultation, engagement and advice**

- 3.1 Not applicable.

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**Appendices:** None

**Background papers:** None