

# **BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN COUNCIL: TEST AND TRACE STRATEGY**

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## **ABOUT OUR STRATEGY**

Our Test and Trace strategy sets out how we will continue to test and trace individuals over the next two years. It outlines our plans and ambition to accommodate mass testing and tracing when needed as well as future proofing our systems as we learn to live alongside Covid-19.

There is still a lot to learn about the virus, spread and transmission and our testing and trace strategy will support this continued research.

It aligns with the NHS Test and Trace service and the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) Test and Trace Strategy. It sits under the emerging Blackburn with Darwen Covid Response Plan and links closely with our Local Outbreak Management Plan. This strategy is underpinned by implementation plans and operational procedures.

Our strategy is based around three priorities

- **Contain outbreaks through testing and use of data**
- **Accessible local testing**
- **Functioning local trace system**

## **EARLY RESTRICTIONS**

As lock-down restrictions were eased across the Country, measures remained in place in Blackburn with Darwen to control the spread of the virus. This included some businesses remaining closed and social contact between households restricted.

With support from the Government and Local Resilience Forum (LRF), we increased our testing capacity across the Borough by introducing Mobile Testing Units (MTUs), Local Testing Sites (LTSs) and targeted community testing. Our message to residents was clear – get tested so we can identify cases and contain the virus.

On 8<sup>th</sup> September 2020, our restrictions on business closures in all parts of the Borough were lifted and aligned to the national guidance.

Throughout this period the Council, partners, businesses and residents have demonstrated flexibility and resilience to adapt to local changes and interventions. The Council recognise that this approach will continue over the coming years.

## OUR PRIORITIES

### PRIORITY ONE: CONTAIN OUTBREAKS THROUGH TESTING AND USE OF DATA

**WHY?** Early introduction of mass testing will lead to quick identification of cases and immediate isolation to prevent the spread of the virus. The more people we test, the better our understanding of where the virus is in the Borough. We can use our local data and knowledge to identify spikes in cases in particular areas.

**HOW?** Working with Public Health England (PHE) and partners, we will collate timely and comprehensive data to monitor positive cases and identify common positive test areas.

We will use this data to identify hotspots of transmission, eg certain businesses, premises or communities and introduce support measures to reduce transmission. Infection control in some settings may be complex and difficult; we can use the data to determine if some areas need particular support and intervention.

We can use the data to monitor the spread of the virus across the community and, when the time is right, step back testing to align with the national guidance of getting a test if you have symptoms.

This approach will help to protect the local economy, minimise short-term lockdown measures enabling people to return to work and education.

Seasonal variations may affect our understanding of where outbreaks of Covid-19 occur, as symptoms from illnesses such as flu and hay fever can be similar to Covid-19. Residents could appear symptomatic but not get tested as they attribute it to other seasonal illnesses.

If a vaccine is developed and a vaccination programmed rolled out, we will continue testing and using data to manage outbreaks.

### PRIORITY TWO: ACCESSIBLE LOCAL TESTING

**WHY?** Everybody who needs a viral detection test should have easy access to get a test as quickly and conveniently as possible. This will help to contain the spread of the virus and protect the local economy.

**HOW?** Our permanent testing site is at Royal Blackburn Hospital and, we can introduce other testing sites, both walk-in and mobile as needed to support mass testing.

In July 2020, to manage the increase in cases we encouraged all of our residents to be tested. Particularly those young people (under 30s) as they are more likely to be asymptomatic.

We make sure our mobile testing sites are easily accessible with clear signposting and information on how and where to get a test. Our sites are accessible by car or have walk-in facilities.

In September 2020, we launched our hyper-local community testing targeted in the eight Wards under additional local restrictions. The government provided home test kits and our community testing teams knocked on doors of homes in some areas of Blackburn with the highest rates of Coronavirus. Home test kits were provided, or residents were encouraged to go to the testing centres.

Our approach to testing will remain flexible so that we can enhance capacity and undertake targeted testing when needed. We want to support our communities and key workers and keep important community services open, for example schools.

Covid-19 testing for our residents is available through home testing kits; regional testing sites; local testing sites; mobile testing sites; and targeted testing for high-risk communities and essential workers.

We recognise that for some, accessing testing and support in self-isolating will be difficult. Working with our partners, we will ensure support mechanisms are in place for all our residents. We will ensure that all individuals who are transferred into vulnerable settings such as care homes are tested for Covid-19 prior to transfer, whether symptomatic or asymptomatic.

Antibody testing is currently available for NHS staff, some care workers and some patients.

