

**MINUTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 24 SEPTEMBER 2020 FROM 8.10 PM TO 8.36 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: John Halsall (Chairman), John Kaiser, Parry Batth, UllaKarin Clark, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Pauline Jorgensen, Charles Margetts, Gregor Murray and Wayne Smith

Other Councillors Present

Prue Bray
Gary Cowan
Richard Dolinski
Lindsay Ferris
Sarah Kerr
Andrew Mickleburgh
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

28. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Stuart Munro.

29. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

30. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Chairman invited members of the public to submit questions to the appropriate Members.

30.1 Wesley Budd asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

I thank the Executive for discussing tonight the possibility of purchasing a limited number of Covid-19 tests. I believe that one figure that has been mooted is that each test could cost around £100. If the kits are purchased, as I hope they will be, will WBC pursue all avenues possible to try to recover all of these costs from the Government?

Answer

An important point to make here is that the price includes the whole testing service and not just the test kit. So that means the tech, the kit, the courier to the lab, the lab processing and public health having access to the test results. It is very important that for any potential test the data is fed into the NHS Track and Trace system.

We are only looking here to secure a backup supply should we have a significant situation, such as an outbreak, where there is a problem basically with the government testing routes. To answer your question directly though we will pursue all avenues for Government funding as we are doing for all the costs incurred directly or indirectly around Covid. Unfortunately, as you may know, the extra funding from central Government is currently not enough to cover all these costs and it is imperative that we target our resources to where they are most needed, which is we believe to be the case with this critical testing initiative. I would say on top of that myself, the Leader, and the Deputy

Leader are continuing to lobby our MPs and put as much pressure on them to address this situation and resolve basically some of these funding issues.

30.2 Al Neal asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

I welcome the proposals under discussion tonight regarding the purchase of Covid-19 test kits. To be effective in stopping the spread of the virus, selecting those to be tested, carrying out the tests and communicating the results are time critical tasks.

Is WBC confident that it has, or can create rapidly, the capacity to perform these tasks effectively?

Answer

As I stated in my first reply we are only investigating the option of purchasing a small amount of our own kits should we have an emergency situation, such as an outbreak, in Wokingham and the national system cannot support us adequately. So it is a back up to mitigate the risks that we have all seen in the media. We do not know how long the national system will take to recover enough capacity so this seems to me like a sensible step. At the moment cases of Covid in Wokingham are relatively low so between the national system and the local system and this back up provision we are trying to do all we can basically to make sure that we are prepared and we are ready for whatever may come and we are doing what we can to protect our residents.

In terms of speed, provision we are looking at securing if we have to use it, is a 48 hour response. It can get to 24 hours in urgent situations so we are confident that it will be timely and critical, and as I said before, all the data, one of the key things for us, is any data via this that is collected is fed into the NHS system basically, so that any evidence that was accrued can be used generally in the fight against Covid.

30.3 Mike Smith asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

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Question

This report accompanying the agenda refers to residents of Wokingham, yet many of our key workers are not Wokingham residents. Will these tests be available for both residents and non-residents who are key-workers in our Borough?

Answer

The national testing system run by the Government is available to all who need it. This includes anyone who develops symptoms of Covid 19 and also includes targeted asymptomatic testing of NHS and social care staff and care home residents. In addition, essential workers can apply for priority testing through the Government website and a small amount of testing kits have been supplied to each local school. We are not aiming to replace this system. As anyone who reads the paper or listens to the TV knows, this system is having well publicised capacity problems. What we are doing is purchasing additional spare capacity to deploy in an emergency situation, such as an outbreak, as directed by our Public Health Consultant, for hopefully what would be a short period of time until the national system recovers. It would be wrong of me to rule specific groups in or out of this, as we do not know what those situations will be. This situation is so fluid and fast moving. I would love to be able to tell you where we will be in two weeks' time but we

cannot. So therefore these tests will be managed in situations in Wokingham if we cannot secure enough capacity via the national route first. If there were residents outside of Wokingham that could not get tested and it was critical that they did for the management and health for the people of Wokingham then yes, we would consider it.

What I would say at the moment is that the rate of Covid in Wokingham, the rate per thousand, is around a third of the UK national average. Now the central Government provision, whilst it is limited, is obviously being directed to areas of higher risk, so at the moment basically, if there was an outbreak in an area of higher risk, it is more likely that the Government system is going to be stronger there than it currently is in Wokingham; which is currently a very low risk area. We obviously hope it stays that way.

Supplementary Question:

It is much appreciated that WBC are trying to chart a path through the chaos created by the confusing messages and ineffective action from central Government. I understand that the initial tranche is going to be 500 tests. This does not seem to me to be a very high number. For example, I am a volunteer at the RBH and I live in Wokingham. Would I be eligible for one of these tests should I need one? Or a refuse collector? Looking wider, what roles are you defining as key workers?

Supplementary Answer:

The figure of 500 and the figure of 1,000 from the original commitment was done following quite a bit of study into what we thought consumption would be or could be. But, as I have already said basically, it is very difficult to anticipate the situation, which is fluid and ever changing. We will continue to review going forward where we are and what is going on. All the potential tests, should Executive approve, that we are looking to move forward with, have got a 12 month shelf life so there is plenty of time to get through them, and we hope obviously that we will get near to that level.

In terms of your specific question as to who would be eligible and who would not, what I would say to that at the moment is that is impossible for me to give a strict definition on that right now because the situation is every changing. The judgement would be made basically on:

- a) Can the national system cope? Obviously, if it can cope and an appropriate response is being provided, then none of this applies.
- b) If it cannot cope, what would any steps that we take for that situation to lower the risk of an outbreak spreading, and control it basically in Wokingham.

