

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 are 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.

Below are the specific dates when Renfrewshire Council was operating at a different level from the national level or the level that of its neighbours:

7th September 2020 - Restrictions on meetings in indoor household settings extended to people living in Renfrewshire and East Dunbartonshire - The restrictions followed an increase in the number of coronavirus (COVID-19) reported in the Greater Glasgow & Clyde area

19th November– Renfrewshire was one of eleven Local Authority areas in Scotland who were placed in Tier 4 Restrictions. This came into effect on Friday 20 November 2020 and ended on 11 December 2020.

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

September 2020: The Council (through Chief Executive) was notified that there was concern about the increase of positive cases in Renfrewshire. The indication was that the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council would be invited to the Scottish Government Resilience Room on 7th September 2020.

November 2020: The Council (through the Chief Executive) was notified by the Scottish Government about concern for the rate of positive cases, on Thursday 12 November 2020. A Scottish National Incident Management Team was held on Friday 13 November, where the NHS flagged concerns about ICU levels and that things could not continue as they were in Tier 3 restrictions. The IMT meeting continued Monday. 16 November. On Saturday 14 November, Renfrewshire, West Dunbartonshire & East Renfrewshire were invited to a meeting on Sunday 15 November. The Government indicated that the case rate per 100,000 had to be below 50 and that if there are changes to the restrictions announced they would impact the Central Belt.

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

September 2020: The Council's Chief Executive and Leader of the Council were invited to a call with the Deputy First Minister to discuss a number of options.

The decision to implement the restrictions was communicated by the First Minister as part of the evening news.

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

September 2020: The Council's Chief Executive and Leader of the Council

November 2020: The Council's Chief Executive and Leader of the Council

- e. 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.

Scottish Government provided the key information from their sources with regard to case rates etc. The Council was not in a position to provide any counter information and therefore accepted the advice given.

- f. 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.

See Above answer / The Chief Executive who was in post has since left the Council and could not be consulted with.

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

There were no instances as decisions were made due to case numbers not due to funding issues.

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;

Operationally

At risk, vulnerable people, or groups of people with protected characteristics were identified through needs assessments conducted by the Local Assistance Teams, Neighbourhood Hubs and through services.

Individuals at risk identified through:

- Shielding List / Higher Risk List
- Test and Protect - self isolation lists
- School Test and Protect calls
- Neighbourhood Hubs
- Refer on to other services - Advice Works / Housing etc
- Contact Centre
- Shielding support mailbox
- NHS vaccinations
- COVID Risk assessments for staff

Examples of support provided:

Support Provided, to at risk, vulnerable and other groups with protected characteristics
Establishing a Bereavement Network to support people who had experienced loss
Prescription deliveries to people who weren't able to get to their pharmacy as a result of shielding
Provision of ongoing support to unpaid carers to access PPE and to continue to socialise and access training online
Establishing a helpline for people struggling with mental health issues during the pandemic
Neighbourhood Hubs which co-ordinated volunteers to help people with shopping, dog-walking etc. Through the Hubs, any issues identified which needed to be escalated to statutory services were done so effectively via the Council and HSCP staff
Increasing online befriending support via a local third sector partner
Provision of short term financial contribution to a post established to support BAME communities
Set Up Social Transport / Taxi process for those struggling to get to vaccination sites
Use of My Bus for general; public to travel to vaccination centres if struggling for financial reasons
Renfrewshire Council Food Service - for those shielding or struggling financially, or had no support network (included pet food, sanitary products etc) (tailored for specific groups e.g. Halal food)
Scot Government food service. (RC provided to support to take the food into people's homes or break down into smaller loads to support the infirm.
Tet and Protect self isolation calls for schools and families
Self Isolation support calls
Local Assistance Line - advice on all aspects of the pandemic e.g. shielding / self isolation
National Assistance Line - Helpline set up by Scottish Government
Money Advice - Advice Works
Social Care - referrals from Neighbourhood Hubs and Local Assistance Team
Children and Family Support
Mental health referrals to RAMH
Vaccination appointment support for staff
Scottish Welfare Fund - Crisis grants
Self Isolation support grants
Connected Scotland provision of devices for those digitally excluded
Vaccination Centres, including mobile vaccination centres in the community

Strategically

In March 2021, Council considered the initial findings from a community impact assessment that had been undertaken across Renfrewshire, in order to develop a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on local people and communities. The community impact assessment process also identified a requirement to continue to listen and learn from the experiences of local people, recognising that the impacts of the pandemic may emerge over time.

