

[motion tabled for Oxford City Council meeting on 30th November]

16a Improving coronavirus testing and tracing

Proposed by Cllr Upton, seconded by Cllr Simmons and supported by Cllr Gant

Cross party motion

Oxford City Council expresses concern that, so far into the COVID pandemic, the country still does not have an adequate testing and tracing system, putting the people of Oxford at increased risk of suffering from coronavirus.

Test and trace has been proven in countries with a properly functioning system to be a successful strategy to manage and contain COVID-19 outbreaks.

Numerous experts have repeated that, to be effective, testing and tracing needs to be managed and carried out at a local level. However, instead of funding local bodies – which have the expertise, experience and vital local connections – this Government has squandered billions of pounds of public money on private companies (though the system has still been misleadingly named ‘NHS’ Test & Trace). This poor performance has contributed to the failure to contain COVID outbreaks and, ultimately, to an increased loss of life. This lack of integration into normal local NHS services (which would allow GPs to contact positive cases with crucial and timely medical advice) could and probably will cost lives. This lack of integration with local authorities prevents the timely offering of financial and practical support.

In late recognition that its tracing performance could not improve without local participation, NHS Test and Trace have in recent months passed to local authorities the names of people with positive tests whom they failed to reach. In short, they are getting local authorities to clean up their mess.

This Council believes the only way to fully rectify the situation is for full control to be passed to local authorities, with the necessary funding to do the job properly, with national input providing any support necessary to ensure effective co-ordination.

We believe a local scheme will:

- Improve traceability
- Enable increased and targeted testing, including asymptomatic testing
- Be better integrated into existing Council COVID support services

- Be a more cost-effective solution
- Achieve greater community engagement
- Allow for the engagement of local volunteers

Pressure is building on the Government both to use local authorities more and to cease contracting out 'NHS' Test and Trace' to private companies.

This Council agrees to add its voice to those challenging the current, failed system by asking the Leader to:

- Call on our Director of Public Health and the leader of the County Council to support more local authority engagement in testing and tracing.
- Write to our MPs asking them for their support.