

SURREY LOCAL OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD – 20 NOVEMBER 2020

PROCEDURAL MATTERS – QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

1. Question submitted by Teresa Wood

Are the new lateral flow tests SARs CoV-2 specific, and if not are we not at risk of continuing to unnecessarily isolate large numbers of people and their contacts leading to gaps in the labour market, specifically in NHS front line workers?

RESPONSE:

The lateral flow test which is currently being used in the UK is the Innova SARS-CoV-2 Antigen Rapid Qualitative Test. Public Health England (PHE) performed an independent rapid evaluation of the Innova SARS-CoV-2 Antigen Rapid Qualitative Test, which was published on 8 November 2020. Overall, the specificity of this test was 99.68% with a false positive rate of 0.32%. Therefore, the risk of false positive results leading to unnecessary self-isolation is very low.

Details of the PHE evaluation can be found here:

https://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/media_wysiwyg/UK%20evaluation_PHE%20Porton%20Down%20%20University%20of%20Oxford_final.pdf

2. Question submitted by Candy Sampson

Would the Board/Local Authority have imposed heavier restrictions across the board in Surrey in November despite the discrepancies between this area and Northern areas of concern and does the authority agree with the principle of shutting/restricting things out of a sense of fairness for those already suffering under restrictions?

RESPONSE:

Decisions for any local and national restrictions are based on advice from SAGE, a team of expert scientists (comprised of virologists, clinicians and epidemiologists). Their advice is considered and directed by central government. Decision making is complex and takes into account a number of factors, including early warning clinical and epidemiological indicators.

At the local level, Surrey County Council has a dedicated team of public health doctors and specialists who monitor the data on a daily basis. The Public Health team work closely with system partners to ensure appropriate health protection measures are implemented effectively in Surrey.

Surrey County Council's strategic response to COVID-19 is outlined in the Local Outbreak Control (LOC) Plan. The plan includes Surrey's Escalation Framework which reflects the alert levels and three tier system which is determined by the government. The LOC Plan is reviewed and updated regularly, to align with changes in national guidance/policy. Once the national plans for alert levels post lockdown have been published, the Surrey plan will be adapted accordingly.

The latest LOC Plan can be found here:

https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/229370/20201019-Surrey-Local-Outbreak-Control-Plan-Test-and-Trace-v7.0-PUBLISHED.pdf

3. Question submitted by Stuart Robertson

Can the Board please advise, what is the cycle threshold for PCR testing in this area, and what steps have been taken to account for false positives, detection of dead virus, detection of other coronavirus RNA and contamination of samples?

RESPONSE:

Cycle threshold values cannot be directly compared between PCR assays of different types due to variations in the test process. Not all laboratories use the same assay, and some may use more than one. Cycle threshold values may also not be reported by some PCR platforms in use. For these reasons, information regarding cycle threshold values for PCR testing across the area are not available.

Further information regarding cycle thresholds in PCR testing can be found in this PHE paper published in October 2020:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/926410/Understanding_Cycle_Threshold_Ct_in_SARS-CoV-2_RT-PCR_.pdf

Management of the NHS Test & Trace system is being carried out on a national level, and we cannot comment on the quality assurance measures in place in individual laboratories. The PCR assays used for the UK's COVID-19 testing programme have been verified by PHE and show over 95% sensitivity and specificity under laboratory conditions. The potential impact of false positive and false negative rates can be found in this PHE paper published by PHE in June 2020:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/895843/S0519_Impact_of_false_positives_and_negatives.pdf

4. Question submitted by Thomas Walker

With news reports of redundancies and many high street shops sitting empty I am increasingly concerned about the longer term harm that may result from the lockdowns, as such could the Board speak to the economic impact the lockdowns have taken upon the local community, and how this will impact the provision of local services in the future? Will the Council be able to fund Adult Social Care for COVID vulnerable individuals under such harsh financial circumstances?

In the absence of other metrics I believe the unemployment benefit statistics and reductions in tax funds received through business rates compared to the equivalent period last year - calendar quarters 2 and 3, would seem fair measurements, to ascertain the sum of harm invoked.

RESPONSE:

Surrey's Community Impact Assessment (CIA) explores health, social and economic impacts of COVID-19 among communities across Surrey, communities' priorities for recovery, and what support these communities might need during the second wave of the pandemic.

Surrey's CIA can be found here: <https://www.surreyi.gov.uk/covid-impacts/>

The CIA is a key tool to enable system partners to plan services going forward taking into account the impact of COVID.

Surrey's Medium Term Financial Plan 2018-21 (MTFP) sets a detailed budget for funding of essential services including Adult Social Care. Surrey County Council now presents an annual comprehensive review of the Council's financial position. The current budget for 2019/20 was approved in February 2020 – details are available here:

<https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=121&MID=6656#AI24281>

Budget planning information is currently being reviewed and the overall impact of COVID-19 on the provision of services is yet to be determined.

5. Question submitted by Philip Walker

Based on positive test rates and hospitalisations, and current trends of these, what is the Board's best guess for transitioning out of national lockdown? Will it happen on the 2 December and if there is to be a resumption of the tier system what metrics will be used to decide which tier an area falls into, and what tier is Reigate and Banstead likely to be in?

RESPONSE:

Nationally, the government are yet to confirm what tier system will be used to transition out of lockdown. On 16 November 2020, Public Health England's Dr Susan Hopkins has indicated that the regional COVID tiers will need to be reviewed in advance of lockdown ending on 2 December. She has advised that the key to knowing if the four-week lockdown in England was working was if cases fall, and that PHE expect to know this in the next week. Dr Hopkins has also confirmed that tier one had very little effect and that the tier system may need to be strengthened in the future. As such, it is not yet possible to say what tier system will be introduced and at what geographical level locally, post lockdown.

Further information about the existing national restrictions can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-national-restrictions-from-5-november>

Details on the statement made by the Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on 16 November 2020 can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/health-and-social-care-secretarys-statement-on-coronavirus-covid-19-16-november-2020>

6. Question submitted by Duncan White

Has the Local Authority developed protocols with the NHS concerning both Care Homes and Nursing Homes that does not replicate the adverse impact that occurred earlier in 2020 with the early discharge of elderly people from the NHS: if so what alternatives have been identified because the Quality of Life Years in Homes has come under considerable duress as a consequence of the majority of NHS resources being used solely for Covid-19 patients, how can this disproportionate impact be ameliorated in the coming months if there are further outbreaks of the virus?

RESPONSE:

In line with national guidance Surrey County Council has worked in close partnership with the NHS to ensure effective measures are in place to minimise the impact of the ongoing

pandemic. This work has also involved working jointly with Surrey Care Association and a wide range of providers of care services across Surrey not just those providing residential and nursing care. Through dedicated support from our Public Health team and infection control nurses we have provided a range of advice and support to provider including:

- The use of PPE and extensive Infection Prevention and Control training
- Outbreak reporting, control and management
- Visiting protocols
- Providing a named clinical lead for each service
- Testing and use of nation test and trace systems

The Council working through the Local Resilience Forum has also distributed a significant amount of PPE at no cost to the sector and alongside this has distributed to the care sector around £35million in Infection Prevention and Control Grant funding to enable provider to put in place measure to ensure the safety of residents and staff.

We continue to work closely with our NHS partners to deliver the requirements of the Adult Social Care winter plan including safe discharge of people from hospital focusing on supporting people to return to their own homes with appropriate care and support wherever possible.