

Leader of Council

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

Date: December 18th, 2020

Re: Decision to keep South Gloucestershire in Tier 3

Dear Secretary of State

I am writing to request an urgent Ministerial meeting with the Council and South Gloucestershire MPs to discuss the Government's decision to keep this area in Tier 3 whilst neighbouring areas are reduced to Tier 2.

Whilst we have supported the Government's decision to move to a local restriction tier system after the national restrictions ended at the start of December, we are very disappointed at the decision to treat South Gloucestershire differently to neighbouring areas, and isolate our residents and businesses in such a way. We find this particularly surprising given the local context, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss these points with you, and better understand the logic of the decisions being taken at a national level.

As I am sure you will appreciate, the decision to isolate South Gloucestershire in such a way, without a clear, transparent and understandable logic has not been understood in the local area (or more widely), and seriously risks the credibility of the national system, restrictions, and our work at a local level to reduce the levels of the virus. This is especially so given the numbers and direction of travel in neighbouring authorities such as Bristol and Gloucestershire, and the significant pressure our local health and social care systems remain in, which are fed by the wider economic and travel to work geography (not just South Gloucestershire). We should state at this point our primary point is not around South Gloucestershire being in Tier 3, but rather the differential treatment of South Gloucestershire to other areas given the local context, and significant issues that arise from this. I set out a little more context below.

As you will be aware, South Gloucestershire's figures have reduced significantly over recent weeks, and remain below the all England average. Whilst we have seen a small and steady increase over recent days, this is in line with much of the South West and the rest of the Country. Much of the South Gloucestershire case load in recent weeks has been attributed to school age children and working age adults. Of most note however is the numbers in relation to the over-60s, which poses a much greater risk to the wider health system. The latest data in this regard is that South Gloucestershire remains significantly below neighbouring areas, with our case detection rate being 84 per 100,000, compared to 135 in Bristol to our South and 155 in Gloucestershire to our North.

As you will be aware South Gloucestershire shares a health system with Bristol and North Somerset, and in fact the 3 main acute hospitals sit within the other two local authority boundaries. The current health system is under significant pressure, however we understand the majority of Covid related beds are

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currently taken up by non-South Gloucestershire residents, possibly reflecting the nature of the case load set out above across the wider system.

As I referenced above, the significant impact this is having on local communities, and their trust in the wider system and central government, should not be underestimated. Our residents fully understand health pressures are driven not only by them, but also the neighbouring areas. Practically we have families that live across the road from each other that are now in different tiers, local supermarkets that are in different tiers, hospitality establishments on the same road or immediate vicinity in different tiers, travel to work and cross border issues for local schools, and public transport that is integrated across tier boundaries. This is already leading to community cohesion issues and increasing levels of frustration and anger. Whilst an element of this might be around Tier 3 status itself, more appears to be about a feeling and sense of unfairness, lack of recognition of the reality of what happens on the ground, and the creation of yet further divide amongst close knit communities.

We would therefore welcome the opportunity for a Ministerial meeting to discuss the contradictory decision to place other local areas in Tier 2 whilst keeping South Gloucestershire in Tier 3, and the context in which this decision was taken given the wider issues set out above.

Yours sincerely,



Toby Savage, Leader of Council

In copy:
South Gloucestershire Members of Parliament (by email)