

Briefing on Test and Trace Southwark (TTS)
Update on development progress

Last updated 15 September 2020

CONTEXT

Contact tracing is an established and effective means of reducing transmission in outbreaks of communicable disease. The NHS Test and Trace system incorporates a call-centre driven model of centrally-coordinated capacity with public health expertise provided by Public Health England. Performance of the call-centre element of NHS Test and Trace remains problematic.

Local authorities have been asked to express their interest in providing local implementations of NHS Test and Trace. Southwark is among four vanguard London local authorities looking to develop and deploy this capability imminently.

SCOPE OF PROGRAMME

Since late-August Southwark's Public Health team has been developing an operating model of local contact tracing that will handle the follow up of persons testing positive, but who are not reachable after 24 hours by NHS Test and Trace call-handlers.

There are three capabilities that Southwark will deploy initially:

1. Matching contact details using local data sets and systems – with agreements on data-sharing and lawful-use being investigated.
2. Telephoning cases using a local Southwark 020-7-X caller ID, which from experience elsewhere in the country has been substantially advantageous given the population's tendency to disregard 0300 numbers.
3. Door-knocking cases where all other attempts to contact the individual have failed.

While other councils are exploring means of embedding welfare support into the contact tracing offer, Southwark is electing to take a leaner and narrower scope in the early stages of delivery to ensure that the contact tracing is effective and efficient. However once the model is running additional tasks may be taken on.

The programme will be led and coordinated by Public Health providing consultant-supervised contact tracing.

WAY FORWARD

So far, 70 staff from across Public Health, Environmental Health and Housing have been loaded onto national training resources. Once this training is completed they will be given access to the national call handling and contact tracing systems.

There are three staffing pools:

1. Active duty – to be trained and operate on the rota.
2. High readiness – to be trained and ready to operate when volumes escalate.
3. Reserve – to have access to the materials and be ready to train should surge needs arise.

By the start of October we will have a multi-division model drawing routinely on environmental health and housing officers, with appropriate shared IT and telephony systems. By the start of November we will have a fully scalable operation ready to surge to escalating needs.

Standard operating procedures are currently being agreed so that case details can be safely and efficiently handled on a seven-day basis, with joint working between Public Health, Housing and Regulatory Services.

Additional capability to support non-English languages both via telephone and on the door-step is being developed

A new monthly joint team meeting for contact tracing staff is also in development – where updates and insights can be shared with a view to quality improvement. Additional internal and external communication work is also underway.

CURRENT SITUATION

The Southwark Public Health team, working with colleagues in Housing and Regulatory Services have successfully completed all LA-side compliance requirements to become eligible for contact tracing. While the intention had been to launch the service on 15 September 2020, technical delays caused by Public Health England's problems connecting Southwark Council with the information portal mean go-live is currently estimated to take place on Tuesday 22 September 2020.

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