

Item No. 5	Classification: Open	Date: 12 January 2021	Meeting Name: Health & Social Care Scrutiny Commission
Report title:		Update on Southwark Council's Lateral Flow Testing Rollout, January 2021	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All Southwark wards and all population groups	
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to update the Health Scrutiny Committee in relation to the rollout of lateral flow testing across Southwark

RECOMMENDATION

The Health Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the update report on lateral flow testing.

CONTEXT

- Cases of COVID-19 in Southwark have risen significantly over the Christmas period. At the time of drafting, there had been 2,359 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Southwark in the week up to 24 December.
- Southwark's 7-day incidence rate is 740 per 100,000 (compared to London 808/100,000); up by 52% on a week earlier.
- Across London, all boroughs now have an incidence above 500 per 100,000, with four boroughs above 1,000 per 100,000. Havering continues to have the highest incidence, at 1,214 per 100,000.
- Overall 'symptomatic test' positivity is currently 15.5%; comparable to London at 17% although testing via our various existing community pathways remains notably higher, with some settings at 20%.

Case for LFT

- Nationally, we know that a sizeable proportion of people with COVID-19 will be asymptomatic hence the national push to introduce lateral flow testing (LFTs) for asymptomatic testing. LFTs may enable us to identify and isolate more asymptomatic people with COVID-19 who are at high likelihood of spreading virus, whilst simultaneously minimising disruption for those who test negative.

More information about LFTs is in Appendix 1.

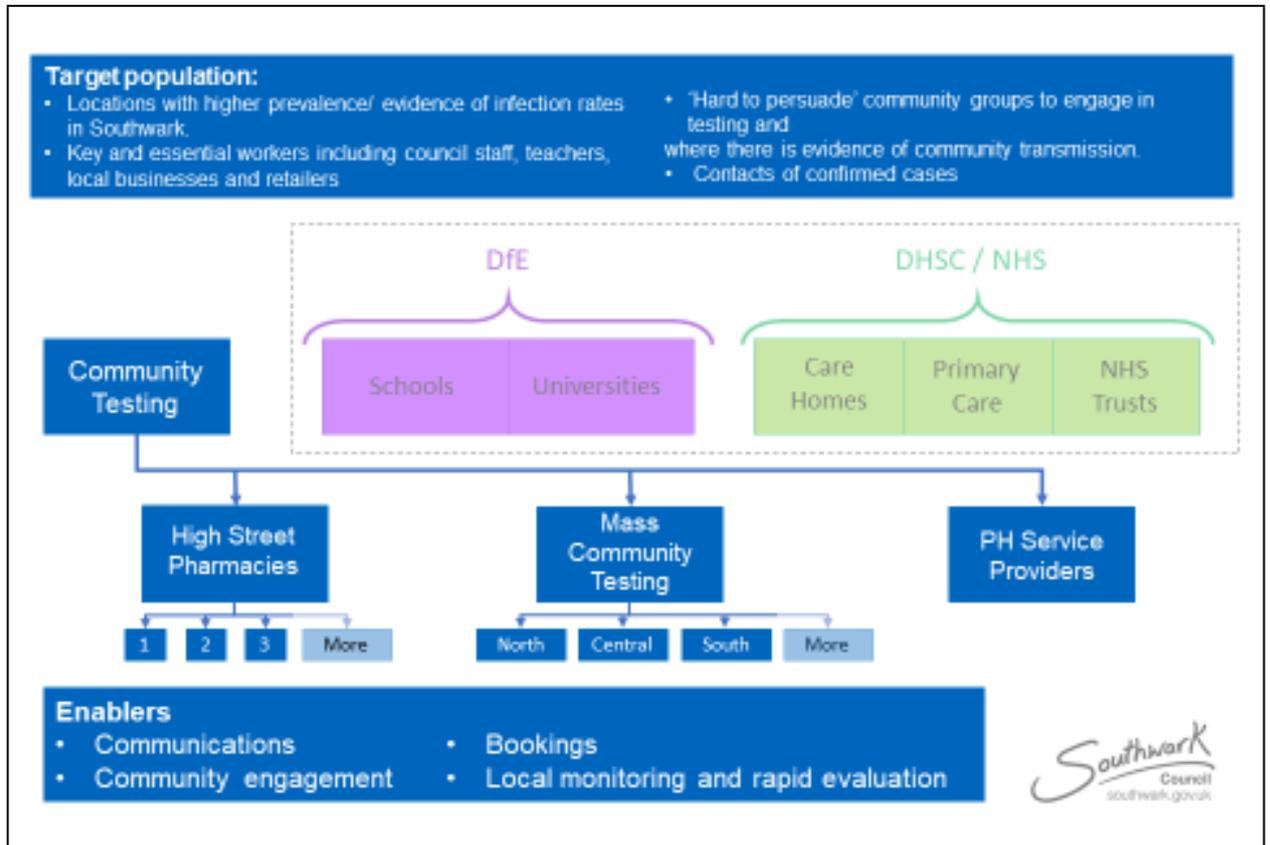
HOW ARE LFTS BEING USED IN SOUTHWARK?

