

Local Outbreak Engagement Board

2 March 2021

Covid-19 Variant – Surge Testing

1. Purpose

To update the Board on Walsall's implementation of Operation Eagle targeted surge testing related to the Covid-19 South African variant.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Board note the content of the Report.
- 2.2. That the Board note the successes and the learning from the implementation of Operation Eagle and endorse the contribution and utilisation of this learning to any future surge testing operations.

3. Report detail

- 3.1 National enhanced testing of a random sample of all coronavirus positive tests revealed an initial 105 cases of the South African variant had been detected. Walsall was found to be one of the 8 areas nationally in which the South African variant had been detected. Further track and trace investigation revealed that 11 cases of the variant were deemed not to be connected to any foreign travel.
- 3.2 As a result the 8 areas were asked to implement a "surge test" methodology to test 10,000 adults in a limited geographical location surrounding the residence of the index South African variant case. Walsall's targeted area was WS27 an area in the Beechdale and Leamore location of the Borough (Area 1).
- 3.3 Over a 10-day period a team was mobilised, contracting the Manor Farm Community Association, to implement a delivery, registration, and collection service in the target location. Each residence in the designated location, 6088 houses, were visited and all residents over the age of 18 were asked to voluntarily participate in an enhanced testing regime. 6399 tests were distributed and 5369 completed tests were collected and directed by courier each evening to a specialist lab for the enhanced testing.
- 3.4 In addition over 2000 tests were conducted at 2 Mobile Testing Units specifically set up to support the operation at the Forest Arts Centre and

Walsall College. Royal Mail also directed postal kits through to the specialist lab.

- 3.5 Whilst concluding the surge testing in Area1 further national testing revealed Walsall had a further South African variant case located in the WS28 Pleck area of the Borough (Area 2).
- 3.6 The implementation team transferred from Area 1 to Area 2 to implement a further surge testing project. The second area was a smaller geographical footprint with 5000 target tests requested from 2122 households. The Mobile Testing Unit at Walsall College was retained to support the enhanced testing.
- 3.7 The learning from Area 1 was utilised to inform the methodology of engagement in Area 2. Local faith groups were approached to assist with the local leadership, promotion and act as drop off points for completed test at the local Mosque, Sikh Temple, Hindu Temple and Church of England and Methodist places of worship. In addition two mobile testing units, with the support of the Imam, with Urdu and Mirpuri speaking staff were deployed to the Mosque on Friday afternoon to engage local residents.
- 3.8 The experience in Area 2 was distinctly different from Area 1 and the engagement levels were significantly lower with over 70% non-engagement or refusal to take part in the voluntary testing. 100% of 2122 households were visited, 1143 tests were distributed and 732 completed tests were returned. There was also a much lower use of the Mobile Testing Unit with 424 individuals utilising this testing service during the period Area 2 was active.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 At the point of writing the operation in Area 2 is still active and without a comprehensive analysis it would be wrong at this stage to speculate why the engagement levels differed so dramatically between the 2 areas.
- 4.2 If surge testing is to become part of the public health response to mutations of the Covid-19 virus then the experience of Walsall, together with experiences from other Operation Eagle sites across the UK, needs to be understood so that the benefits of different operational methodologies can be appreciated to enable engagement with the range of communities that contribute to the rich fabric of our society.

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