

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

SCRUTINY RAPID REVIEW

4 MARCH 2021

MINUTES

Present: Cllr Janet Grace (Chair) Councillors Barrington, Anthony Boyle, Brame, Edna Finneran, Andrew Makinson, Lisa Preston and Paul Tweed

Also Present:

Apologies of absence were received from: Cllr Angela Coleman and Cllr Doreen Knight

1. Community Risk Management (Prevention) Rapid Review - Volunteers

Members were given a presentation updating the Authority on the utilisation of volunteers, to support the response to the pandemic.

Group Manager Mark Thomas introduced the following presentation – Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service’s Covid Community Actions.

Members were updated with the following timeline:

- Covid19 arrived on the planet in December 2019
- In January 2020, coaches from London carrying passengers from Wuhan were quarantined in Wirral (the start of the journey regarding Covid19 and the start of a huge multi agency response locally)
- March 2021 (6 weeks later) lockdown began and before Boris had even given this lockdown speech, clinical trials to find a vaccine against the Sars Covid 2 virus had begun across the globe
- April 23rd 2020 (4 weeks later) Dr Elisa Granato a Microbiologist was one of the first two people to trial the Oxford vaccine on her 32nd birthday on 23rd April 2020
- April 26th 2020 (3 days later) she is reported to have died on social media. These claims are untrue and reflective of anti vax principles – scare tactics.
- MFRS officers co-opted onto various working cells as part of the multi agency response under the Local Resilience Forum (LRF), this split mid year to include vaccination cell which initially was focussing on hope that the flu vaccine would be delivered against a backdrop of Covid
- Then in October 2020 the cell was given information that the plan would not be used for Flu but for Covid vaccines which were in the advanced stages. Information was released that Covid vaccines would be ready (at scale) for deployment from 2nd December 2020 and plans were drawn up to deploy. It is hard to believe the pace.
- Structures were agreed through the LRF on a place based delivery model for Cheshire and Merseyside ~ 9 places

- 8th December 2020 at 06:31 hours UK time, Grandmother Margaret Keenan was the first person in the world to be given the Pfizer Covid19 vaccine as part of a mass vaccination programme

Now MFRS started working... the protocol was changed in mid-January to allow non-medical professionals to be trained to deliver the vaccine. The first North West mass vaccination site would be in Manchester, followed closely by St Helens. Using our well established existing relationships with our health colleagues, it was asked what we could do.

MFRS asked the Nation Health Service (NHS) could they help. Conversations were then initially had with St Helens and Knowsley's Local Authorities who were the designated workforce leaders for the vaccination programme. They wanted vaccinators and admin staff, so to begin with 60 volunteers from MFRS were provided.

All MFRS staff were asked if they would like to help. Previously there had been 280 volunteers so a project team was put together to set up IT systems, establish priorities and make contact with the staff who had shown an interest. 120 staff offered to be vaccinators and 55 offered to be admin support staff. All staff (from every department of the service) stepped forward of their own accord as they all wanted to be a part of the solution to end the pandemic.

Members were advised that there were challenges along the way. Legal teams from MFRS, St Helens NHS and Knowsley NHS teamed up to work out liability and indemnity issues. Clearly there was a risk to MFRS staff administering injections without correct training, so a proper training regime was set up with NHS educators who had been reengaged to help the programme. Clinical negligence liability would fall under the NHS trust and the Authority would be indemnified, so there would be no risk to the Authority. There was a memorandum of understanding between MFRS and the trust. This information was shared with colleagues at Cheshire FRS who were making similar arrangements.

Training was given to staff by St John Ambulance initially, then NHS educators who had been redeployed from other frontline NHS duties and reengaged from retirement. Firefighters from Cheshire were also invited to Service Headquarters for joint training to help them deliver their own team of vaccinators. There was online training plus face to face training meaning 120 vaccinators were now able to draw up, handle and administer the Oxford Astra Zeneca vaccine.

Before staff were deployed they were provided with welfare support which consisted of a 20 page induction pack, 15 page guidance document, risk assessment document and most importantly telephone numbers of managers - to communicate with staff and help them feel secure.

