

<b>MDA No.</b>	1	2	4	8
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Title: COVID-19 Testing – Health Secretary

### **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 Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, on COVID-19 testing in London. The letter is attached at **Appendix 1** and will be formally noted at the Committee's next appropriate meeting.

### **Decision**

That the Chair, in consultation with the Deputy Chair, agree the letter to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, as attached at **Appendix 1**.

### **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** 2/12/20



**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 Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, on COVID-19 testing in London. The letter is attached at **Appendix 1** and 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	16/11/20
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 Health Committee has the power to make the decision set out in this report.

Signed by Legal		Date	16/11/20
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**

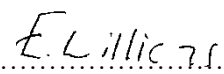
Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA or EIR should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

**Is there a part 2 form - No**

**Lead Officer/Author**

Signed Fenella Nance Date: 20/11/2020

Print Name **Fenella Nance** Tel: x1242  
Job Title **Public Affairs Manager**

Countersigned by Director  Date: 20/11/2020

Print Name **Ed Williams** Tel: x4399

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

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
(Sent by email)

18 November 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

The number of COVID-19 cases continues to rise in London. At the time of writing, Public Health England figures show that cases in the capital have reached record levels - over the past seven days there have been an average of 188.8 cases per 100,000 of the population, surpassing the highest rate previously recorded. Although steps have been taken to improve testing capacity in London and across the country, there is clearly no room for complacency.

As you will no doubt be 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. 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.

This problem is by no means specific to the capital, but 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 ask that he raises this issue with the London Transition Board, and it's London Transition Management Group. I have also raised the issue with the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, in his capacity as Chair of the Health Select Committee, as part of the Committee's on-going inquiries into the management of the coronavirus outbreak and the delivery of core NHS and care services during the pandemic and beyond.

I now ask that you raise this as a matter of urgency with relevant officials in the Department of Health and Social Care. Is the Department aware of this anomaly, and if so, what steps are being taken to resolve it? 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.

Given the urgency of the situation and the need for an effective testing system for all Londoners, I would appreciate a response by 2 December.

Yours,



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

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<sup>1</sup> 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>