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30 March 2022

Dear Colleagues

Contact Tracing Workforce Full Year Funding 2022-23

Further to recent discussions on the future of contact tracing that have taken place with all Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) delivery partners, I am pleased to be able to confirm that the Minister for Health and Social Services has allocated a full year 2022-23 budget of £2m to cover tracing costs in your region. This equates to 40% of your 2021-22 budget.

As you will know, “Together for a Safer Future: Wales’ Long-term Covid-19 Transition from Pandemic to Endemic” sets out our transition plan for TTP. As wide scale testing reduces over the coming months, the need for contact tracing will also reduce. In parallel with a gradual move away from wide-scale testing for the general public, and the end of the legal requirement to self-isolate, tracing capacity should be scaled back over the next few months.

From July tracing should be wholly targeted on protecting the most vulnerable and supporting the response to local outbreaks rather than breaking chains of transmission. Teams should continue to work with care homes in particular to provide support and guidance in relation to necessary public health actions. The excellent work of the community outreach coordinators in engaging with diverse and minority groups should be embedded and built on. There should be surge capability to respond in the event of another variant of concern.

The transition to a new “Covid Stable” tracing service targeted on the most vulnerable will inevitably require a much smaller workforce. It is, of course, challenging to quantify the precise level of tracing capacity that will be needed in the future. However, based on a range of planning assumptions, partners worked together in a Task and Finish Group to model potential workforce requirements. That modelling work has informed a number of recommendations that will aid workforce planning decisions going forward. These are as follows:

- As testing volumes reduce, the workforce needs to be significantly reduced to be in the region of 15-20% of the current staff complement.
- The type of work required in future coupled with the projected numbers of cases suggests there should be one team per region on a health board footprint. Regions themselves should identify where this team best sits to meet regional

needs. In addition, there is benefit in a national team to remove duplication and add flexible capacity in the event of surge.

- There is no future need for a contact advisor role.
- Consideration should be given to contact tracers undertaking a wider health protection role.
- There should be an immediate recruitment freeze (therefore allowing natural attrition)
- Operating hours should be reduced. Regions should manage operating hours having regard to the need to achieve required levels of performance.
- Those deployed to TTP from elsewhere in organisations should return to substantive roles
- Consideration should be given to whether there are other (vacant) roles in wider health protection where contact tracing skills / experience could be used, to offer alternative employment to those whose roles are no longer required.
- Statutory notice should be given to those whose roles will no longer be required and who cannot be offered alternative employment.

In setting the 2022-23 budget, the Minister has highlighted her strong expectation that contact tracing roles are broadened wherever possible to strengthen the wider health protection system. This is particularly important as the modelling is a best guess based on the available data, and it is highly likely there will be capacity for staff to undertake complementary roles alongside their Covid contact tracing role when case numbers are low.

To help with this expectation, the Task and Finish Group considered how the workforce could use their skills and experience to enhance wider public health. There was a strong appetite from all stakeholders for a wider role beyond tracing and for there to be career progression opportunities. Other potential wider public health roles identified by the group that you will wish to explore with your teams, include:

- Wider Covid roles – for example supporting testing or supporting Covid vaccination
- Other communicable diseases – contact tracing other infectious diseases; supporting vulnerable / complex / high risk settings, providing advice and guidance to care homes, schools, prisons on IP&C/Health and Safety matters
- Health Inequalities - working with vulnerable and disadvantaged groups to address health inequalities by, for example, encouraging take up of childhood vaccinations and participation in screening programmes; supporting healthy lifestyle programmes; intervention/advice, and general data collection/analysis for other community health interventions.

In addition, alongside the retained contact tracing workforce, we must also ensure that tracing capacity can be rapidly expanded if required in a 'Covid Urgent' scenario. Where possible those who have worked in TTP should be identified to return to TTP should surge capacity be required in future. You are therefore asked to maintain a register of those who have worked in TTP and to ensure that those staff are provided with regular digital updates and training to ensure their skills are kept up to date to enable a smooth transition back to TTP should the need arise.

I would also take this opportunity to confirm that this funding allocation, which includes first quarter costs, can be used to meet any redundancy costs resulting from

having to release staff whose roles will no longer be required and who cannot be offered alternative employment. However, please note the Minister has asked that every effort is made to find alternative roles for our TTP workforce, particularly where individuals have expressed a desire to continue working in public health protection.

Finally, thank you once again for your continued support and commitment to delivering Test, Trace, Protect. It is widely recognised that contact tracing teams across Wales have played a vital role in reducing transmission throughout the pandemic and I believe we are well placed to deal with whatever happens in the months ahead.

If you have any questions at all please do not hesitate to contact my team.

Yours sincerely

WG Officer 1 <redaction s40(2)>

Uwch Swyddog Cyfrifol POD, Cyfarwyddwr, Llywodraeth Cymru
SRO TTP, Director, Welsh Government