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# Good governance during COVID-19: learning from the experience of Scottish Local Authorities



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On that tension, one chief executive offered the following perspective:

“We were getting no advance insight from the Scottish Government around what was going to happen next in terms of public health measures to be put in place, so we couldn’t brief our members in advance of the public announcements. This created a suspicion amongst members, that its own staff were not keeping them briefed – when in reality, their own staff had no advance notice either. As a staff base, and a delivery partner of Scottish Government being informed at the same as the public, was hugely frustrating and unhelpful.”



One chief executive was directly critical of what was felt to be an unnecessarily centralised approach by the Scottish Government:

“The public face of the pandemic for both governments, was their respective political leader. In Scotland’s case, that was the First Minister. It was clear from a delivery partner perspective, that the political involvement in all the decision-making associated with the response was all pervading and on some occasions, the political “optics” seemed the guiding force. And of course, because of the 24/7 media world we now live in, the respective national political leaders were centre stage of that 24/7 media world. In the gold command structures put in place by the Scottish Government, there was no scope for any departure from the nationally set approach, which was an unrelenting single focus on health harm rather than the 4 harms approach that was claimed. There was no real local decision-making and no real opportunity to influence the response actions to be taken. It was a here it is and it’s to be implemented. Since devolution in Scotland, there has been a growing tension between Scottish Government and local government and the pandemic has exacerbated that tension not only between respective politicians but also across officials. Local political leaders were being held to account for decisions they had no locus in and privately were being criticised by the Government for not doing enough to support the response, when they were not being treated as a partner in the response.”

