



## TEST & PROTECT PROGRAMME

The purpose of this report is to update the NHS Lanarkshire Board of the progress being made in the Test & Protect Service in line with the requirements set out by Scottish Government. This report provides an update of recent changes with particular focus on the Scottish Government's Test and Protect Transition Plan.

### **SITUATION**

NHS Lanarkshire Test and Protect (COVID-19 contact tracing) Service continues to provide a daily, Monday to Sunday, 8am-8pm service. From 15<sup>th</sup> June 2020 to 21<sup>st</sup> March 2022, 250,705 COVID-19 cases have been recorded on the case management system (CMS). Case numbers remain very high; on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2022, the number of open cases was 2066.

Test and Protect delivers a Contact Tracing service funded by Scottish Government (SG) based on a single integrated approach nationally where health boards have their own recruited staff, and the national team, the National Contact Centre (NCC), deals with all overflow and surge capacity. They co-ordinate the nationally agreed mutual aid arrangement to ensure consistent distribution of cases nationally, focusing mainly on surge.

### **COVID-19 cases (March 2022)**

The graph below shows the distribution of new NHS Lanarkshire positive cases daily from 01/03/2022 to 20/03/2022 (blue line) and the number of cases we have closed on each day for the same time period (orange line).

**Number of positive cases:** 29425

Daily average: 1471.25

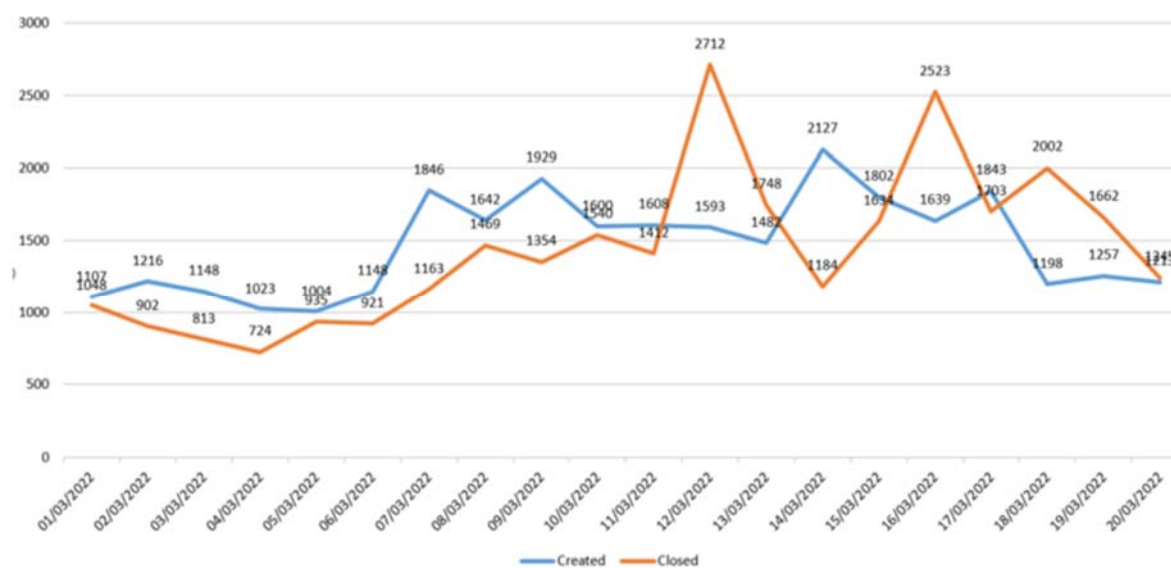
Range: 1004 - 2127

**Number of cases closed:** 28694

Daily average: 1434.7

Range: 724 – 2712

Figure 1: Number of Cases Created and Closed from 01/03/2022-20/03/2022



## **BACKGROUND**

Since the start of the pandemic, we have seen rises in cases, surging then plateauing on a continuing basis. After each surge, the resulting plateau has left us with higher case numbers than the one before which is consistent with expected changes following the lessening of restrictions.

## **CURRENT STAFFING**

Table 1 : Test and Protect Contact Tracing Service

<b>Role</b>	<b>Headcount</b>	<b>WTE</b>
Contact Tracers	48	32.92
Contact Tracing Practitioners	36	29
Team Leads	10	10.9
T & P Nurses	12	11
Service Managers	2	2
Nurse Consultant	1	1
NCC Contact Tracers	14	14

NHS Lanarkshire (like most other health boards) has a Service Level Agreement with NCC (endorsed by SG) whereby NCC provide NHS Lanarkshire with 14 wte staff members (10 NCC staff members daily 7 days per week). This is expected to end mid-April.