- Testing remains a key part of Southwark's Outbreak Prevention and Control Plan. Lateral flow testing provides us with the opportunity to increase rapid case finding across Southwark through targeted and mass testing

programmes, in order to prevent and reduce community transmission. By proactively testing asymptomatic individuals, they also hold the potential to not only break chains of transmission, but also help to protect and enable our critical businesses, key workers and institutions to continue operating as effectively as possible.

The diagram below illustrates the different lateral flow testing pathways proposed for Southwark:

Lateral flow tests in Southwark: working model – As at 29/12/2020



Update on the different testing routes in Southwark

1) National LFT programmes - Lead: DHSC/DfE/NHS

- Specific settings have been getting access to LFTs through national rollouts– this currently includes universities, care homes (in progress) and schools (phased rollout from January 2021). DHSC is also conducting pilots of lateral flow testing in other settings, such as large-scale events, as well as with specific underrepresented groups. The results of these pilots are still pending, but findings will inform local approaches.
- **NHS staff:** The NHS has also rolled out regular asymptomatic testing of NHS staff. GSTT and Kings currently run the LFT home testing scheme for NHS staff.

- **Care homes:** Care home visiting is one of the recently announced national schemes and LFTs have been delivered to Tower Bridge and Queens Oak Care Homes directly by DHSC, with other homes due to receive their tests shortly. Although initially targeted to support visiting, DHSC recently announced the additional use of LFTs for staff and residents in certain circumstances to enhance testing capability and COVID-safe care. The Public Health team is continuing to facilitate knowledge exchange and learning between homes.
- **Schools** – Asymptomatic secondary school pupils and families are now eligible to test at the local MTU (Burgess Park) and LTS (Peckham Pulse). From the first week of January, schools are eligible to directly order LFTs for weekly testing to identify asymptomatic cases and daily testing (7 days) of contacts of confirmed cases (initially staff and Years 11 – 13 but to be extended to other year groups). There will be further guidance to support this for January but it is likely that schools will experience operational logistics and will require support and advice. Reasonable costs for additional workforce will be reimbursed by DHSC. Training, materials and support is provided directly by DHSC and DfE.
- Given recent government announcements and the implementation of the contingency framework for education settings, schools in Southwark will now be shifting back to online learning for the immediate future. There is still uncertainty on the timeline for schools re-opening and what this means for the rollout of LFTs in this setting. Once a return date is established, Southwark public health and the school nursing team will organise support sessions for schools.

2) Targeted DPH-led Local Testing (Southwark) *Lead: Southwark Council [Public Health]*

- In November, the Health Secretary announced that Directors of Public Health in Local Authorities in England would be offered local lateral flow testing capacity. Public Health Directors would have the discretion to use the tests as they see fit in their communities. Southwark successfully applied to participate in this scheme.
- Southwark took delivery of the first 10,000 tests at the end of November 2020. Public Health successfully supported London South Bank University and School of Osteopathy to start testing to enable students to return home for Christmas 2020 after they were unable to start the DfE University scheme until Jan 2021. The pre holiday testing ran on schedule for 2 weeks from 30 Nov 2020. LSBU is due to recommence testing in first week of January for the staggered return of students. The January programme is directly contracted with DHSC.
- Southwark is contributing to a pan-London targeted testing in Special Schools; clinical guidance is being developed to allow roll-out shortly.
- Southwark's Drug and Alcohol Service provider, CGL has established clinical guidelines and will start testing shortly.
- Other avenues including an 'NHS-style' home-testing programme for Southwark Council staff and LFT testing for businesses within Southwark's BID and construction sector have been explored but not progressed due to the

DHSC restriction on home testing for non NHS staff. As at 23.12.20, an emergency application of use has just been approved by MHRA. Further work will now re-commence on developing a programme for home testing.

