

## **Campaigners and Councillor call on County leaders to request transfer of testing and tracing to our local authorities and the NHS, with the necessary funding.**

***Address by Janet Philips on behalf of Oxon Keep Our NHS Public to Oxfordshire County Council on local and public testing and tracing, 8 December 2020, and question from Cllr Pressel on the same***

Thank you, and good morning!

I hope you've all had a chance to read the question from Councillor Susanna Pressel, which we urge you to support.

I've been campaigning in Oxfordshire, together with Liz Peretz and Isabel Tucker, for local public testing and tracing, on behalf of We Own It and Keep Our NHS Public. What I'm going to focus on today is: first,

- Effectiveness, and, second,
- Value for Money

*Effectiveness.* The current national and largely privately-run scheme 'NHS' Test and Trace is still not reaching the 80% it needs to in order to be effective, and most people who need to self-isolate are not compliant; one study showed that only 11% of those needing to quarantine or self-isolate were doing so. Effective testing and tracing involves some door-knocking, and some people – for example, with learning difficulties or who don't speak English well – need special help to self-isolate. Involvement of GPs is also important. All of this can only be done at a community level.

Our view is that a local and publicly-run system – from finding to testing, to tracing, and then encouraging isolation, and providing necessary support for that – is the way to get on top of the virus. We need this Council's excellent Public Health Department to take control back from the national operation.

What is the evidence? Look at Australia, which has had a total of 908 deaths, neighbouring New Zealand with only 25, and South Korea with 532 deaths and no lockdowns at all. They have all had robust testing and tracing from the outset and, crucially, at local level. There is also local real-time evidence from here: AnsaF, working in harmony in the last six weeks with district councils, the NHS and the universities in the small tracing add-on to the national system, has demonstrated impressively what can be done locally.

And now to *Value for Money*.

So far, the national 'NHS' Test and Trace has received £22 billion pounds. £22 billion! That is more than the budgets for the police and the fire services put together; and no one could claim the performance has matched that amount of money. It would have cost many times less to fund our local authorities to do the work, and do it better. What's more, our local authorities already had the expertise, the experience and the qualified people for it.

We understand the frustration that people, particularly in tier 3 areas, feel about continuing restrictions, which harm the economy. It is not, however, a question of health or the economy. The way back to normality, where we can come out of our homes and go back into the shops, pubs, restaurants and theatres, is to get the virus under control. The only way that can be done is for resources to be handed over from the central

organisation to local hands. That would also be cheaper than putting more money into 'NHS' Test and Trace. Most importantly, it would save more lives, save more jobs, and reduce further damage to the economy.

So, we call on you to give your full support to Councillor Pressel's request for the Leader of the Council urgently to contact the DHSC and our MPs, to ask them to transfer the work of testing and tracing to our local authorities and the NHS, with the necessary funding.

Thank you.

### ***Councillor Susannah Pressel's question***

'There is huge pressure from residents in my division and many other people across the country to improve the test and trace system. This is widely agreed to be essential if we are to reduce deaths and save our economy. In November Oxfordshire was at last allowed to start tracing some of the people that the national scheme has been unable to find. Congratulations to our public health officers at the County Council, the districts and the City, who have hit the ground running, as they track and trace the people that Serco and Deloitte, etc, have failed to locate. When they find them, they also offer support to help them cope with their quarantine.

'Directors of Public Health and countless other experts have recognised for a long time that the national Serco test, trace, isolate and support system has not been working well enough. It is not improving. The local scheme, on the other hand, is working superbly. Please will the Leader contact the DHSC and our MPs urgently to ask them to transfer much more of this work – or all of it -- to local authorities and the NHS, together with part – or all -- of the £22 billion that has so far been allocated to it.'

**Contact:** Liz Peretz 07791 738 577, Bill MacKeith 01865 558145