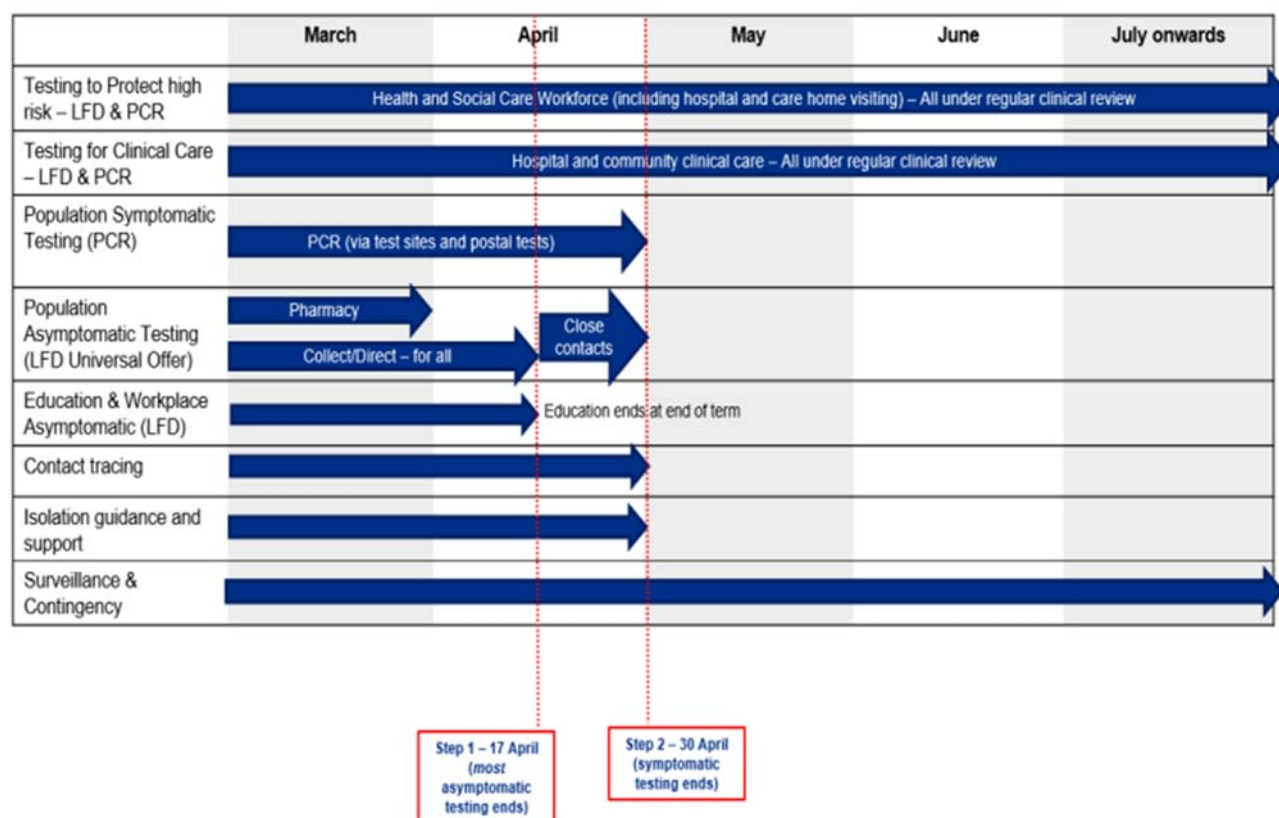
### **FIRST MINISTER ANNOUNCEMENT and TEST AND PROTECT TRANSITION PLAN**

On 15/03/2022, the First Minister made an announcement affecting the wider Test and Protect teams as detailed below:

