

## **Annex D: Rule 9 Request to be provided to Chief Executives of COSLA Members**

Annex D contains questions which the COSLA should provide to the Chief Executives of the Scottish councils within the COSLA's membership.

1. The purpose of these requests is to assist the Covid-19 Inquiry to gain an overarching understanding of the roles and responsibilities of Scottish councils as far as this is relevant to matters within the scope of Module 2 and 2A. The Provisional Outline of Scope for Module 2 can be found [here](#). The Provisional Outline of Scope for Module 2A can be found [here](#). The requests at this stage are not an exhaustive list of the areas the Inquiry is examining for the purposes of Module 2 and 2A and are intended to be high level. As such, the Inquiry may be in contact again with further requests for information and underlying documentary evidence in relation to Module 2 and 2A and/or other Modules.
2. For the purposes of this request the statement should focus upon the period of time between the following two dates ("the specified period"):
  - A. 21 January 2020, which is the date on which the WHO published its 'Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) Situation Report - 1'.
  - B. 30 April 2022, which is the date when the remaining Covid-19 restrictions were lifted in Scotland.
3. If there are matters that you consider are relevant to the Provisional Outline of Scope for Module 2 and 2A, but fall outside of the proposed date frame, please identify those matters in your response.

### **Local Restrictions**

4. Were any local restrictions, in addition to the national restrictions, imposed in your Council? If so, please:
  - a. Please provide a list, and the dates of, all local restrictions;  
[Aberdeenshire Council implemented only those local restrictions imposed by the Scottish Government. A timeline of the Covid-19 milestone dates is available on the Scottish Parliament Information Centre \(SPICe Spotlight\). This](#)

contains links to the restrictions and guidance issued by the Scottish Government.

- b. Please provide an outline of the framework regarding the decision-making for the imposition of local restrictions

The only local restrictions that were imposed, were those set out by the Scottish Government. The update Reports to Full Council charted the restrictions that were in place.

- c. Please identify the input of representatives of your Council into the decisions of the Scottish Government to impose local restrictions

Aberdeenshire Council was not involved in the decisions of the Scottish Government to impose local restrictions. The Council was asked for anecdotal feedback on the impact of the restrictions that the Scottish Government were going to put in place.

- a. Please identify whether, and if so which, representatives of your Council attended meetings with the Scottish Government to discuss the imposition of local restrictions.

The Leader and the Chief Executive attended teleconferences with the Scottish Government on the imposition of or changes to local restrictions. These were very much Scottish Government and public health led.

- a. Please identify whether representatives from your Council provided any information or evidence to the Scottish Government in respect of the decisions that were taken regarding the imposition of local restrictions.

Information and evidence in respect of decisions on local restrictions was provided by public health data and expert advisory bodies brought in by the Scottish Government as opposed to Aberdeenshire Council.

- d. Explain whether representatives of your Council agreed with the decisions and/or reasoning of the Scottish Government's decision to impose or extend local restrictions.

Not asked to agree or participate in decision-making but consulted on impacts at a local level.

5. Please outline any instances, if applicable, where funding implications impacted upon the decisions to impose or extend local restrictions.

Aberdeenshire Council implemented only those local restrictions imposed by the Scottish Government and therefore funding was not a consideration.

6. Please explain whether representatives from your Council, or the Scottish Government of its own volition, considered the impact that local restrictions would have on 'different groups of people.' By this, the Inquiry means at risk and vulnerable people and those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. Please provide a high-level overview of:

- a. how such categories of people, if any, were identified;

The support needs of all residents including those at risk, vulnerable and those with protected characteristics were considered and addressed through the establishment Grampian Humanitarian Assistance Centre (GHAC).

- b. any key communications or meetings between your Council and Scottish Government relating to discussions on (i) different groups of people; and (ii) the potential impact of NPIs on such groups;

No

- c. Any documents or submissions produced by your Council for the Scottish Government relating to discussions on (i) different groups of people; and (ii) the potential impact of NPIs on such groups;

There was a national dashboard set up that was populated on a weekly basis.

- d. Any methods by which your Council monitored the effect of the pandemic or the response to the pandemic on the different categories of people identified.

The dashboard was considered at the Special Strategic Leadership Team.

- e. Please outline the process by which your Council canvassed the views or response of the public to NPIs and whether, and if so how, this was communicated to the Scottish Government.

There was no formal public consultation by the Council in respect of non-pharmaceutical interventions, but the Council was able to gauge the views of residents and businesses from the queries and representations it received through telephone, email and social media contact.

- f. Please explain the role played, if any, by representatives of your Council in discussions with the Scottish Government on the impact of the border with England in the imposition of local restrictions. Please provide an outline of any specific occasions that the border with England caused difficulties surrounding the operation of local restrictions

There were none.

