



17th December 2020

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Professor Chris Whitty CB FMedSci
Chief Medical Officer and DHSC Chief Scientific Adviser
By email

Re: Decision to keep South Gloucestershire in Tier 3

Dear Secretary of State and Professor Chris Whitty,

I am writing following the recent announcement made today on the outcome of the Government's first review of tiering in England and the decision to keep South Gloucestershire, and my constituency of Kingswood, in Tier 3 – Very High Alert.

I fully supported the Government's strategy to move to a local restriction tier system after the national restrictions ended on Wednesday 2nd December. I believe this is the right approach to target the toughest measures only in areas where the virus is most prevalent and where there are sharper increases in the rate of infection, helping to control the spread of the virus locally and taking into account the pressures which still remain on the NHS.

However, the local context is also a useful factor to consider and I was therefore very disappointed to hear of the decision to keep South Gloucestershire in Tier 3, especially in light of the announcement that the neighbouring areas of Bristol and North Somerset will move to Tier 2 from Saturday 19th December.

South Gloucestershire's local figures show the current rates have come down, to 160 cases per 100,000 compared to a national average of 200 cases per 100,000. At its peak in mid-November the local figure was 349 per 100,000, significantly above the England rate was 265 per 100,000. Although more recently the figures have begun to modestly increase again (along with neighbouring Bristol City), they remain significantly below the England average.

Looking at the over-60s, the latest data shows that South Gloucestershire currently has a case detection rate of 80 per 100,000. This is lower than both North Somerset (81.9) and lower than Bristol (128.6). I believe these figures mean South Gloucestershire is in a good position to be considered for a move to Tier 2, which would better reflect local circumstances.

South Gloucestershire also shares the same health ecosystem as the Bristol area, with hospitals, healthcare services and local populations being closely entwined.

I understand that bed occupancy figures from the local North Bristol Trust and CCG show that of the 273 Covid-19 patients occupying a bed, only 73 were identified as being South Gloucestershire residents.

Importantly, both South Gloucestershire and Bristol are also considered part of the same “travel to work” area, along with North Somerset. It is my understanding these were the reasons why all three areas were placed in Tier 3 at the beginning of December.

I would therefore welcome an explanation for the contradictory decision to place Bristol and North Somerset in Tier 2 while keeping South Gloucestershire in Tier 3, as this decision may suggest these crucial local factors have not been taken into consideration during this first review.

Based on local case data, the lower levels of infection overall, including in the over 60s and hospital bed occupancy from South Gloucestershire residents, I would strongly urge the Government to reconsider South Gloucestershire’s position at the earliest possible opportunity.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris', with a stylized flourish underneath.

The Rt Hon Chris Skidmore MP
Member of Parliament for Kingswood