- The Scottish Government is limited in testing capacity, as funding for this is determined by the UK Government decisions taken for England. Within this constraint, SG have sought as far as possible to reach the right decision for Scotland.
- Testing for those without symptoms (asymptomatic testing) and testing for those with symptoms will last until the end of April. This is as far as the SG can go within its funding constraints.
- Until Easter, there will be no change to the testing advice. Following the Easter weekend (18 April) the Scottish Government will no longer advise people without symptoms to test twice weekly unless they are healthcare or social care workers.
- However, until the end of April, the advice will be to continue using lateral flow device tests if people are identified as a close contact and on each occasion when visiting someone who is vulnerable (in a hospital or care home setting etc.).
- PCR tests to continue for those with symptoms, either by post or by visiting a Test Site. PCR test sites will remain open during this period, with opening hours and locations being subject to change during this transition.
- With the exception of health and care settings, the advice to test regularly will also end from 18 April for workplaces, early learning and childcare settings, mainstream and special schools, universities and colleges.
- This will be kept under review with the intention being that from the end of April all routine population-wide testing will end, including for those who have symptoms.
- Contact Tracing will also end at this point, with those experiencing symptoms of respiratory illness being advised to stay at home.
- Physical test sites will close at the end of April, although mobile testing units and lab capacity will be retained for longer term testing purposes.
- Everything that can be done to support those who have worked on the testing programme during the transition will be done. FM thanked all of the staff for their invaluable contribution over the past two years.
- From 1 May, testing will be on a targeted basis – to support clinical care and treatment of those at greatest risk and to protect higher risk settings; and for surveillance, outbreak management and responding to significant developments, such as a new variant.
- For any purpose in which the Scottish Government continues to advise testing – access to tests in Scotland will remain free of charge.

The announcement that contact tracing will end at the end of April without staff being informed in advance had a negative impact and caused a great deal of unrest.

Figure 2: Timeline taken from the Test and Protect transition plan below:



## TESTING

Currently community testing for COVID-19 is primarily delivered through the network of regional, local and mobile testing units staffed by Scottish Ambulance Service and the postal testing service with PCR samples processed via the UK Government laboratory network. In addition to the national testing provision NHS Lanarkshire also has a community testing team which has supported the distribution of LFD kits in the community, has conducted community engagement and outreach work to encourage regular testing among disadvantaged and ethnic communities across Lanarkshire and has provided an outbreak testing service to facilitate testing in closed communities or workplaces in response to outbreaks.

Asymptomatic and most symptomatic community testing will be stood down from the end of April, but some testing will remain for health and social care staff, both with routine LFD testing and some limited PCR testing and pre-admission testing for elective surgery. Clarification is awaited around the national resources via postal testing service that will be available to support this testing and local staff that may be required to support this testing. It will be important that NHS Lanarkshire retains capacity and expertise to be able to rapidly stand-up some localised testing in response to outbreaks identified in high risk settings and in response to the identification of a new variants of concern – see below for more details of the VAM Plan (Variants and mutations response plan). It is anticipated that the nursing staff required to support such localised community testing will be based within the health protection team (HPT) and provide outbreak testing support as required.

## **STAFF WELLBEING**

As well as the high number of cases daily having a detrimental effect on staff, their morale has been further lowered by the prospect of the service as they know it ending at the end of April 2022 and the uncertainty of what lies ahead.

Although staff attrition had slowed with contracts being extended to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022, following the most recent COVID-19 announcement by the First Minister, it is anticipated nationally that there will be further staff attrition. We have trained and developed a highly skilled team whose members are an asset to NHS Lanarkshire.

Test and Protect Service Managers have held sessions with Team Leads at their request, on completing job application forms and on interview techniques which we are happy to offer to any other members of the team who would find this useful.

We continue to promote Health and Wellbeing webinars and activities to our teams and are available to them to discuss any concerns they may have, as well as having Tracespace, our online Microsoft Team dedicated to the welfare of our workforce.

A local partnership group has been established which includes Health Protection Management, Test and Protect Management, HR and Partnership to manage us through this transitional period and provide reassurance to staff of our intent to support them moving forward. We have sent two communications to staff currently on temporary contracts in COVID-19 roles; one on the 11<sup>th</sup> March 2022 prior to the First Minister (FM) delivering her speech on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2022 regarding a transition to the ending of whole population Contact Tracing and moving to a more targeted approach, although timelines were not known at that point. The second was sent on the 18<sup>th</sup> March 2022 to provide a further update following the FM's speech.

There is also a national Future of Test and Protect Workforce group which exists as a sub-group of the broader Test and Protect Transition Programme Board and is responsible for considering the impact on the workforce of any changes to overall Test and Protect policy. The group meets weekly but during this period of uncertainty, are meeting twice weekly. Membership of this group include representatives from Scottish Government, Public Health Scotland, National Services Scotland, Tactical Operating Group and five health boards.

