



**North
Somerset**
COUNCIL



Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

15TH March 2021

Report of: The Directors of Public Health

Title: Bristol and South Gloucestershire Community Surge Testing

Ward: All

Officers Presenting Report:

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Recommendation

It is recommended that the Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee note this report

Summary

It is in the nature of viruses to adapt and change. Many changes are of no consequence, however some changes may result in greater harm or challenge. For this reason, Public Health England undertakes regular additional analysis on samples of all positive cases. Around 20% of all positive tests are routinely sampled.

As a result of routine sampling 11 cases of interest were identified in Bristol and South Gloucestershire between the middle of December to the middle of January. These cases were a combination of a known variant of concern 202012/01 (commonly known as the 'Kent' or 'UK' variant) with an additional change on the spike protein called E484K.

All of these cases were historic, in the sense that they were already in the Test and Trace system. Additional public health investigation was instigated utilising enhanced contact tracing methodologies; epidemiological mapping techniques; additional testing and further genomic sequencing.

On 5th February 2021 the local authorities of Bristol and South Gloucestershire were advised by Public Health England that wider population testing should be undertaken. The local incident management group undertaking the local investigation also identified that additional analysis should be undertaken on all positive results at this time.

This work was undertaken as part of a national programme called Operation Eagle which is focused on the identification and control of new variants of concern.

Context

Between 7th February and 15th February over 40,000 asymptomatic tests were undertaken and all positive results from all sources were sent for additional analysis.

Testing was progressed in three phases:

- 6 Mobile Testing Units
- 13 Collect and Drop sites at libraries and community centres
- A variety of outreach efforts including community conversations and engagement; letters to all clients of social care;

Less than 1% of 42,000 the asymptomatic surge tests completed have come back with a positive result for COVID-19. This compares to a positivity rate of 3% from symptomatic test sites. This is reassuring to note.

All positive cases have been sent off for additional analysis called genome sequencing. We are still awaiting the genome sequencing to be completed on these positives, to confirm whether or not there is any further detection of this new variant.

Proposal

To note this report, acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of local communities, local authorities and partners; and consider the recommendations of the Directors of Public Health as set out below.

We should expect, and prepare for, the emergence of changes in the virus.

Case identification and isolation of case and contacts remains the most important action in containing the virus.

Local authorities will need to maintain capacity and capability to support outbreak management and to support individuals to isolate.

In addition, it will continue to be important to support national and global efforts to understand and enable science to 'stay ahead' of the virus. This may well require the collection of additional case samples to support this effort