In the report in March 2021, an initial Social Renewal Plan was approved by Council. The plan set out the high-level actions that the Council and partners will take as we move forward from the pandemic with a clear focus on tackling inequality and improving wellbeing.

The Community Impact Assessment was initially reported to Council on 17th December 2020, with further reports building on this process in March 2021. The CIA comprised an assessment of national research on the emerging impacts of the pandemic, as well as dedicated research to explore local impacts of COVID. In addition to working with local partners to understand demand, there was also a Public Services Panel exercise run in both December 2020 and December 2021 to specifically explore the impact on local households. This survey based research was undertaken with a representative panel of 1,000 households locally, and provided an insight into the experiences of different groups of people locally. This work was also reported widely through fora such as Renfrewshire's Local Partnerships to explore the results with local communities in more detail. In addition to this, dedicated focus groups were set up with a range of equality groups where the initial Community Impact Assessment had indicated disproportionate impacts for some groups, including disabled people, women and black and minority ethnic households. The key findings of this work were presented to Council March 2021.

At the beginning of the pandemic when Renfrewshire Council was delivering its own food provision support, there were a number of very early exercises to inform how this food would be distributed – with some analysis completed of vulnerable children and families locally, and referral routes open to a wide range of frontline staff to ensure that provision was reaching people.

- 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;

Key Meetings:

- West of Scotland Regional Resilience Partnership
- Local self-Isolation Assistance Service
- LA Isolate and Support Delivery Leads Contact Group

Regularly updated guidance from Scot Government

In discussions with the Scottish Government, we were asked to demonstrate how we were ensuring ethnic minorities receive support during self-isolation. We also discussed practical solutions for those that were infirm, to secure provision of the required support directly into their homes. This ensured that all key groups and been considered and appropriate support was in place.

There were also a number of meetings with Scottish Government officials related to funding for food insecurity, and although relatively informal, a key focus of these meetings was about how the Council was reaching a range of different groups as part

of the Council's response to food insecurity initially, and latterly as part of discussions around Scottish Government's Winter Support Fund for financial insecurity.

- 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;



BAME support during
COVID19.docx

- Statistical returns produced weekly as requested by the Scottish Government and COSLA
 - Community Impact Assessment
- 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.
- Regular weekly updates on figures / demand to CMT
 - Regular updates at COG meetings
 - Statistic provided to Scot Gov and COSLA
 - Community Impact Assessment
 - Public Services Panel Information
- 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.
- Ad hoc feedback collected at Neighbourhood hubs
 - Feedback through Local Assistance Team on calls to those being supported
 - Councillor updates and feedback
 - Regular discussions at the forums outlined above
 - Specific Requests from Scottish Government through these forums
 - Community Impact Assessment
 - Public Services Panel Information
- 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
- Updates given through WOSRRP on behalf of the Scottish Government. This had little impact on local restrictions

Enforcement

6. Please provide a list of all non-pharmaceutical interventions (“NPIs”) which your Council had responsibility to enforce. NPIs include:
 - a. The lockdowns in Scotland – Police Scotland
 - b. Local restrictions – Police Scotland
 - c. Working from home – Police Scotland
 - d. Reduction of person to person contact – Local authority/Police Scotland
 - e. Social distancing – Police Scotland (Local Authorities in relevant businesses)
 - f. The use of face coverings – Police Scotland
 - g. Travel in and out of Scotland (including any consideration of the border with England) – Police Scotland
 - h. The initial development of Test and Protect – Local Authority assisted but NHS led
 - i. The certification and app systems rolled out by the Scottish Government – N/A
 - j. Repatriation - N/A

Renfrewshire Council's Public Protection service, through Environmental Health and Trading Standards were responsible for enforcing the restrictions and requirements on retail businesses. While this was a very specific remit, the service did also provide extensive advice and guidance to businesses, organisations (such as charities or religious groups) and members of the public around the legislation – in particular from July 2020 to August 2021 when the legislation was changing on average once a week as the threat level was reassessed.