## **RESOURCE FOR TRANSITION TO STEADY STATE SERVICE**

To reduce transmission of COVID-19 in high risk settings, we will require to have a Contact Tracing Service which is capable of quickly contacting those who have been in high risk settings. These include Health and Social Care settings where there is a risk of transmission to vulnerable people and other settings where there is a risk of a high rate of transmission e.g. custodial settings.

In Lanarkshire, we also prioritise calling over 70s and those who may be clinically vulnerable due to having a number of health conditions. These individuals are called halfway through their isolation by our T&P specialist nurses to check on their wellbeing and ensure they are able to

access primary care and specialist care as required. The aim of this piece of work is to avoid worsening of any health conditions and potential acute admissions.

T&P are also involved in the programme to identify COVID-19 positive individuals who may be eligible for nMAB or anti-viral treatment and signpost them to the Community Covid Pathway for clinical assessment. From 03/01/2022 – 20/03/2022, Test and Protect made 815 signposting calls. We play a small, but significant role.

With high community transmission and workplaces operating at normal capacity, we provide businesses with support to mitigate the risk of further transmission. While we may not have as much information from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2022 onwards, we envisage there still to be some need for this support.

We are currently looking at resources needed going forward to mitigate transmission of COVID-19 within high risk settings and to vulnerable individuals.

As contracts are currently in place until 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022, we are exploring the possibility of deploying staff elsewhere within the Directorate where the demand is greater and within the wider organisation where need is identified. e.g. we currently have seven members of staff from the Contact Tracing team helping in Health Protection, which is not only a development opportunity for them, but is filling a current gap in resource at a time where there is high demand in this area.

In the planning to prepare a more robust and resilient future model equipped to stand up during surge or outbreak situations, transitions were commenced and have been in place over the past three months. This has included Health Protection training and cross cover staffing from the Specialist Test and Protect Nurses and the Community Testing Team Nurses. The Nurses all have licenses and access to the Health Protection HP zone record system as well as the Test and Protect electronic patient system, CMS. Over the past month this cross cover and training has extended initially to 6 of the Test and Protect Team Leads. All the noted staff have been able to demonstrate excellent transferable skills and have been an important essential resource to cover and support the Health Protection Team Care Home outbreaks. As well a development opportunity for staff, this is filling a current gap in resource at a time where there is high demand in this area.

Current support includes the Specialist Nurses' risk assessment of the multi-agency Hospital Discharge planning daily meetings.

Keeping as many as possible of this skilled workforce within NHS Lanarkshire gives us resilience to upscale the service if required to address any surge or new variant of COVID-19.

### **RISKS AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Reputational risk—Despite open and transparent communication, there may not be roles available which are suitable for all staff being displaced. Communications need to be reflective of the pace of change, and support for workforce needs to be robust.

Financial risk—Funding sustainability: we need to plan now, but are as yet, unaware of what funding resource will be available as we move to steady state with COVID-19 endemic in our communities.

It is imperative we maintain a well-resourced service capable of quickly adapting as needed throughout this pandemic and look to the future as we transition to the endemic phase of the pandemic.

We prioritise contacting high risk cases including those who work in health and social care, those in custodial settings and those 70 years old and over. In the past week 1652 COVID-19 cases have fitted these criteria.

### **VAM PLAN (Variants And Mutations Response Plan)**

The Scottish Government has asked Public Health Scotland to produce a plan which details how to monitor for the development of new variants and mutations of the COVID-19 virus and how best to respond if a new variant of concern is identified. This is a plan being devised to ensure that nationally and at health board level, we have the resource and resilience to quickly respond to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 which may result in further significant morbidity and mortality and have a significant impact on health and social care capacity. A first edition of the VAM Plan is to be produced by 31 March, however, it will be a dynamic document and will continue to be developed in the coming weeks and months. All relevant national agencies, NHS Boards and partner agencies and the Scottish Government are involved in the development of the plan.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Board is asked to:

- Note the need to support resourcing of the Public Health Directorate to maintain adequate capacity to deliver effective COVID-19 transmission mitigation and Outbreak Management across Lanarkshire.
- Consider the use of our skilled staff to address the wider Public Health challenges and those of the wider organisation.

Sharon Falconer

Test and Protect Service Manager

23rd March 2022

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

[Test and Protect Transition Plan - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/test-and-protect-transition-plan)