



Lord Bethell
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Date 24 December 2020

Dear colleagues,

Payments for Community Testing Funding

First and foremost, please accept my sincere thanks to you and your teams for the substantial work you have done in recent weeks to develop plans under the Community Testing Programme. Many of you have already started to ramp up asymptomatic testing in your areas, and many more will follow on in January. The Programme is an important addition to your toolkit in responding to COVID-19, and we are committed to helping you make the most of the opportunity it presents.

We know that the programme is moving at incredible pace and operating in a rapidly changing context as other testing offers come on stream. We understand that this creates uncertainty and raises questions that it is important you get rapid answer to. We are continuing to offer advice to local authorities throughout the Christmas period, so if you have any concerns please feel free to contact us through your NHS Regional Convenor or directly on CommunityTesting.CentralOps@dhsc.gov.uk.

There are three things that we know local areas have had specific questions about and I thought that it would be helpful to cover these off directly here.

The first is on the terms of our engagement with you – this has now been set out in the Collaborative Agreement which you should all have received. If you have any remaining questions about this, please let us know - mostly they will be simple to answer and resolve.

The second is specifically on the issue of liability. Having discussed the key concerns with a small number of local areas, we have now developed a letter of comfort which sets out how we propose to work with you to manage those liabilities. Again, that letter should now be with your teams and if you have any remaining concerns it would be helpful if you would let us know.

The third is around funding. The details of the funding model are set out in the Collaborative Agreement and will also be covered in the Section 31 letter that will set out the details of the grant you receive, however I thought it would be helpful to address some specific concerns that have been raised with us.

We understand that there may be instances where, due to events beyond your control, the number of people who attend testing sites in your area is lower than planned. Where this is the case, we will work with you to ensure that your legitimate costs will be covered and that you will not be left out of pocket. You will understand that some conditions need to apply to this reassurance, but I hope you will agree that these are reasonable. Essentially costs will be covered where:

- a) they have been incurred reasonably and with best endeavours to keep the costs as low as possible, up to the limit of £14 x number of tests planned (less the value of goods supplied by DHSC Commercial);
- b) There is evidence that they have been incurred by you in connection with the Community testing. You will need to maintain reliable, accessible and up to date accounting records with an adequate audit trail for all expenditure funded by grant monies; and
- c) you have not deliberately incurred liabilities for eligible expenditure before there was an operational need to do so.

I should add that we are also committed to working with you to review the case for continuation of Community Testing in your areas beyond the initial 6 weeks well before the end of that period, taking account of a range of factors including the effectiveness of the plan to date, ambition for the future, prevalence predictions, and VFM.

Finally, I wish you all a very pleasant holiday period.

Thank you again,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bethell', written in a cursive style.

Lord Bethell
PS(I)