

**TOM PURSGLOVE MP**  
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

21<sup>st</sup> May 2021

*Dear Conifer,*

**RE: CORONAVIRUS - TEST & TRACE**

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of the Test & Trace system; your comments upon which I have read with great interest.

NHS Test & Trace is essential in our fight against COVID-19 and regular testing is a vital tool to stop transmission as we cautiously ease restrictions. I am extremely proud of the fact that, after building a testing system from scratch, we have carried out more than 110 million Coronavirus tests and have increased PCR test capacity to 800,000 per day. This is more than any other comparable European country, with the UK having the largest testing capacity in Europe.

Protecting communities and saving lives is the Government's first priority and every pound spent on Test & Trace is contributing towards efforts to keep people safe. I firmly support the £22 billion spent during 2020-21 to support this programme, with a further £15 billion budgeted for 2021-22; funding which provides vital support for this crucial service. 80 percent of NHS Test & Trace's budget is spent on buying and carrying out COVID-19 tests, with the remainder spent on contact tracing and other areas of the programme. It is also worth highlighting that while the NHS app is playing a key role, it is only one part of the wider NHS Test & Trace system. The National Audit Office (NAO) estimated that as of October 2020 the spend on the app was around £43 million.

The Government is now providing regular rapid testing for NHS and care home staff, thousands of businesses where employees cannot work from home, and for teachers and secondary school children and their parents. Regular rapid testing identifies new cases of the virus we would not otherwise find, preventing the spread of the disease and saving lives.

NHS Test & Trace is successfully reaching over 90 percent of the contacts of positive cases - with 98 percent being contacted within twenty-four hours, and the contact tracing service has already reached more than 9.1 million cases and contacts, making a real impact in breaking chains of transmission.

Testing and NHS Test & Trace services are being provided through the NHS, and while it is true that providers like Serco and Sitel are working with the public sector to deliver these services, I am confident that these providers will be held to the highest standards to ensure that the best service possible is delivered. It is a testament to the ingenuity of British businesses that they have been able to adapt existing resources in a time of great need for our country, and I am extremely grateful to all those organisations that have offered their services at this time.

I absolutely agree that it is vital data is shared with local authorities as quickly as possible, particularly as we move forward with the easing of restrictions in the Government's 'road map' and as we work to prevent the spread of new variants. The Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) has outlined that granular data is being made available to specialist teams through local dashboards, and that this service has been expanded to provide more data for local areas.





I understand that all 314 local authorities have joined forces with NHS Test & Trace to provide an enhanced contact tracing service, enabling NHS Test & Trace to go further in supporting people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and tracing their recent contacts. Together, they are successfully reaching 88.9 percent of people who've tested positive for Coronavirus and 88.8 percent of their close contacts.


A series of pilot schemes, known as 'Local-0', are ongoing and I know that the DHSC is monitoring these closely. The initiative supports local authorities to contact positive cases faster by bringing them in right from the start of the tracing journey, at the same time the case is entered into the national NHS Test & Trace system. I look forward to learning more about the outcome of these pilots and I shall continue my discussions with my ministerial colleagues to learn more about their plans to expand the programme, including to here in Northamptonshire. Given all this, I do see a continuing and ongoing value in the national Test & Trace system which has a built-in resilience that councils may be unable to replicate if cases were to increase.

Like many, I was delighted when the NHS Test & Trace app was launched across England and Wales in September last year. This is a significant achievement, and I congratulate all those involved in this process. I would encourage everyone to download the app if they haven't already, and if they have a smartphone, and to scan NHS Test & Trace QR codes which are displayed in businesses and venues across the country, making it much easier for you to be notified in the event of an outbreak.

I was encouraged to learn that the NHS COVID-19 app was the second most downloaded free iPhone app on its App Store in the UK last year and has been downloaded more than 20.9 million times. I understand that 87 percent of iOS smartphone users and 93 percent of Android smartphone users in the UK can download and use the NHS app. While this app is continually evaluated and improved in response to feedback, it is important to remember that it is only one part of the wider NHS Test & Trace system.

More broadly, I agree that it is critically important that all resources available are being used to their fullest extent. While I understand that the system presently has adequate capacity, it cannot be understated how important this work is and I know resources are kept under constant review.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

*With best wishes,*  


**TOM PURSGLOVE MP  
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT  
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**