3) Community Mass Testing *Lead: Southwark Council [cross Council corporate team]*

- Following the recent rise in cases, the Government announced a new community mass testing programme that will offer Local Authorities in tier 3 (and subsequently Tier 4) areas the opportunity to participate in a six week testing surge using LFTs. This will enable Local Authorities to offer tests to the general population as well as targeting high-risk workplaces and industries, hard-to-reach communities and schools in a coordinated effort to drive prevalence down.
- Southwark successfully submitted a £1.6m proposal to DHSC to run a targeted 6 week testing programme, with the aim of delivering approximately 117,000 tests in this period (with potential to scale up/extend). A council-wide programme board has been established with the aim to launch in January 2021. Testing will be delivered through a range of providers including community mass testing sites, local pharmacies and existing public health service providers.
- There is a proposal for the existing Peckham Pulse LTS site, which is currently providing PCR tests for symptomatic to be repurposed to also offer rapid LFTs for asymptomatic individuals. As at 30.12.20, DHSC has paused the proposed reconfiguration pending further technical advice. Separately, as at 30.12.20, there is a request to DHSC to step up an additional PCR facility at Bel Air (to be confirmed).
- A contractor to provide community mass testing is in the process of being appointed and the outcome of this will be confirmed verbally when the paper is presented at the next Health Scrutiny meeting.
- There are on-going negotiations with pharmacies to set up a network of high street pharmacies to provide LFTs, and a service specification is currently under development. The intention is to have a pilot service for mid January.
- Key enablers to ensure safe uptake of mass testing include putting in place appointment booking systems (to avoid social gathering in excessive queues) as well as ensuring the testing programme is supported by focused communications activities and ongoing community engagement (to ensure a broad uptake of residents amongst those more at risk of COVID-19). Local monitoring and evaluation is also a priority, informing longer-term lateral flow testing approaches across the borough.

CHALLENGES AND MITIGATIONS

- There are a number of different LFT workstreams in Southwark and robust project management structures, involving representatives from teams across the council, have been established to ensure alignment and oversight on testing work.

- Set-up costs for the mass testing sites including workforce, equipment etc are being factored into the budget. DHSC has provided some assurance in the form of a 'Comfort Letter' to underpin 'reasonable financial expenditure' for this initial outlay however, it is a risk being monitored.
- Sufficient uptake of lateral flow testing will rely on appropriate community engagement to address issues around testing hesitancy and ensure that any barriers to access are identified and addressed. A targeted outreach and engagement plan is under development through the project team, with input from key divisions including public health and communications to ensure good uptake from those most at risk of asymptomatic COVID-19 infection and/or risk of poor outcomes. All LFT workstreams will be regularly monitored to ensure that key populations are being reached and that the proposals do not discriminate against anyone. Provision of LFTs across multiple sites and providers – including high street pharmacies – is intended to improve the access and acceptability of testing for our local residents.
- The community mass testing initiative will run for 6 weeks, with no indication that the scheme will continue to be funded beyond this. A monitoring and rapid evaluation framework will be developed and the findings will inform next steps for asymptomatic community testing in Southwark.

RISKS

- There are risks to upscaling delivery of LFTs through the mass testing programme due to resource implication, both financial and workforce. Where possible these will be proactively identified and mitigated through the cross-council project team to ensure we are able to recoup costs through the national scheme.
- Operational risks associated with the rollout of LFTs at scale include crowding and long queues at testing sites. Steps are being taken to mitigate these risks through the identification and implementation of appropriate booking systems, and ensuring that the appropriate workforce are in place to manage the sites.
- There is also a risk of LFT positives not being able to access PCR quickly given rapidly rising case rates. We will work closely with local testing sites and counterparts at National NHS Test and Trace to ensure this risk is managed.
- There is also a risk that LFTs will be 'misused' by some individuals to 'test to enable'. There has to be clear messaging that relevant national and local guidance on tier, social distancing, restrictions etc must be followed and that LFTs are not a license ignore guidance.

NEXT STEPS

- Following a Council COBRA meeting, the Council is adopting a corporate cross council approach to supporting this programme of work. A project team has been established and met for the first time on 21st December, and work is now underway. We are currently receiving quotes from potential providers, with a deadline of 1.1.2021.

- The Public Health team are working to develop the pharmacy testing offer, including establishing the service specification and inviting expressions of interest.

Appendix 1 – WHAT ARE LATERAL FLOW TESTS?

Lateral Flow Tests (LFTs) are a simple-to-use point of care solution for rapid COVID-19 testing. They utilise the same swab test as PCR testing but offer rapid turnaround time (20-30 mins) without the need for laboratory processing. They involve (self) swabbing of throat and nose and application of a reagent and then 'reading' the results off a strip device. The swabs are self-administered and the application of reagent and 'reading' can be done, with training, by non-clinical staff.

Confirmatory testing for positives is currently required for LFTs and this must be performed rapidly to quickly release false positives from self-isolation. The confirmatory test is done using a PCR test.

Regional testing pilots in Liverpool (over 100,000 people tested at asymptomatic test sites) and Merthyr Tydfil have trialled offering rapid tests to a wider population and Government have indicated that are making a contribution to a fall in positive cases alongside other measures.