Enhanced Covid-19 testing
Communications campaign review
Introduction

We were put on standby at the end of play on a Friday 9 April that entire borough surge testing would be announced by the Department of Health & Social Care on Monday 12 April afternoon. All existing lateral flow testing would be switched to PCR testing alongside a huge expansion of capacity. Enhanced testing of this scope and nature had never been done before in England. This meant rapidly gathering with the surge testing operations team and starting to develop the key communications assets. We had previously run communications and engagement for two surge testing operations in the borough, but in small sections of Lambeth in specific postcodes. This operation would be much wider and target all audiences.

The crucial first steps were organising website pages which would go on to underpin all our surge testing communications, alongside public relations work for the initial announcement and readying for message amplification across all council communications platforms. This meant working through the weekend to get these crucial initial assets together.

Lambeth itself is a complex borough with people from a wide range of religious, language, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. It is a young borough with high levels of political engagement, media consumption and an over representation of people working in newspapers, TV and other outlets. There are also hard-to-reach audiences that throughout the pandemic we have worked hard to build the infrastructure needed to ensure inclusion of messaging. These facts presented both opportunities and challenges in our communications campaign to support surge testing.

Following launch, our communications and engagement diversified as we worked closely with the operations team to support the project as it progressed over the allotted two-week sprint. The communications and engagement team would rely on local demographic profiles, media consumption research, local networks built through the Covid-19 crisis, elected officials, council colleagues and public sector partners to update and encourage all residents to join the surge testing operation and play their part.

Approach

A multi-channel approach based on previous experience, taking communications opportunities as they presented themselves and spending money strategically where we could add value.

We ran a bespoke local communications campaign while engaging with communications teams from the Department of Health and Social Care, Public Health England, NHS Test & Trace, Cabinet Office, London Councils and Wandsworth Council.

A communications plan was put in place to schedule tasks, allocate team responsibility and keep track of delivery dates. This communications plan was shared with all London boroughs via London Councils in anticipation of surge testing being expanded to other areas.

It is vital that all Lambeth residents take an asymptomatic PCR test so that we can identify all cases in order to stop the spread of this variant of concern.

Ruth Hutt, Director of Public Health
Outputs and channels

Website
The website was a crucial tool in underpinning all communications throughout the fortnight of surge testing. Web traffic was driven to a dedicated 5-page section on enhanced testing using a short URL on all comms:
lambeth.gov.uk/enhancedtesting

We made the call to get tested clear on the website with a home page takeover.

The information residents needed in order to get tested was quickly accessible via any page on the Lambeth website by way of a distinctive banner (see below):

The web pages included a table of the fluctuating number of around 18 testing centres, with their addresses, opening times and how you could access a test there. This information was complex and constantly changing, for example there were some sites where you could get tested in person, but you could not pick up a home test or return a home test. The table became the definitive information point that people checked and relied on before going out to get or return a test, and we worked hard to ensure it was constantly updated to reflect the changes on the ground.

Traffic to the website peaked at three times average levels, with 172,431 page views on 13 April, the second day of testing.

Over half of web traffic to the enhanced testing landing page came directly, but other key sources of referral were Google, our emails sent by GovDelivery and Twitter. See chart to the right for more sources.
Media engagement

Launch media was crucial to engage the widest spectrum of residents.

From our previous media consumption survey work we’d identified BBC London TV and the Evening Standard as the most widely read/viewed outlets in the borough. Local outlets with far smaller local consumption rates remain significant for other key audiences including influencers and different demographic profile. For example, the South London Press, the only borough newspaper although a much reduced South London Press, the only borough including influencers and different significant for other key audiences smaller local consumption rates remain.

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Having an agreed spokesperson with previous media experience was agreed at the outset with our Director of Public Health delivering key and consistent messages in local, regional and national press throughout the surge testing operation. The timing of the surge coincided with the pre-election period which placed restrictions on the approach we would usually take when putting people forward for interview and issuing comments. However we were able to overcome this challenge in a flexible and pre-agreed way.

