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Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London, SW1H 0EU

Tuesday 15th September 2020

Dear Matt,

Slough's Covid-19 testing centre and laboratory capacity for the South East

I'm writing on behalf of Slough's Local Outbreak Engagement Board for two reasons; to urge the government to reverse its decision to designate the testing centre for Slough as an 'appointment only' site and to raise concerns about the lack of laboratory capacity for the South East. This is an unsustainable situation which puts our residents' lives at risk and hugely damages all the work that's been done to reduce Covid-19 transmission rates in the community by the council and our partners.

In the last week of August, Slough was visited by the Cabinet Office to find out how local services have been working to support our residents through the pandemic and to bring the number of positive cases down as we were designated an 'area of concern' and so put on the national Covid-19 watch list. Local leaders, including myself, specifically talked about the testing centre as a key element of our strategy to bring down the transmission rates for the virus and the flexibility of the centre meant that language, transport and technology barriers were overcome. We were told that we would be highlighted as an area of good practice. We were therefore shocked and dismayed that last week the government took this decision unilaterally without any consultation. The testing centre helped us to bring our cases down and be taken off the national watch list. We must have flexibility returned to this centre so we can continue to keep the number of cases down and be able to build a successful local test, track and trace system.

In the week of the visit from the Cabinet Office, the alarm was raised by Chief Executives of local councils in the South East about laboratory capacity issues which remain some way off being resolved two weeks later. This means not every resident that needs a Covid-19 test can have one and many are being sign posted to testing sites hundreds of miles away. One resident last week was told to go to the Isle of Wight! We are a borough with the majority of the population in a BAME Group and we know from research that these ethnic groups are hardest hit by the virus. As you pointed out in your letter informing our Member of Parliament that the town was being taken off the watchlist, there is 'never any room for complacency'. Indeed, this week our cases are up again (despite people not being able to access tests) and our exceedance rate has moved into 'red'.

The two issues I've described above combine to make the present situation unsustainable in the long term if we are to remain an area that is able to keep Covid-19 cases down and our residents safe.

I am writing to urge you to reverse your decision with immediate effect and to write to inform us of what action is being taken to resolve the laboratory capacity issues for testing as a matter of urgency.

I look forward to your urgent reply.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Natasa Pantelic

Lead Member for Health and Wellbeing
Chair, Slough Outbreak Engagement Board

Cc Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi MP, Member of Parliament for Slough