

# **Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board**

## **23 September 2020**

### **Update on COVID-19 Communications Strategy and the role of the Local Outbreak Engagement Board**

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr L Miller, Adult Social Care and Health

**Local Councillor(s):** All

**Executive Director:** S Crowe, Director of Public Health

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**Report Status:** Public

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that:

- a) The Board notes the development of the Dorset Council COVID-19 Local Outbreak Management Plan (LOMP) Communications Strategy;
- b) The Board notes the key role the Local Outbreak Engagement Board will play in responding to future outbreaks/incidents as highlighted by exercises under the LOMP;
- c) Key members of the Engagement Board share their learning from the table-top exercise due to run on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2020.

**Reason for Recommendation:** Oversight of preparations for the local management of outbreaks of COVID-19 in accordance with the COVID-19 Local Outbreak Management Plan for Dorset.

## **1. Executive Summary**

To update on the development of a Communications Strategy to support the Dorset Council COVID-19 Local Outbreak Management Plan and COVID-19 Local Outbreak Engagement Board.

## **2. Financial Implications**

Any resourcing required in support of the communications strategy and Trusted Voices project will be supported via the Test and Trace grant provided to Councils, worth £1.28M for Dorset Council.

## **3. Climate implications**

None.

## **4. Other Implications**

The importance of having comprehensive communications plans to support the Local Outbreak Management Plan cannot be over-estimated. The role of the Local Outbreak Engagement Board in leading effective communications and engagement is a key part of our response to COVID-19.

## **5. Risk Assessment**

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: High

Residual Risk: Medium

The current risk of COVID-19 in the community is high with potential impacts on financial / strategic priorities, health and wellbeing and safe delivery of critical services. The Communications Strategy sets out work to alert people to risks and encourage safe policies, procedures and individual behaviours and hence is a key element of work to minimise the risk of transmission of coronavirus.

## **6. Equalities Impact Assessment**

The aim of the Communications Strategy and the Trusted Voices project in particular, is to engage with and communicate effectively with a diverse range of communities, taking into consideration their communication needs and the wider concerns and challenges they may be facing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **7. Background**

- 7.1 This paper supports the Dorset Council Local Outbreak Management Plan – specifically, updating on the development of a communications and engagement strategy and the role of the COVID-19 Local Outbreak Engagement Board in leading this work.
- 7.2 As planning for the prevention and management of outbreaks of COVID-19 develops through the Our Dorset COVID-19 Health Protection Board, it is timely to consider the role of the Dorset Council COVID-19 Local Outbreak Engagement Board, along with associated communication and engagement plans. Our ability to communicate effectively and to really engage with local communities, organisations, businesses, visitors etc, is vital if we are to continue to respond well to the COVID-19 pandemic locally.
- 7.3 This short paper updates Members of the Health and Wellbeing Board on the work to date in developing a strong communications and engagement approach to support COVID-19 outbreak management planning.
- 7.4 The Our Dorset COVID-19 Health Protection Board has been meeting weekly since 29 June, tasked with developing, rehearsing and activating key elements of the Local Outbreak Management Plans (LOMPs). As part of this work, a comprehensive Communications Strategy has now been developed (see Appendix 1). Consistent with national guidance and the Dorset LOMP, the strategy plans communication in relation to three levels of viral transmission and response:
- a) Steady state, business as usual living with COVID-19, sporadic cases managed (as being experienced currently)
  - b) Low levels of outbreaks: isolated outbreaks occurring and overall numbers of positive cases starting to rise.
  - c) Multiple outbreaks with evidence of sustained community transmission.
- 7.5 A desktop exercise on 17 August involving members of the COVID-19 Health Protection Board rehearsed the local response to a 'rising tide' scenario, exploring the interagency actions that would be needed at each of the three levels, if infection rates start to rise. What became clear was that the role of the Local Outbreak Engagement Boards would step up as the seriousness of and extent of local outbreaks increased. By the time our surveillance indicated a situation commensurate with Level 3 response, in other words requiring decisions as to whether to enact local and/or national measures, it is envisaged that the Dorset Council Local Outbreak Engagement Board would be meeting regularly and playing a central oversight role in decision making and communications and engagement with the public.
- 7.6 The Communication Strategy sets out:
- a) Leadership on interagency, regional and national communications;
  - b) A media handling protocol including designated media spokespeople;
  - c) Agreed comms messages and cascade arrangements;

d) Plans for engagement and stakeholder mapping.

- 7.7 Recent learning from elsewhere in England, where there have been extensive outbreaks requiring further local restrictions, has highlighted the need to engage quickly with a diverse range of local communities, including with those who may not regularly be in receipt of council, or other public sector messaging. To improve the reach and relevance of messaging, and the positive engagement of local communities in responding to outbreaks of COVID-19, local agencies have conceived the Trusted Voices project (details of which are set out in Appendix 2 of the Communication Strategy).
- 7.8 The idea of Trusted Voices is to work closely with leaders and representatives of local communities, particularly where there may be barriers to good engagement, to better understand the needs of these communities at this time, and to co-produce resources and messages that will be effective in supporting prevention and the management of outbreaks. Those people we work with, the 'Trusted Voices' will also form a network of people, through who timely messages can be conveyed. The project aims to build on established networks and the very positive engagement work that the council and other stakeholders are already undertaking.
- 7.9 In continuing to test our plans moving forward, a further COVID-19 desktop exercise, designed to rehearse communications and the role of the Local Outbreak Engagement Board was held on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2020. Learning from this exercise will be shared with key partners via the Health Protection Board, Local Outbreak Engagement Board and Council Covid Incident Management Team.

## **8. Appendices**

Appendix 1 - COVID-19 Communications Strategy  
Appendix 2 – Trusted Voices campaign

## **9. Background Papers**

None.

### **Footnote:**

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.