## **Enforcement**

7. Please provide a list of all non-pharmaceutical interventions (“NPIs”) which your Council had responsibility to enforce. NPIs include:

- a. The lockdowns in Scotland
- b. Local restrictions
- c. [Sector Specific Interventions](#)
- d. Working from home
- e. Reduction of person-to-person contact
- f. Social distancing
- g. [Licensing](#)
- h. The use of face coverings
- i. Travel in and out of Scotland (including any consideration of the border with England)
- j. The initial development of Test and Protect
- k. The certification and app systems rolled out by the Scottish Government
- l. Repatriation

8. Do you feel you had:

- a. Sufficient guidance from the Scottish Government to explain your role in the enforcement of NPIs;

[In the initial stages of the pandemic the time lag between the announcement of restrictions and the required guidance being issued was problematic but this was mitigated from July 2020 onwards with the inclusion of expert advisory groups in the consultation and drafting process.](#)

- b. Sufficient funding to fulfil your role in respect of enforcement of NPIs.

[The Council initially provided funding to meet the costs associated with Covid-19. Scottish Government funding was provided at a later date and this was](#)



sufficient in respect of the costs incurred. In terms of lessons learned it would perhaps be worth considering the timing of funding for future events of this nature and duration.

9. Please provide a high-level overview of your Council's interaction with the NPCC or local police force in respect of enforcement of the Coronavirus legislation and regulations.

Working Protocols were put in place with local police force which generally worked well with both organisations supporting each other through joint visits and sharing of information. There were a few occasions however, where advice provided by Police Officers was incorrect. This was however, mainly resolved through the establishment of agreed joint working protocols.

### **Public Health Communications**

10. Please outline the role your Council played in public health messaging. Please outline:

- a. Whether your Council issued public health messages over the course of the Pandemic;

From the early days of the pandemic, we were in regular contact with public health colleagues locally, in order to share and reflect health messaging in our comms. This was through either direct correspondence with public health in the early days, or public health involvement in communications groups laterally.

- b. Whether the Scottish Government, or Public Health Scotland, provided guidance to assist with public health messaging at a local level;

National public health messaging was shared with local partners through the local Public Health Teams, and Scottish Government communications cells were created to support national messaging being fed into local communications.

- c. Whether you monitored understanding of local public health messages, and whether there were any instances of confusion in respect of what regulations or guidance applied to your particular Council;

We monitored trends of comments on social media and used data from public health experts to support communications in respect of pockets of compliance issues. Confusion arose in events where there were discrepancies on each side of a local authority boundary, such as when Aberdeen City was placed into

a forced lockdown in Aug 2020, but Aberdeenshire wasn't. As a result of large numbers of people who move across the boundary daily, there was considerable confusion about how/if people were able to move for work, for medical appointments, for education etc.

- d. Whether messaging of the Scottish Government, Public Health Scotland, or the UK Government, caused confusion to members of the public living in your Council;

Issues with confusion about national messaging came later in the pandemic, where there was national chatter about confusion when parts of the UK moved out of restrictions/testing etc sooner than others. This will be reflected nationally and was not specific to Aberdeenshire.

- e. Whether and how members of the public in your Council could seek assurance as to what measures specifically applied to them;

All local authorities were clear that their main role throughout the pandemic was in signposting to national guidance. As a result, we created a web-based portal for Aberdeenshire residents to get help and advice, as well as for communities to support each other, we established a dedicated phone helpline, we set up a staff communications micro-site with regular bulletins (at one point 7 days a week) for staff, regularly updated social media and created dedicated sections on our Council website. These all pointed to national and Scottish guidance as well as regulation.

- f. What steps were taken to ensure that different religious or faith groups, or those that speak a language other than English or Scottish, were catered for in the use of public health messaging undertaken by your Council.

We were regular and proactive in sharing resources translated into a range of languages. We worked with equalities colleagues and area teams to direct translated information to the relevant communities. Most of these were national assets which the Scottish Government translated and produced. We also created a video (which was updated) on how to access council services during the pandemic in BSL.

## **Lessons learned**

11. In respect of any of the above questions, please explain any 'lessons learned' and whether this changed the actions of your Council over the course of the pandemic.

Aberdeenshire Council informally reviewed the effectiveness of its response to Covid-19 in July 2020.

The reflection and learning from the response to the pandemic has been used to inform a refreshed approach to emergency planning and resilience across the authority. These have been incorporated in the revised Emergency Planning and Resilience Framework and the Generic Emergency Plan that were approved on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

The informal review highlighted the importance of clarity of roles and responsibilities, the empowerment of workstream leads, collaborative working and communication and these were incorporated in the revised Framework.

The technology available to the Council was a major asset during the response, enabling the Council's governance arrangements to remain in place, albeit meetings were virtual. It was, however, recognised that in the initial response phase there was a lack of skills, knowledge and expertise in terms of the various tools at its disposal, although this lessened over time

The response from individuals, the third sector and a wide variety of community groups highlighted the importance of maintaining those relationships in peace time and inviting them to the Table at the outset of a response.

For a major incident or emergency that is likely to be prolonged in nature (months or years), there is a question about how and when organisations identify when it has ceased being an emergency and has instead moved to a "new operating model".