

- 82. The balance between national and local leadership of England's test and trace regime was a recurring challenge, which failed to strike an optimal balance.** In particular, the role of local authorities – as the lead organisations for public health in England and with deep connections to local communities – was under-developed in NHSTT; similarly, the role of primary care services was overlooked which risked failing to capitalise on their local networks and understanding of populations. In 2020, for example, NHSTT initially led the role of contact tracing, but it gradually became clear that for non-complex cases, staff working in national bodies were less well positioned to lead contact tracing than local health protection teams based in Public Health England and local authorities. Over time, testing policy and the operational model for contact tracing did adjust to better support local leadership, and tap into the expertise of directors of public health. Looking ahead, if a test and trace approach is needed in future pandemic health scenarios, it should be developed in close collaboration with local authorities, local directors of public health and local health protection teams, ensuring they play a leading role and are able to meet local needs and address inequalities.
- 83. The effectiveness of NHSTT was bound up with a broader policy regime which was poorly designed to support people to break chains of transmission.** NHSTT required people to follow self-isolation guidance to effectively break chains of transmission. However, there was evidence that people's ability to test and adhere to self-isolation guidance was a major challenge through the peaks of COVID-19. Key barriers to isolation included a sick pay regime in the UK which saw people potentially financially worse off for following the guidance and inadequate national policy support, including financial support payments, for people who tested positive. For future pandemic scenarios where self-isolation is required, a useful guiding principle would be that no one should be made worse off for having to self-isolate.
- 84. Inequalities were a vital axis shaping COVID-19's impact on population health in England, and the test and trace regime was underpowered to address these.** The operational effectiveness of NHSTT varied across the country with – at least at times – a higher rate of successful contact tracing in