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Title: COVID-19 Tests – Select Committee Inquiries

Executive Summary

On 25 June 2020, the Health Committee noted the following standing delegation:

At its Annual Meeting on 15 May 2020, the Assembly agreed to delegate authority to the Chair of the Health Committee, in consultation with the Deputy Chair of the Health Committee, to agree any outputs of that Committee, in accordance with the agreed work programme, for the period up until the May 2021 GLA elections.

Following consultation with the Deputy Chair, the Chair of the Health Committee wrote to the Chairs of the Health and Science & Technology Select Committees on COVID-19 testing in London. The letters are attached at **Appendix 1** and **Appendix 2**. They will be formally noted at the Committee's next appropriate meeting.

Decision

That the Chair, in consultation with the Deputy Chair, agree the letters to the Chairs of the Health and Science & Technology Select Committees, as attached at **Appendix 1** and **Appendix 2**.

Assembly Member

I confirm that I do not have any disclosable pecuniary interests in the proposed decision and take the decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct for elected Members of the Authority.

The above request has my approval.

Signature

Date 27/10/20



Printed Name Dr Onkar Sahota AM, Chair of the Health Committee

Decision by an Assembly Member under Delegated Authority

Notes:

1. *The Lead Officer should prepare this form for signature by relevant Members of the Assembly to record any instance where the Member proposes to take action under a specific delegated authority. The purpose of the form is to record the advice received from officers, and the decision made.*
2. **The 'background' section (below) should be used to include an indication as to whether the information contained in / referred to in this Form should be considered as exempt under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA), or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR). If so, the specimen Annexe (attached below) should be used. If this form does deal with exempt information, you must submit both parts of this form for approval together.**

Background and proposed next steps:

On 25 June 2020, the Health Committee noted the following standing delegation:

At its Annual Meeting on 15 May 2020, the Assembly agreed to delegate authority to the Chair of the Health Committee, in consultation with the Deputy Chair of the Health Committee, to agree any outputs of that Committee, in accordance with the agreed work programme, for the period up until the May 2021 GLA elections.

Following consultation with the Deputy Chair, the Chair of the Health Committee wrote to the Chairs of the Health and Science & Technology Select Committees on COVID-19 testing in London. The letters are attached at **Appendix 1** and **Appendix 2**. They will be formally noted at the Committee's next appropriate meeting.

Confirmation that appropriate delegated authority exists for this decision

Signed by Committee Services	L J Harvey	Date	06/10/20
Print Name: Lauren Harvey		Tel:	x4383


Financial implications

NOT REQUIRED

Signed by Finance	N/A	Date
Print Name	N/A	Tel:

Legal implications

The Chair of the Economy Committee has the power to make the decision set out in this report.

Signed by Legal		Date	6/10/20
Print Name	Emma Strain, Monitoring Officer	Tel:	X 4399

Additional information should be provided supported by background papers. These could include for example the business case, a project report or the results of procurement evaluation.

Supporting detail/List of Consultees:

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair of the Health Committee)

Public Access to Information

Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the FoIA, or the EIR and will be made available on the GLA Website within one working day of approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary. **Note:** this form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Part 1 – Deferral

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? No

Until what date: (a date is required if deferring)

Part 2 – Sensitive information

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA or EIR should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form - No

Lead Officer/Author

Signed

F Nance

Date:
07/10/20

Print Name

**Fenella Nance
Public Affairs Manager**

Tel: x1242

Job Title

Countersigned by
Director

E. Lilliers

Date:
08/10/2020

Print Name

Ed Williams

Tel: x4399

Chair of the London Assembly Health Committee**Dr Onkar Sahota AM**

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Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Chair of the Health Select Committee
(Sent by email)

2 October 2020

Dear Jeremy,

Over the last number of weeks, it has become clear that there is a lack of COVID-19 tests available across the UK. Unfortunately, London is not exempt from this issue.

As I am sure you are aware, in order to get a COVID-19 test sent to your home, a person who suspects they may have COVID-19 needs to complete and pass identity verification checks through the TransUnion credit reference agency. If their identity cannot be verified by TransUnion, they are required to go to a walk-in or drive-through test centre. These centres are not accessible to many parts of the city, meaning Londoners who are self-isolating cannot get to one if they do not have access to a vehicle.

The UK's largest credit reference agency, Experian, has estimated that there are around 5.8 million people in the UK that are invisible to the credit system, because they have little or no credit record in this country. It is likely that many of these people live in London, perhaps hundreds of thousands. There are a number of reasons why someone will find themselves in the situation of having a thin credit file – for example, more than 80,000 foreign nationals have come to work in London this year, and there are many thousands of people who are homeless or seeking asylum. Many Londoners have thin credit files because of social and economic disadvantage, and these people are being prevented from accessing home COVID-19 tests because of the difficulties they face in verifying their identity with TransUnion.