Proactive advice was provided to the business sector at any significant change, detailing the specific legal restrictions imposed on businesses such as which sectors were permitted to trade, physical distancing/permitted numbers and opening hours. Proactive advice was also given to businesses to secure compliance on matters such as Test & Protect, the Vaccination scheme, ventilation, hygiene and cleanliness, toilet cleaning, counter terrorism and risk assessment (including the use of screens, encouraging the use of face coverings etc).

Reactive advice was given to any person making an enquiry and was usually around the use of Face Coverings (or the enforcement by Police Scotland), lockdowns and leaving home, travelling between areas, working from home, vaccinations and certification.

Around 920 enquiries were made of the service during this time, and around 2070 interventions (remote or physical) were undertaken at premises to check compliance with legislation.

7. Do you feel you had:
 - a. Sufficient guidance from the Scottish Government to explain your role in the enforcement of NPIs;

The swift constitution of the cross-profession, national, ETC-19 Liaison Group, by the Society of Chief Environmental Health Officers in Scotland (SOCOEHS) and the Society of Chief Trading Standards Officers in Scotland (SCOTSS) meant that we very quickly had a

framework in place whereby Enforcing Officers could check their understanding and application of the legislation and support businesses in their understanding of the relevant guidance. This took time to get the Governance in place which led to challenges early on. The clear split between Police Scotland and Local Authorities was also not clear at times, with the public believing that local authorities were responsible for all enforcement e.g. face-coverings where the legislation as clear that only Police Scotland could enforce and issue Fixed Penalty Notices.

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

Appropriate funding was provided for the initial set up of Test and Protect as Officers were seconded directly to NHS to assist. Funding was also provided for the Community Testing that Renfrewshire Council led on (pilot Asymptomatic Test Site in Johnstone in December 2020).

All other works including interventions for businesses was undertaken using existing resource and funding.

8. 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.

There were excellent local communications between Renfrewshire Council and Police Scotland to ensure consistency in approach through Operation Talla. Good relations already existed and at an operational level, the Trading Standards and Licensing Manager liaised with Police Scotland on a frequent basis.

At a strategic level, the Divisional Commander (Chief Superintendent) attended both Emergency Management Team and Corporate Management Team meetings on a weekly basis (or as required).

Officers from Public Protection also attend Operation Talla Gold Command meetings on a fortnightly basis.

Public Health Communications

9. 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;

Yes – the issuing of public health messaging was a key focus for our communications team during the pandemic, particularly in 2020 and into the first half of 2021.

Examples of communications activity and messaging issued included:

- sharing Scottish Government and NHS public-health advice around stopping the spread of the virus, Test and Protect, Shielding advice and support and wider available support to individuals and businesses
- updates on the introduction and lifting of national and local restrictions

- information around local Covid testing centres and home testing
- information around local vaccination centres
- targeted comms around milestones such as schools and council offices reopening
- staff communications reflecting government guidance on ways of working
- text messages and letters to parents/carers at schools where contact tracing was active
- fliers or letters to residents or businesses directly affected by specific developments (ie Covid test centres being set up in a particular area)
- emails to residents subscribed to our e-news alerts
- media releases to local media outlets
- email and text updates to staff with public-health and organisational updates
- briefings to elected members

Channels and tactics used to deliver the above included a specially created section on our website with information on how Covid had impacted each area of council services, how to access financial or other support, and signposting to national public health advice and details of restrictions (a staff version was also set up).

