

SODC ward councillor's report

Shiplake – 10th January 2022

Covid-19

Covid cases have surged. We now have increasing impact from autumn/winter weather, Christmas gatherings and of course the new Omicron (B.1.1.529) variant. Omicron is known to be much more transmissible and has some extra capacity to somewhat evade past vaccinations (1st and 2nd) – especially as anti-body levels fall over time. However, early evidence suggests that the current booster vaccinations (3rd jab) really improve our defences.

The Omicron variant is now dominant and showing strong growth.

It is clear that the vaccinations and natural antibodies are reducing the hospitalisation rate and death rate of Omicron. However the surge of infections indicate that, even with a much lower hospitalisation rate, hospitalisations may match the national 34k peak seen last year on 22nd January 2021. This at a time when the NHS faces strong demand from the previous backlog of conditions and where flu may still potentially make more impact than it did last year. Happily deaths remain low and even with hospitalisations the severity of cases – particularly for those with antibodies – is less than seen previously. There are some concerns as to whether Christmas gatherings might cause infections to older people with more risks.

Further to “Plan B” the government have indicated some further grants to certain business sectors – like hospitality – who have suffered sharply from falls in demand and cancellations. Full details are awaited from Whitehall.

The government are loathe to impose further restrictions – apart from face masks in schools.

At 04/01/2022, Oxford City was at a weekly rate of 1,580 per 100k population. By comparison, Cherwell DC was 1,920, West Oxon DC at 1,595, **SODC at 1,633** and Vale of WH DC at 1,672. Reading BC (to 3rd January 2022) was at 1,623. These levels are huge; by way of comparison at 4th November SODC was at 363 and by the 3rd December was at 764 – now at 4th January at 1,633 !

The booster and vaccine programme continues – with particular focus on boosters and reaching out to those with vaccine hesitancy. Resources are desperately stretched but have achieved very high numbers. Boosters are available to all adults (18 or over and 16 or over if vulnerable). Walk-in centres are being offered and expanded with the aim of getting boosters to as many as possible. Second vaccine doses are now being offered to 12-15 year olds. Flu vaccines are also available – free for those over 50, those who are vulnerable or whose health job or care role implies a particular need.

The risks of co-infection or twin infection with both flu and Covid are still troubling virologists.

Whatever the rules may be, the advice must be to proceed with caution and to protect the more vulnerable.

Grants

The capital grants scheme closed for applications from voluntary and community sector organisations and town and parish councils on 17th December.

The Councillor grants scheme (round 2 of 2) has re-opened and will close around the end of January (actually early days of Feb).

For further information about the grants scheme and scoring criteria please take a look at the website southoxon.gov.uk/grants. The Community Enablement Team on communityenablement@southandvale.gov.uk will welcome enquiries for help and advice. This is expected to be a very competitive funding round.

Inspired Villages/Little Sparrows

SODC's application for a Judicial Review of the highly unconventional approach of the Inspector in the above case was refused, appealed and refused again. The courts now take the view that Appeal Inspectors can virtually do as they like with scant recourse even where bizarre, unconventional and apparently irrational approaches are taken. In my view this decision underlines the extent to which our national planning system is broken. The only positive being the change of Secretary of State and the promise of a review to improve things; we shall see.

Happy New Year to all. Keep safe!

Leigh Rawlins

District Councillor