

Covid Response Advisory Working Group

Monday 7 March 2022

Notes of meeting

Present:

Cllr Andy Foulsham	Chair
Cllr Gabby Barody	Vice-Chair
Cllr Cheryl Briggs	Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames (ex-officio)
Cllr Alex Greenaway	
Cllr Lorraine Oates	

In attendance:

Susan Whipp	Deputy Town Clerk / RFO (clerk to the meeting)
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1. **Apologies for Absence**

None

2. **Declarations of Interest**

None

3. **Notes**

The notes of the meeting held on 10 January 2022 were agreed.

4. **Updates from District and County Councils**

Cllr Andy Foulsham reported -

- Updates from the Buckingham, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care System (BOB ICS) are still being received, but these mainly cover routine information regarding the vaccination programme.
- Public Health dashboard figures show a reduction since the end of December, looking at the seven-day rolling average (now 400 per 100,000 in the Vale, was 1,600 per 100,000).
- Anecdotal local evidence shows cases still prevalent in Abingdon and surrounding area, so still a need to follow the guidance.

Cllr Gabby Barody reported –

- No update to share from OCC
- Number of cases being treated by the local NHS trusts is reducing
- Aware that healthcare professionals are still testing regularly
- Reminder that free lateral flow test kits will no longer be available to the public from April and so we should expect to see a further reduction in case numbers reported.

Cllr Cheryl Briggs raised concerns that the end of free testing will add to the complacency of some, together with lack of sick pay for some which means individuals will choose not to test. Also concerned that worrying trend not to have the (third) booster may increase cases once the benefits of the 2nd dose have reduced.

Cllr Foulsham urged everyone to remain responsible.

5. **“Living with Covid” staffing arrangements**

The group considered the following proposals put forward by the Chair:

- (i) Give the Town Clerk the continuing authority to authorise working from home by staff where necessary to support staff with COVID related health concerns or where justified by high rates of COVID infections.
- (ii) Encourage staff to continue to take lateral flow tests regularly.
- (iii) Note that these will no longer be free after March, and therefore we should authorise the purchase of lateral flow tests for staff to continue testing as long as the Town Clerk feels is necessary.
- (iv) Note that staff *shouldn't feel obligated to work from home when ill*, because they have the capability to do so. So, staff shouldn't feel obliged to join meetings online if they are ill.

Cllr Alex Greenaway questioned the *clarity of the wording* in (iv), and it was changed to:

Note that staff who are on sick leave, shouldn't feel obligated to carry out work, even though they have equipment and access at home to do so. Staff should not feel obligated to join meetings online if they are on sick leave.

It was proposed by Cllr Andy Foulsham, seconded by Cllr Lorraine Oates, and voted unanimously to approve these proposals.

6. **Future meetings**

The group considered the need for future meetings. All members agreed that there was no immediate need to meet again soon but wished for the working group to continue to be able to call a meeting at short notice in the future if such a need materialised.

It was agreed to delegate the calling of future meetings to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chair.

Cllr Alex Greenaway thanked both the staff and local community groups for their work over the past two years in responding to the pandemic.

The meeting closed at 6.40pm.