Posts on the council's corporate social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube), community Facebook Groups and specially commissioned video content. We also worked closely with customer service colleagues to reply to questions received via our social channels and to signpost to official info where appropriate. A dedicated telephone helpline was also created as a source of information for those seeking advice and support for the most vulnerable.

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

Yes – the Scottish Government provided a regular supply of toolkits with digital and print assets to allow local authorities to share the central public health messages, and we made use of these.

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;

The comms team didn't undertake any formal measurement of public opinion/understanding; however we quickly established a social customer service operation which enabled us to closely monitor social media comments and sentiment and assess message reach and interaction on our Covid-related posts and provide clarity where appropriate. This gave us some insight into how well understood the messaging was and allowed us to consider any scope we had to tailor our approach to fit that.

In what was often a very fast-moving environment, there were some instances of delay between public announcements (both from UK and Scottish Government) and the detail of the guidance being updated on their public websites and so we were not able to update and signpost local audiences with the detail until that point.

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;

Undoubtedly, there was some confusion over the rules and restrictions among local audiences, but this was an inevitable by-product of the situation and especially when the advice was fast changing, and government messaging was designed to reduce that. Such an example included travelling across boundaries to provide childcare/caring responsibilities.

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

Wherever restrictions were updated (such as when we had the Levels system) we signposted from our channels to the relevant web content on the Scottish Government or NHS website for our area. There was also the dedicated telephone helpline and customer service operation. We established extended hours of operation for both social customer service and the communications and marketing team. We also ensure Elected Members were provided with regular updates to ensure they could update their constituents if asked as a reliable source of information and ensure any key community partners were kept updated such as community councils, community groups and third sector, as well as schools, council and HSCP staff with a public facing role.

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.

Renfrewshire Council has a contract with an external company to provide free telephone interpreting services. This is a 24-hour service with access to around 150 languages. We can also ensure documents are available in large print, audio, Braille or alternative languages when requested.

When browsing the council website, foreign language speakers are invited to use Google translate or Babelfish web services which translate the pages into other languages. We were cognisant of our local demographic in our communications and were aware of toolkits from partners, NHS Scotland in particular, that provided bespoke communications in different languages.

Public Protection had a nominated Single Point of Contact (SPOC) through whom all queries throughout the Council routed, regardless of where they came from. The SPOC also answered queries from internal stakeholders around compliance with restrictions, working with other members of the management team where required. Internal queries included checking eligibility for funding for Economic Development, advising Education (Children's Services) around end of term celebrations, advising Land Services on restrictions which could apply to public parks, advising Licensing on restrictions applicable to Liquor and Civic Government licence holders, working with partners in Land/Licensing/Roads/Planning to ensure hospitality areas could open outside areas with ease, advising services on entry to private property when this was restricted (e.g. building services on whether they could carry out non-emergency repairs at certain times), working with the corporate Events Team to devise a programme of

resilient events for the Renfrewshire population which could go ahead regardless of changes to control levels.

Lessons learned

10. 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.

Public Protection made the decision early to proactively seek email addresses for businesses in sectors, so that proactive advice could be issued. In part this was due to the overwhelming level of enquiries received which would follow the same pattern. Laterally a system of circa-weekly emails was issued to time with the relevant changes, and which broke advice and guidance down into FAQs.

Feedback from businesses showed that they largely wanted to comply and were simply worried about getting things wrong. The emails helped them to comply easily, and built a trusting relationship with businesses. When some requirements were brought in which were more controversial to certain sectors, we were able to secure compliance more easily than other areas simply due to the two-way dialogue with business. This was reflected in our enforcement statistics as we only issued 5 Prohibition Notices in total during the relevant period.

One of the key issues was terminology from Scottish Government daily briefings which did not translate into legislation or guidance that caused confusion with the public e.g. "non-essential businesses should close". The legislation only stated certain types of businesses, therefore if not detailed in legislation they couldn't be enforced and members of the public couldn't understand this. It got better as the pandemic went on, however, was a challenge for local authorities at the beginning.