Vaccinations then started at the mass vaccination site in St Helens, which is currently including the over 60s. Flow is steady at the moment after the busiest week the site had had last week. There is office space on site to share with NHS colleagues. The site is split into two levels currently – GP site on ground floor with mass vaccination site on first floor. The 2nd floor will open in April to handle second doses. The site currently only uses the Oxford Astra Zeneca vaccine which our staff are competent to deliver.

Members were informed that the site is an inspirational place to work. There are people there who had not left their homes for a year, coupled with NHS staff who have been working in some of the most awful conditions (covid) for the last year. The process for vaccination on site is firstly administration to book the person in, then doses (drawing up and administering jab).

Figures are received daily from the site and feedback from MFRS staff is too. There are good relationships with the operational clinical staff and the healthcare professionals who are looking after MFRS staff every day. MFRS staff have not been there long but feel really confident working in the team and feel very appreciated. The site has been identified as best practice nationally and is now used as a template for other mass vaccination sites.

During week commencing 22nd February 2021, 627.5 hours have been worked by MFRS staff, 3325 vaccinations have been administered by staff (taking the total to 4610 since 8th February 2021) and 120 vaccinators & 55 support staff have assisted in this.

MFRS staff have made the following comments:

- A lady asked to have her photo taken whilst having her vaccine as she wanted to show her granddaughter and tell her this would go down in the history books.
- The setup is very slick and professional; those individuals I have worked with have been amazing. Listening to some of the comments from the members of the public is heart-warming and makes our efforts so much more special.
- A man I vaccinated said it was his first time out the house in 12 months and I was making it possible for him to meet his granddaughter for the first time. He has only ever met her over face time and he cannot wait to hold her in his arms.
- A lady very emotional how we were all there to do this and couldn't believe the fire service were involved.
- It ran like clockwork and I have met some fantastic people, it has been an honour to help out.
- I am so proud to say I am part of this amazing team.

Tracey McLoughlin, a Matron at Allen Day Unit / Interventional Radiology Nursing / St Helens & Whiston Outpatient Departments / Mass Vaccination Service said:

“The fire service have become a much valued part of a multi-disciplined, integrated team. They have brought a new dynamic to the NHS family

which have provided much needed support for the vaccination program whilst remaining professional, friendly and kind throughout. Their contribution to the Mass Vaccination Service has been exemplary and very much appreciated”

Members were informed of Operation Eagle to assist with the South African variant of Covid19 that had recently been detected in Sefton. MFRS staff advised the public in the PR9 area of Merseyside about the variant and also delivered corona test kits to that community in freezing cold weather conditions. All people involved are the key to successful testing.

Members were then advised what will be happening next. MFRS will be supporting the second doses which start on Monday from Nightingale House in Whiston and in April at the Mass Vaccination Site. There will be more staff stepping forward daily to be trained as vaccinators and lots of things for staff to do to assist. MFRS will support the communications task as ‘vaccine hesitancy’ is addressed and will capture and evaluate data to report back to National Fire Chiefs Council. Practices will be shared to help others and MFRS will continue to contribute to bringing an end of the pandemic, helping our communities stay safe and alive.

Members thanked staff for an excellent presentation and asked if volunteers where Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checked. Members were informed that most of the workforce are DBS checked, the others are EDBS checked. A site risk assessment ensures no-one works alone with the public.

Members queried the impact the volunteers have on core workers at MFRS. Members were advised that staff are mainly deployed when not on duty, although some staff work during their rostered hours, which is a gift of time from the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) to the NHS. It was clarified that there is a team organising the volunteer staff and that if it was impacting on their duties they would not be released for a shift.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) Mottram then told Members that the last 12 months has been hard work and the whole team working to assist the NHS had done well to vaccinate over 5000 people in 3 weeks. Over half the workforce have volunteered selflessly, whilst still running an emergency service and not faulting the performance of it, which was extremely reassuring. He added that he couldn’t be more proud.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 9 September 2021