

London Borough of Bromley

PART 1 - PUBLIC

Briefing for Adults PDS

17 March 2021

RAPID TESTING PROGRAMME

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1. Summary

- 1.1 Bromley Council has delivered a thirteen-week Rapid COVID Testing Programme, which commenced 4 January to 31 March 2021. The purpose of this programme was to identify positive asymptomatic cases of COVID-19 and encourage them to self-isolate to reduce transmission of the virus. Given the ongoing nature of the pandemic an extension to the programme is likely however this is yet to be confirmed by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).
- 1.2 To-date (as at 23 February 2021) 16, 485 Rapid Covid Tests have been delivered from two test centres, one based in the Civic Centre Council Chamber and the second at the Kentwood Adult Education Centre Penge. 0.9% of all those tested were asymptomatic but positive.
- 1.3 The Rapid Testing Programme delivers Lateral Flow Test for asymptomatic people. This is a throat and nasal swab which is processed at the testing location (not a laboratory) and can provide results within 30 minutes.
- 1.4 Initial demand for tests exceeded expectations, capacity was quickly increased during the third week to ensure that all demand was met. All essential workers, council employees, contractors, partners, and those residents required to leave their homes were able to access tests. The service has provided reassurance for those required to leave their home whilst also reducing the spread of the infection where symptoms were not evident. New and emerging asymptomatic programmes within other settings including care homes and schools have been deployed during this period adding further asymptomatic testing capacity into the area.
- 1.5 Members may like to note that feedback about the efficiency of the Councils Rapid Testing service and professionalism of the operational staff has been excellent. The Programme team managing the service took an agile approach, responding to changes at a national level as well as flexibility adjusting capacity and processes as required locally to ensure the successful deployment of the programme.

2. The Briefing

- 2.1 The Government has put in place a national testing strategy for both symptomatic and asymptomatic testing. This includes
 - Pillar 1: Testing in a hospital setting for those with a medical need and critical key workers
 - Pillar 2: Symptomatic at test centres and through home testing kits (PCR Testing)

- Pillar 3: Antibody testing to help determine if people have immunity to coronavirus.
- Pillar 4: Surveillance testing to inform epidemiology
- Pillar 5: Asymptomatic testing at scale

2.2 On 13 November 2020 the DHSC wrote to all Local Authorities inviting them to express an interest to be part of a pilot Public Health Rapid **Targeted Testing Programme**. This programme would contribute to Pillar 5 of the national testing strategy. Bromley's expression of interest in being a pilot Targeted Testing borough was accepted. On 13 December 2020 National Government placed all London Borough's into Tier 4 and asked them to implement a 6-week Rapid **Community Testing Programme** regardless of their previous engagement in the Targeted Testing Programme. On 11 January 2021 DHSC formally combined the Community and Targeted Testing Programmes and announced an extension of the programme to continue to 31 March 2021 (13 weeks).

2.3 The Approach

2.4 While Local Authorities were given the flexibility to design their programmes to reflect local priorities they were also directed not duplicate or replicate existing and emerging national programmes. During the London Tier 4 and National lockdown period it also became necessary to make tests available to those people who were permitted to leave their home for essential reasons and those who were unable to access asymptomatic testing through other routes. This was particularly welcomed by those who were critical to supporting communities, responding to the pandemic and/or at higher risk of infection and transmission.

2.5 The objectives of Bromley's Rapid Testing Programme were

- i. to identify asymptomatic but potentially infectious individuals, helping to break the chain of transmission of COVID-19.
- ii. to protect front line public services and limit transmission whilst working face to face with members of the public.
- iii. to help with the management and containment of COVID-19 outbreaks reducing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- iv. to protect vulnerable people who are most at risk from COVID-19.

2.6 The Council has been responsible for setting up the rapid testing service, management oversight has included initial and ongoing implementation logistics, workforce training and mobilisation, infection control measures, health and safety risk management, clinical governance, and operational management.

2.7 Two centres were established in Bromley, the first based in the Civic Centre Council Chamber and the second at the Kentwood Adult Education Centre in Penge. The programme lead has shared learning with other providers who have since deployed their own testing services such as briefing at Care Homes and the Secondary Schools Head Teachers forums.

2.8 Daily operational performance reports have ensured that the right capacity was delivered to the right people at the right time. For example, early feedback relayed that social work staff were finding it difficult to book a test at the right time to meet their needs prior to visiting vulnerable residents. Testing capacity was increased to meet this demand, feedback from social workers welcome this accommodation.

2.9 During the programme we have delivered (as at 23 February 2021):

- 16,845 tests booked across the two centres during the first seven weeks.
- 0.9% cumulative positive rate, from 150 positives across the two centres.
- Of the resident Bromley population, seven in every ten bookings are for women, although the percentage male to female improved during the programme men in their 20's and 30's remained under-represented.

- Fewer persons of Black, Asian and mixed heritage booked tests disproportionate to the population base. Targeted communication improved this somewhat but remained low as experienced by other boroughs also.
- 2.10 A communications plan was deployed involving a mail out of invitations to targeted elements of the community this included (but did not excluding anyone that wished to book an appointment);
- all council staff employed by the council and those contracted by the council who were required to work with the public this includes for example social workers and enforcement officers.
 - all partner staff, including for example those working education settings, adult social care providers, housing providers, and the those working and volunteering in the voluntary sector.
 - All the above groups were encouraged to take a test twice a week for optimal identification.
- 2.11 More general interest was galvanized via press releases and social media for all residents living in the borough who were required to leave their home (those working for other boroughs or carers of those needing support for example). A deeper analysis of 'footfall' data led to targeted communication towards young men aged 20 to 40, it was apparent that they were disproportionality underutilising the service, we also contacted over 100 faith groups who were likely to be open meeting in congregation and just under 20 BAME communities groups to encourage take up, this was in addition to encouraging invitations to be shared via ward Councillors.
- 2.12 All those wishing to be tested were required to book a test online, this booking system worked effectively allowing the programme to deploy a measured footfall to ensure social distancing. A phone 'helpline' was deployed to ensure that those without internet access or other barriers could book tests as required, 500+ calls were taken in the first four weeks. Frequently asked questions were published on the Councils website and are regularly updated www.bromley.gov.uk/rapidtesting
- 2.13 Feedback of those utilising the testing centres has included.
- "May I say a big thank you to all involved at your rapid Covid testing at the Civic centre today. All were extremely polite and helpful making it very easy for me today to have the test. A credit to all involved"*
- "This has all the hallmarks of Council efficiency at its finest. Clear procedures delivered by very helpful staff observing strict safety rules. The instructions to be carried out were very precise and throughout it was most impressive. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to our colleagues who have take on these vital roles".*
- "I have just had a partnership meeting with the Jobcentre Plus based in Elmfield Road and they wanted to say how well organised the rapid test centre was when they have been for their tests."*
- "I just wanted to write and say what an amazing service this is. As a household of five aged between 6 and 68 with three keyworkers we have found being able to test regularly invaluable. I have used both the Civic Centre and Kentwood and the staff at both are amazing so friendly, reassuring and efficient. Thank you to all of them for providing this for us."*
- 2.12 Further national direction on the future of the programme is to be determined, testing is most likely to remain a key part of the governments strategy.