Our approach to testing aligns to the national guidance, which gives local councils the flexibility to ask all residents to take a test, even if they are asymptomatic.

### **PRIORITY THREE: A FUNCTIONING LOCAL TRACE SYSTEM**

**WHY?** Everyone who has been in contact with a person who is infected with the virus, is at higher risk of becoming infected themselves, and of potentially infecting others. A functioning local tracing system will help to contain the virus.

#### **HOW?**

In July 2020, the Council introduced its own enhanced tracing system to make faster contact with residents who had come into contact with positive cases. This system has received national praise from Government and our peers.

If the NHS Test and Trace team have been unable to contact residents who test positive within 48 hours, our dedicated team will attempt direct contact through several channels, including text messages/calls from a local '01254' number. If residents cannot be contacted by telephone, a Blackburn with Darwen public protection officer and/or another member of our partner's services will attend the home to speak to the resident in person.

The Council will ask for the information below which will remain confidential.

- Name, date of birth, postcode
- If other people live in the household
- Any places the resident has been recently, such as a workplace or school
- Names and contact details of any people the resident has been in close contact within the 48 before symptoms started or the positive test result.

Anyone who has been in close contact with the resident will be told to stay at home (self-isolate) for 14 days. We will align to national guidance and regulations for instructions to those self-isolating.

We have continued our support arrangements, through our BwD Help Hub, across the Borough for those residents who are self-isolating if needed.

We rely on the support of our businesses for effective tracing and will continue to provide advice and guidance on recording contact details and using the NHS Covid-19 app and QR code. Many businesses that take bookings already had systems for recording their customers and visitors – including restaurants, hotels, and hair salons.

All relevant establishments across the Borough assist us by keeping a temporary record of their customers, visitors and staff shift patterns for 21 days. This should be done, in a way that is manageable for their business, and establishments should assist NHS Test and Trace with requests for that data if needed.

## **MEASURING SUCCESS AND MANAGING RISK**

The council reports on its performance twice per year – July and December. Our existing performance framework is flexible to enable new KPIs to be included as needed. Performance measures for Test and Trace will continually develop as we adapt our systems to match local need.

Whilst the Council is managing the local test and trace system, many external factors will depend on its success. This includes testing capacity with the NHS, number of tests available, public attending testing sites, positive cases providing correct contact details, people self-isolating when told to do so.

There are several associated risks that may affect our performance, which we will continue to monitor. These include:

- Staff capacity
- Long-term funding
- Seasonal illnesses (eg flu)
- Testing capability within the NHS
- Availability of tests
- Other emergencies (eg adverse weather conditions; cyber-attacks)

## **COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH**

We have several communications channels that are open to the public including social media, website and a dedicated covid-19 managed mailbox.

**Public:** Our residents who test positive will be contacted through the NHS in the first instance, or through the local tracing system. We are keeping the public informed on local test and trace activity through our website, social media channels, ad-vans, targeted mail, digital advertising and through our local media. We also encourage our residents to contact the Council or their elected member if they have further concerns or queries.

**Business:** Our businesses can access support information on our website as well as speaking with our public protection and environmental health teams for support on holding contact information.

**Elected Members:** Our elected members receive regular updates from the senior management team.

**Partners:** We are in regular dialogue with our partners and the Government.

## OUR PARTNERS

For the test and trace system to be effective we will work closely with all our key stakeholders.

These are:

- Residents
- Businesses
- Elected members
- Voluntary, community and faith organisations
- Local Resilience Forum
- NHS
- PHE
- Government

## EVOLVING AND RESPONDING TO CHANGE

Our test and trace strategy is in place for the foreseeable future. We recognise that our strategy must remain flexible and adaptable to change as we learn more about Covid-19. If a vaccine is developed, testing and tracing will continue until the Government decide otherwise.

The Council is well placed to respond to the demands of the Government or the LRF, including mass testing; localised tracing as well as any future improvements to testing arrangements such as 20 minute-test results.

## GOVERNANCE

We will ensure the test and trace system receives effective oversight and scrutiny via the Council's outbreak management system, including local Incident Management Hub and Health Protection Board, and in collaboration with relevant LRF Cells for testing and tracing.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

For more information about how the council is responding to Covid-19, please check our website – [www.blackburn.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.blackburn.gov.uk/coronavirus)

You can read about our Outbreak Management Plan – <https://www.blackburn.gov.uk/coronavirus/local-outbreak-management-plan>

The national Test and Trace response is available – <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/>