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ENGAGEMENT BOARD (COVID-19)

MINUTES OF MEETING Wednesday, 6th January 20201

PRESENT: Councillor Brett (in the Chair); Councillors Daalat Ali, Emsley, Heakin and Rowbotham (Rochdale Borough Council); Dr C. Duffy and D. Dawson (Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale NHS CCG), K. Bertram (Action Together) and K. Jones (HealthWatch Rochdale).

OFFICERS: M. Widdup (Director of Neighbourhoods), A. Fallon (Director of Public Health), W. Meston (Consultant in Public Health), D. Gardner, M. Hall, A. Threlfall (Public Health Directorate) N. Suleman and P. Thompson (Resources Directorate).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: A. Mitchell (Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale NHS CCG).

14 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Iftikhar Ahmed, Councillor Blundell, Councillor Dearnley and Gail Hopper (Director of Children's Services).

15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interests.

16 MINUTES

Resolved:

That subject to the amendment of the designation of G. Hopper (from Director of Public Health to Director of Children's Services (in the list of Officer's present), the Minutes of the meeting of the Engagement Board (Covid-19), held on 18th November 2020, be approved as a correct record.

17 INTELLIGENCE UPDATE

The Director of Public Health reported on the latest intelligence available for use by the Council and its partners to attempt to counter the spread of Covid-19 in the Borough.

In terms of direct impact on the Borough, the Board was reminded that the most vulnerable groups, susceptible to the virus, are those who are elderly and frail, those in care homes and older people with multiple health conditions. These people had a case fatality rate of 5% or more. It was therefore crucial to carry out all available measures to prevent spread in these groups.

In addition many other people over 50 years of age were also vulnerable, if they have existing health conditions but the case fatality rates in this group was much lower. A small proportion of people younger than 50 with underlying and multiple health issues were vulnerable.

There was currently 185 people in hospital, in Rochdale, with Covid-19. This, however, compared to 424 hospital patients at the height of the first wave of the pandemic, in the spring months of 2020. The fatality rate was so far (during the 2020/2021 winter months) much lower than it was in the spring of 2020

In terms of the indirect impact of the virus on vulnerable people it was noted that the response to the virus was causing harm. Most vulnerable includes those at risk of decline because of isolation, financial distress, lack of care and treatment. In addition some of the most vulnerable may be hidden or less obvious and could include: Young people with anxiety; people trapped in abusive relationships; wealthier people seeing their life's work in ruins; homeless and people with unaffordable mortgages.

Resolved that the report be noted.

18 HEALTH PROTECTION BOARD AND OUTBREAK PLAN UPDATE

Further to Minute 11 of the previous meeting of the Engagement Board, held 18th November 2020, the Director of Public Health gave a presentation that detailed statistics relating to the numbers of deaths and hospital admissions in the Borough as a result of Covid-19 and updated on testing arrangements across the Borough.

The Engagement Board was informed that a 'fast testing programme' was to be rolled out in Rochdale later in January 2021, in a bid to 'filter out' asymptomatic cases. In addition 'Lateral Flow Tests' – which delivered results in 30 minutes – would be available at four different sites throughout the Borough from 18th January 2021. The Council were presently in discussions with the army about delivery of the initiative, which will run for six weeks.

The swab kits that would be used were of the kind used in the mass-testing initiative piloted in Liverpool and Merseyside during November 2020. Although these were not as accurate as lab-processed PCR tests, the Director of Public Health reported that they were useful for identifying asymptomatic cases in the population. Therefore this meant that those testing positive for the virus, despite not falling ill, would know to self-isolate, thereby helping to break the chains of transmission.

The meeting was advised that Lateral Flow Tests were particularly useful for when people had a 'high viral load', meaning when they were at their most infectious. These tests would allow asymptomatic carriers to be 'taken out of circulation' and stop them spreading the virus. Thus far 70% of the negatives were accurate.

It was envisaged that the sites would be placed in Rochdale, Middleton and Littleborough, with their exact location yet to be determined. There would be a drive-through centre in Heywood.

Resolved:
That the report be noted.

19 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT UPDATE

Consideration was given to a presentation and report of the Director of Public Health and voluntary sector partners which set out key themes of engagement activity across the Borough in relation to the pandemic and responses from the community thereto.

It was reported that there here had been sustained efforts to share key public health messages and regular updates on the current situation in the Borough, working closely with partners to ensure consistent messaging, including the public health actions taken by partners and public health.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.