All press releases produced were shared with relevant Government departments prior to issue having been cleared internally with our operations team, Director of Public Health and council Cabinet leads for health and Social Care. All releases were posted to the council’s Love Lambeth blog to allow social media amplification and key media outlets were engaged to seek coverage.

Launch media coverage: BBC London online – Covid. Surge testing in Wandsworth and Lambeth after South African variant cluster found – A “significant” cluster of the South African Covid-19 variant has been found in two areas of south London where surge testing has been implemented. Wandsworth and Lambeth will see additional testing after 44 confirmed and 30 probable cases were identified.

The Guardian – Covid: surge testing deployed in south London as South African variant cases rise – About 44 cases have been confirmed, mostly in Wandsworth and Lambeth, while a further 30 probable cases have been identified.

South London Press – Health chiefs urge Lambeth and Wandsworth residents to get tested after outbreak of South African variant – Everyone over the age of 11 who lives or works in Lambeth is being asked to take a PCR Covid-19 test after new cases of the variant first identified in South Africa were found in the borough.

London SE1 – All Lambeth residents asked to take COVID-19 test – Lambeth Council says that the additional testing will help quickly identify any further cases and help limit any potential spread. Eight additional testing sites have opened across Lambeth from Monday.

Operations surge testing coverage: BBC London online – Covid. Surge test areas ‘can still enjoy lockdown easing’ – Ruth Hutt, director of public health for Lambeth Council, said people could enjoy restrictions being lifted but should “do that safely”.

Downing Street said there were “strong measures in place to find and isolate any new cases” of the variant.
Wandsworth Guardian – Ministers under pressure over variant cluster in south London – Director of public health for Lambeth, Ruth Hutt, said: "It is vital that all Lambeth residents take an asymptomatic PCR test so that we can identify all cases in order to stop the spread of this variant of concern.

Evening Standard – Battle to control South African Covid-19 variant in London – Londoners were today urged to get tested for Covid-19 to protect the city from the South African variant as surge testing was extended to a third borough. Residents in a "targeted area" within SE16 in Southwark are being urged to get a test after a case of the mutation was detected there. Ruth Hutt interviewed.

South London Press – Lambeth Council leader urges all residents to get tested for Covid – The advice follows the announcement of "the largest surge testing operation to date" after 44 confirmed and 30 probable cases of the Covid variant first identified in South Africa were found in Lambeth and Wandsworth.

Wandsworth Guardian – Everyone gets tested for Covid-19, Lambeth leader says – Lambeth Council leader, Cllr Jack Hopkins, wrote to residents on Tuesday (April 13) to urge all residents over 11 years of age to take a PCR Covid-19 test in the next week.

BBC London TV news – Half a million people in London are being urged to get a Covid test to stop the spread of the South African variant – Ruth Hutt, director of public health for Lambeth, said at the moment there are no plans to change the current easing of restrictions, however if we were to find more cases, clusters or outbreaks that would be reviewed.

Evening Standard – Get tested without delay, health chiefs urge Londoners in areas hit by Covid South African variant – The capital’s public health chief Professor Kevin Fenton issued the plea as more testing sites were being opened in south London. More than half a million adults have been offered tests, including 264,000 in Lambeth, 265,000 in Wandsworth, and 14,800 in SE16 area of Southwark.

Evening Standard – South African variant: Londoners keep calm and carry on queueing to get tested – Long queues snaked across Clapham Common and Brockwell Park as testing for the mutant strain, which may be more resistant to vaccines, began at pop up sites in Wandsworth and Lambeth. Wandsworth council has described the testing operation as a ‘mammoth task’.

South London Press – Lambeth: tests underway, can identify all cases in order to stop spread of it locally, Lambeth testing chief urges to get tested – Long queues snaked across Clapham Common and Brockwell Park as testing for the Covid-19 variant first found in South Africa, with 0.2 per cent turning out positive.

