

- 5.8 Inevitably, as our knowledge developed during the pandemic, some working hypotheses were abandoned whilst others were taken forward and became crucial tools in the UK's COVID-19 response. This iterative process of service development – which enabled the UK to deploy effective LFD tests at scale before most other countries – is not unusual; it is how almost all new major consumer services are developed. What was unusual was the pace at which these new services were trialled and developed and the scale and speed at which they were launched.
- 5.9 UK government decision making was affected by wider, and not unsurprising, disagreements on the appropriate policy approach which created challenges for NHSTT to deliver operationally.
- 5.10 For example, NHSTT faced various difficulties in obtaining HMT and CO approval for Lighthouse Laboratories in the summer of 2020 **[DH7/07 INQ000575994; DH7/08 INQ000575993]**, and this meant that the approvals process for the expansion of the Lighthouse network took far longer than it should have in the circumstances. Had NHSTT had greater delegated procurement authority during this time, this would likely have reduced the capacity issues we experienced in the autumn. It was these frustrations which led to the substantial delegated authority to directly approve spending on PCR and LFD tests and award contracts up to £150 million that was agreed with the Prime Minister and HMT from 22 September 2020.
- 5.11 These challenges were further exacerbated by the inherently unpredictable nature of the pandemic. In December 2020, NHSTT was encouraged to move towards a more “business-as-usual” environment and increase focus on value for money across the organisation (including in relation to procurement). Shortly afterwards, a new variant of the virus emerged which led to the standing up of new use cases such as the testing of hauliers at the border and of secondary school staff and pupils at very short notice and the need for a third lockdown. This meant that simultaneously NHSTT was being challenged by the Prime Minister to scale faster, and the CO to slow down **[DH7/09 INQ000528313, DH7/10 INQ000528316]**.
- 5.12 The centre of government, CO, HMT and No. 10 faced understandable challenges in managing competing scientific advice and the tension between managing the spread and impact of the virus and the economic impact of the measures taken to constrain the virus. The work of the COVID-19 Taskforce in late 2020 and 2021 to co-ordinate