Londoners have been getting in touch with the London Assembly to describe the difficult situations that they find themselves in, with regards to getting vital tests for COVID-19. Take Claire, a young professional on a visa from Australia, who began to have COVID-19 symptoms a few days ago. Following Government advice, Claire self-isolated as soon as she noticed symptoms. Claire tried to get a test via the Gov.uk website but was told that because she doesn't have enough of a credit history in the UK, the automated test booking system could not identify her. Like most Londoners, Claire does not have access to a car and relies solely on

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public transport to get around the city. As Claire is self-isolating, she cannot use public transport to get to a test centre. Her closest centre is more than 6 miles away.

While this problem is by no means specific to the capital, rates of car ownership in London are lower than in the rest of the country. While 80 per cent of households in the rest of England have at least one vehicle, only 56 per cent of households in London do so.¹ This means that someone with a thin credit file, who suspects they may be infected and who should be self-isolating, is being required to walk or take public transport to get to a COVID-19 test centre. This seems to be a perverse and pointless additional hoop for people to jump through, when the most important thing is for us to track, trace and stop the spread.

I have written to the Mayor of London to raise these issues with the London Transition Board, and its London Transition Management Group. I ask that your Committee raises this with the Government as a matter of urgency and considers this further as part of your ongoing scrutiny of management of the coronavirus outbreak.

Londoners cannot be sent miles across London without transportation to access a COVID-19 test or, even worse, left in limbo without access to these much-needed tests that will enable our city to function as normally as possible in these extraordinary times.

Yours Sincerely,



Dr Onkar Sahota AM

¹ Household car ownership by region and Rural-Urban Classification, National Travel Survey, Department for Transport 2019: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/nts99-travel-by-region-and-area-type-of-residence>

Chair of the London Assembly Health Committee**Dr Onkar Sahota AM**

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Rt Hon Greg Clark MP
Chair of the Science and Technology Committee
(Sent by email)

5 October 2020

Dear Greg,

Over the last number of weeks, it has become clear that there is a lack of COVID-19 tests available across the UK. Unfortunately, London is not exempt from this issue.

As I am sure you are aware, in order to get a COVID-19 test sent to your home, a person who suspects they may have COVID-19 needs to complete and pass identity verification checks through the TransUnion credit reference agency. If their identity cannot be verified by TransUnion, they are required to go to a walk-in or drive-through test centre. These centres are not accessible to many parts of the city, meaning Londoners who are self-isolating cannot get to one if they do not have access to a vehicle.

The UK's largest credit reference agency, Experian, has estimated that there are around 5.8 million people in the UK that are invisible to the credit system, because they have little or no credit record in this country. It is likely that many of these people live in London, perhaps hundreds of thousands. There are a number of reasons why someone will find themselves in the situation of having a thin credit file – for example, more than 80,000 foreign nationals have come to work in London this year, and there are many thousands of people who are homeless or seeking asylum. Many Londoners have thin credit files because of social and economic disadvantage, and these people are being prevented from accessing home COVID-19 tests because of the difficulties they face in verifying their identity with TransUnion.

Londoners have been getting in touch with the London Assembly to describe the difficult situations that they find themselves in, with regards to getting vital tests for COVID-19. Take Claire, a young professional on a visa from Australia, who began to have COVID-19 symptoms a few days ago. Following Government advice, Claire self-isolated as soon as she noticed symptoms. Claire tried to get a test via the Gov.uk website but was told that because she doesn't have enough of a credit history in the UK, the automated test booking system could not identify her. Like most Londoners, Claire does not have access to a car and relies solely on public transport to get around the city. As Claire is self-isolating, she cannot use public transport to get to a test centre. Her closest centre is more than 6 miles away.

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While this problem is by no means specific to the capital, rates of car ownership in London are lower than in the rest of the country. While 80 per cent of households in the rest of England have at least one vehicle, only 56 per cent of households in London do so.¹ This means that someone with a thin credit file, who suspects they may be infected and who should be self-isolating, is being required to walk or take public transport to get to a COVID-19 test centre. This seems to be a perverse and pointless additional hoop for people to jump through, when the most important thing is for us to track, trace and stop the spread.

In her appearance before your Committee on 17th September, Baroness Dido Harding said that: *“Home testing has a really important role in the overall testing platform, but if you have symptoms and you are in the general population and want to get a test result as fast as you can, it will be faster if you go to one of our face-to-face testing sites.”* Clearly, Baroness Harding has not adequately considered the problems facing those with a thin credit file and the barrier this creates to effective home testing. Too much emphasis is being placed on expecting these Londoners to travel to a walk through COVID testing sites, which are often miles from their home.

I have written to the Mayor of London to raise these issues with the London Transition Board, and its London Transition Management Group. I ask that your Committee raises this with the Government as a matter of urgency and considers this further as part of your inquiry into UK Science, Research and Technology Capability and Influence in Global Disease Outbreaks.

Londoners cannot be sent miles across London without transportation to access a COVID-19 test or, even worse, left in limbo without access to these much-needed tests that will enable our city to function as normally as possible in these extraordinary times.

Yours Sincerely,



Dr Onkar Sahota AM

¹ Household car ownership by region and Rural-Urban Classification, National Travel Survey, Department for Transport 2019: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/nts99-travel-by-region-and-area-type-of-residence>