Brixton Blog – Lambeth: final call for residents and workers to have COVID test – The council said on Saturday that those who have not been able to participate so far are asked to take a PCR Covid-19 test by the end of Monday. More than 50,000 people in Lambeth have taken a PCR test over the last 12 days.

South London Press – Covid-19: Borough wide PCR testing underway – Lambeth: Covid-19 PCR test kits distributed to secondary schools – Lambeth council news blog over the surge testing for a Covid variant indicate no spread of it locally, Lambeth council said today (28 April). More than 70,000 Covid tests were registered by people over 11 years old in Lambeth between 12 April and yesterday when surge testing ended.

Love Lambeth council news blog over the surge testing for a Covid variant indicate no spread of it locally, Lambeth council said today (28 April). More than 70,000 Covid tests were registered by people over 11 years old in Lambeth between 12 April and yesterday when surge testing ended.

Wandsworth Guardian – Lambeth publishes results of Covid-19 surge testing – More than 70,000 PCR tests were completed in Lambeth during surge testing for the Covid-19 variant first found in South Africa, with 0.2 per cent turning out positive.
Social media

We used both organic and paid social media to promote the enhanced testing operation and to engage with residents and businesses who used social media to share their experiences, ask questions and share issues with us.

We generated approximately 1.9 million impressions, just over half of these coming through paid social marketing. Most of our organic impressions were on Twitter.

As is common for us during major incidents, Twitter was our busiest organic social channel, both in terms of reach and inbound responses received. Interestingly, our proactive replies to resident questions made up a large proportion of our total impressions. Of our total impressions, 58% came through replies to inbound responses.

We also used local social network, Nextdoor. Our announcement post, which targeted the whole borough, received hundreds of comments and reached up to 36% of users of Nextdoor in the borough.

Following this, we used more local targeting to inform users in specific parts of the borough as we opened new testing sites close to them.

We worked with DHSC colleagues to run paid ads via Facebook and Instagram. This delivered a significant boost to our reach and impressions.

Email and SMS

We used a variety of email and SMS lists to spread the word about testing. Our key audiences were:

- Public mailing lists (46,000 unique contacts)
- SMS to Lambeth housing residents living close to test sites (4,000 contacts)
- SMS to Lambeth Public Health emergency contact list (90,000 contacts)
- Businesses and community groups (10,700 unique contacts)

Email campaign results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Total Recipients</th>
<th>Unique Email Opens</th>
<th>Unique Email Opens Rate</th>
<th>Click Rate</th>
<th>Unique Bulletin Link Clicks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>111092</td>
<td>47577</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>9104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public mailing lists</td>
<td>100344</td>
<td>42205</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>8624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and stakeholders</td>
<td>10748</td>
<td>5372</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total social</th>
<th>Reach</th>
<th>Impressions</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Link clicks</th>
<th>CTR</th>
<th>Spend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>451,842</td>
<td>972,960</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2596</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>£7,009.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Print matters

Lambeth’s quarterly resident survey, completed in February and March 2021 shows that:
9% of residents have no access to a computer, laptop or tablet within their household, and 8% share a device
9% of residents have no or insufficient access to the internet at home
5% of residents are not confident using a search engine to find information or help online
10% of residents are not confident accessing and using public services online.

The data also highlight that all of these challenges are greater for people with a disability, and that there is a greater challenge of access to devices and Internet for people from a black, Asian and minority ethnic background.

Our tactics

• We used door-to-door distribution for letters and leaflets to the entire borough, as the quickest way to get the message delivered

• We followed up with letter distribution to the five areas around the testing centres inviting the residents to come and get tested

• We repeated the distribution of a letter to all residents on the second week

• We knew that the areas we were covering were overlapping, still we decided to push our communications to make sure everyone gets a letter

• For the Mobile Testing sites we used laminated posters that could be easily sanitised

• We increased visibility of the message by hiring a digital screen van to display the message in 12 languages. The van was instructed to drive around the borough and stop outside popular places, tube stations, park gates and high streets for six days.
Breaking the language barrier

• We translated the information into the most spoken languages after English. Based on intelligence from a Pulse residents survey held in 2020 and on our experience from the pandemic we translated surge testing information into: Amharic, Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, Somali, Polish, Tigrinya, Chinese, Tamil and Hindi.

