
SPECIAL MOTION NO. 6 – LEARNING FROM THE FAILURES OF THE £37BN NATIONAL TEST AND TRACE SYSTEM

Standing in the names of:

- (i) Councillor Ben Coleman
- (ii) Councillor Patricia Quigley

This Council recalls the motion passed by Full Council on 21 October 2020, which:

- Urged the government to recognise that the national Test and Trace (T&T) system it had created had failed; and
- Called on the government to turn T&T into a locally led service, putting local authorities and local public health officials in the driving seat in the battle against coronavirus, with appropriate delegated powers and funding.

This Council notes a subsequent report by the Public Accounts Committee on 10 March 2021 which said:

- There was “no clear evidence” that T&T had cut Covid rates despite its huge cost of £37bn over two years;
- The system had ignored important stakeholders and not exploited the existing networks of local authorities and NHS primary-care bodies; and
- Although T&T’s rationale had been to help avoid a second national lockdown, since its creation there had been two further lockdowns.

This Council notes a recent report by the National Audit Office (NAO) on 25 June which criticises T&T for:

- Failing recently to reach nearly 100,000 people who had tested positive for Covid, and by extension all their contacts who could infect others;
- Losing track of nearly 600 million Covid tests (only 14% of the 691m tests distributed have been registered);
- Lacking targets for increasing the uptake of lateral flow testing or compliance with self-isolation;
- Failing to share data effectively with local public health directors (hindering efforts to tackle outbreaks);
- Continuing to rely on expensive private consultants (45% of head office staff); and
- Risking value for money by giving out contracts without competition.

This Council:

- Welcomes the NAO's finding that local authority-run testing and tracing schemes have increased, including a Local Zero pilot whereby councils undertake all contact tracing in their area;
- Is proud that Hammersmith & Fulham is one of the first Local Zero Councils – a recognition of our effectiveness in contacting those residents failed by the central system and in being the first local authority to make welfare calls to residents with Covid, to support self-isolation, identify sources of infection and target activity; and
- Is concerned by the NAO's finding that councils still have numerous problems with T&T, including difficulties with accessing data for mass testing, a lack of national clarity about local roles and responsibilities, multiple uncoordinated local pilots and funding streams, and new testing approaches planned without local authorities (e.g. for schools and international travellers).

This Council notes that:

- Former Health Secretary Matt Hancock recruited Baroness Dido Harding to set up and run T&T, and she remained in charge until Mr Hancock merged T&T and Public Health England into the new National Institute for Health Protection on 1 April 2021; and
- In mid-June 2021, Baroness Harding applied to be the new Chief Executive of NHS England after Sir Simon Stevens stood down in July.

This Council:

- Calls on the government to take full account of and implement all the findings of the NAO's highly critical report on T&T, including taking all necessary steps to increase public compliance with testing and self-isolation.