



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

26 November 2020

Dear Greg & Clive,

Thank you for your letters of 1 and 2 June about COVID-19 contact tracking and tracing. I am very sorry for the delay in replying.

In England, the NHS Test and Trace service is a close partnership between the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Public Health England (PHE), Local Authorities and the NHS itself. DHSC runs the COVID-19 testing programme, contact tracing is led by PHE (with complex cases handled by its local health protection teams and Local Authorities), NHS England manages the test results database, and NHS Digital manages the website for test booking.

The NHS employs registered health professionals as clinical contact tracers to work with people who have tested positive for COVID-19 to establish their recent contacts, providing specialist advice to those contacts where needed. NHS Test and Trace also uses call handling staff employed by contractors. Integral to NHS Test and Trace is the Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC), which provides authoritative information to local, regional and national decision makers to help them respond rapidly to outbreaks, and advises on new COVID-19 alert levels.

All 152 upper tier Local Authorities have created and shared their Local Outbreak Control Plans. We have committed up to £465 million of funding for English Local Authorities through the Local COVID-19 Alert Level system, on top of £300 million already allocated to English Local Authorities for test, trace and contain activity. We have been working closely with our local partners, to provide them with the resources and tools they need to take swift action to deal with any new local spikes in COVID-19 infections. Further work by the JBC means that latest positive-case data is now available to all upper tier Local Authorities alongside PHE reports on the situation at local level.

From the outset of this pandemic, we have combined a national framework and central Government resources with local expertise, and 174 Local Tracing Partnerships are already in operation, with more due online in the coming weeks.

Indeed, as you may be aware, Local Authorities also now have powers to close specific premises, shut public outdoor spaces, and cancel events. Where COVID-19 outbreaks affect multiple Local Authorities, we encourage them to work together in Local Resilience Forums. As set out in the 'Contain Framework', national decision-making takes place through our Local Action Committee command structure, details of which can be found on the GOV.UK website under 'A guide for local decision-makers'.

As our testing capacity increases, we are working closely together with regional Directors of Public Health and Local Authorities on how to deploy this most effectively, including tailored local solutions. This includes our new rapid testing capability. Our Winter Plan, which I announced on 23 November, includes a major community testing programme offering all Local Authorities in tier 3 areas in England a six-week surge of testing. More generally, we will be expanding rapid testing to a range of settings including NHS frontline staff and social care. We are already using testing to help schools and universities stay open, and testing will enable students to know they can go home safely for Christmas.

Thank you once again for your letter, and for your continued engagement as Chairmen of your respective Parliamentary Committees.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Boris Johnson', with a stylized, cursive script.

The Right Honourable Greg Clark MP
Mr Clive Betts MP