Obviously, that is going to depend on the scenario at the time. Now we can all make educated guesses about how we think this is going to play out over the next few months and where the greatest elements of risk are, but no disrespect intended they are educated guesses. We have set up a system in the Council where each situation would be judged by the Public Health Consultant, the Director of Adult Services, senior leadership for the Council, with me and the Leader obviously having oversight of it. So I cannot give you specific criteria today but I hope you understand the reasons why.

31. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Chairman invited Members to submit questions to the appropriate Members

31.1 Lindsay Ferris asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

What criteria/protocol is going to be used to decide who receives a WBC funded test, particularly if there are a number of people/areas who may need such a test?

Answer

The purchase of tests for WBC is being proposed within the context of significant capacity problems within the national Test and Trace system. WBC tests will be reserved for emergency situations, for example, where there is a significant outbreak and the national testing cannot be rapidly deployed or where a lack of national testing poses a risk to the capacity of local authority services; which we all know are vital to deal with some of the aged and vulnerable in the community, etc. People who really need our support.

The decision about when to use WBC testing will be made by WBC Public Health Lead Ingrid Slade and Director of Adult Social Care Matt Pope, in consultation with WBC senior management team and the Lead Member for Wellbeing and Adult Services, which is obviously me, and obviously the Leader. I think in terms of criteria, for the reasons I have just said to Mike Smith it is hard for me to give you anything. I can make an educated guess of where we will be in two weeks, four weeks, but I have no way of knowing that. All the evidence from part 1 of Covid taught us, basically, that what we expected to happen did not happen, and a lot of things we did not expect, did happen. I think the key here is just to keep watching, talking, meeting regularly and planning as we go. I am more than happy to keep you, your Group and the Independents informed of any significant changes going forwards.

Supplementary Question

When will these be available?

Supplementary Answer

We should Executive approve tonight, what we did at the end of last week is to reserve some capacity because we had to, to secure an early date. Obviously if we had left it a week, I think two days after we had enquired, strangely enough the NHS were on the phone to this company, so I will leave that to you as to what you may think of that. We were very anxious that we did not wait a week or two and end up going back a month on delivery date.

The answer to your question is, we are hopeful that if Executive approve tonight, they will be available from very early October.

31.2 Andy Croy had asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question but in his absence the following answer was provided I:

Question

The initial lockdown saw large numbers of people finally recognised as keyworkers.

While NHS and caring staff were clearly always in this category, the lockdown made us realise that shop workers, refuse collection, postal workers and many others were also key workers. The paper is not clear on exactly which key workers (and which schools - maintained schools, fee paying private schools?) will be eligible for testing.

Can the Executive Member outline the range of 'other key workers' and schools for who it is anticipated testing will be made available?

Answer

The Government national testing system scheme is available to all who need it. This includes anyone who develops symptoms of Covid-19 and also includes targeted asymptomatic testing of NHS and social care staff and care home residents. In addition, essential workers can apply for priority testing through the Government website. As part of this all schools have a small supply of kits already. We are not replacing this system but we know that that system is having well publicised problems. What we are hoping to purchase is additional spare capacity to deploy in emergency situations, such as an outbreak, as directed by our Public Health Consultant for a hopefully short period of time until the national system recovers. It would be wrong to rule specific groups in or out of that at this stage, as we just cannot anticipate what those potential situations will be.

32. COVID-19 TESTING

The Executive considered a report relating to a proposal to purchase a Covid-19 swab test service for emergency provision.

The Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services outlined the proposal which was to purchase an amount of Covid testing kits to provide the ability to test educational key workers, where there was a risk to schools capacity, and other key workers should they be unable to access testing through the NHS track and trace system. Based on initial data provided by schools, and considering the possible size of local outbreaks, it was estimated that around 500 tests, with the capacity to increase to 1,000 tests at a future point if necessary, were required.

Councillor Margetts advised that the selected supplier would be able to deliver the required number of test kits, which had a shelf life of 12 months, at a lead time of a week. The tests once completed would be sent to the lab and would be turned around within 48 hours, seven days a week. All positive results would be notified to Public Health England; thereby linking into the track and trace system.

Councillor Kaiser commented that he believed that spending money on Covid tests was completely justified as the proposal would support those in care homes and in schools.

Councillor Haitham Taylor also provided her support to the scheme and particularly how important it was to access tests over the weekend. She cited a recent case of a small primary school who was unable to access enough tests or advice over a weekend which led to the school having to close because one teacher had tested positive for Covid-19. This had a huge impact on the local community and she would not want to see that happen within the Borough. By purchasing these tests it would mean that testing could be undertaken quickly and should be able to alleviate this happening.

Councillor Margetts provided an update on the situation in the Borough and stated that Wokingham currently had a low level of Covid with cases around a third of the national average with track and trace just under 90% which was encouraging. However account had to be taken of the fact that the national picture was getting worse and that further outbreaks were likely to occur. The Council was therefore planning for these eventualities to ensure that they were ready to deal with and mitigate such incidences as soon as

possible. It was noted that the Council would be shortly accepting responsibility for some track and trace functions.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the gaps in Covid testing provision in Wokingham Borough be noted;
- 2) a supplementary estimate of up to £120,000 be approved for the purchase of Covid swab test service for emergency provision;
- 3) this supplementary estimate will be drawn down in stages as tests are needed for essential workers or outbreak management;
- 4) the decisions relating to the draw down on this supplementary estimate be delegated to the Director for Adult Social Care and Health in consultation with the Lead Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services on the advice of the Public Health Consultant.