• We designed all translated leaflets to look like the original English version to make the message more effective.

• We shared the translations with a network of community organisations, faith groups, partners and stakeholders.

• We distributed the translations via our service areas i.e. Schools, Children’s Services, Housing, Streetscene.

• We delivered printed copies of translated leaflets via our food parcel service in the languages as requested by the users.
Focusing on housing

On the second week of the surge testing Mobile Testing Units were set up on housing estates.

Our communications have focused on these key housing estates: Vauxhall Gardens, Loughborough Estate, Cotton Gardens Estate, Myatt’s Field North.

The digital screen van was instructed to drive and park in each estate to increase visibility as the testing was taking place.

Councillors and housing officers were door knocking to invite more residents to test.

Diary of a crisis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APRIL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 Monday</td>
<td>Operation Eagle 3 is launched for the entire borough of Lambeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Tuesday</td>
<td>Leaflet for surge testing sent to all residents and businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(130,000 addresses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Wednesday</td>
<td>Special signage is delivered to all testing sites. Letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sent to residents living around the five testing sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(104,000 addresses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Thursday</td>
<td>1,000 extra leaflets are delivered to Age UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Friday</td>
<td>Translations in 12 languages are distributed via email to all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-18 Saturday and Sunday</td>
<td>Digital screen van displaying message in 12 languages is driving around the borough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Tuesday</td>
<td>Digital screen van displaying message in 12 languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>is driving around the borough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Wednesday</td>
<td>Lambeth testing leaflets printed for street engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>officers, Foodbanks, Age UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Thursday</td>
<td>New letter to all residents and businesses is distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>door to door (130,000 addresses). Stickers with easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>instructions on return of testing kits are distributed to all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>testing sites. Digital screen van displaying message in 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>languages is driving around the borough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-25 Saturday and Sunday</td>
<td>Focus on four key housing estates with MTUs set to test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>residents. Digital screen van displaying message in 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>languages is driving through the estates. Cllrs and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>housing officers are door knocking. 4-page wrap advert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>is published in South London Press.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Surge maths

- 365,000 letters and leaflets were delivered in three distributions over two weeks
- 104,000 letters invited residents in the five areas around the testing centres to take part
- 12 languages are the most commonly spoken in Lambeth after English
- 1 digital screen van was driving around Lambeth for six days
Throughout the testing we shared communications materials and messages with our elected councillors, MPs, GPs, hospitals, voluntary sector and community groups so they can inform and reassure their constituents, networks, clients and patients about this surge testing. A meeting was held with our borough’s seven business improvement districts to help engage businesses.

Our voluntary and community sector were updated three times during the enhanced testing with key messages and asks via our pre-established network. Our secondary schools and colleges were important avenues for reaching sections of the target audience of anyone over 11-years-old.

The communications team helped produce a letter for parents and a letter to headteachers that was clear and effective, to ensure best participation rates. Similarly, the communications team were involved in supporting a testing kit pick up initiative launched to ensure Faith Groups and businesses in the borough were best able to participate in the enhanced testing.

Throughout the roll out of the Covid-19 vaccines the council’s communications team has been working closely with the NHS South East London Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) which is a clinically led organisation responsible for planning, paying for and monitoring most of the health services provision in Lambeth and neighbouring boroughs.

We worked with the CCG on clear enhanced testing messaging for all NHS employees in the borough which includes three major hospitals and network of GP surgeries.

Ahead of the last weekend of enhanced testing we booked a four page wrap for the South London Press, the most widely distributed local newspaper in the borough that is traditionally read by older people in Lambeth as well as people living on housing estates.

As the testing progressed beyond the initially intensive media engagement we looked for local solutions to ensure we reached different audiences in different ways.