

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

16. However, a 'one size fits all' approach to the next review of protection levels due by 7 June was unlikely to be effective or credible at a time when there was very low incidence in a number of mainland areas which met all the Level 1 criteria, and when there were virtually no cases in the island areas currently in Level 1 (which were due to move down to Level 0). It would also be vital to ensure continued confidence in the levels-based system (and willingness to comply with remaining restrictions such as physical distancing) at a time when public opinion had been led to expect a gradual fall in Levels.

17. In areas where the criteria were met for continuing to progress downward through the levels, it would therefore be difficult to justify not proceeding with these planned moves. In addition, the differences between the measures in place in Levels 2 and 1 would also be much less apparent, for most people, than between Levels 3 and 2 (although particular sectors – such as children's soft play areas – would be affected by a failure to move some areas to Level 1).

18. However, there were a number of mainland areas where the criteria for moving to Level 1 were demonstrably not yet met, and it would seem advisable for such areas to remain at Level 2 for the time being (or in the case of Glasgow City, to move to Level 2) – at least until the effects of the vaccination programme had begun to mitigate the increased case rates associated with the Delta variant. These areas were: City of Edinburgh, Clackmannanshire, Dundee City, East Dunbartonshire, East, North and South Ayrshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Midlothian, North and South Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and Stirling.

19. There were, however, a number of areas where a move from Level 2 to Level 1 would appear reasonable: Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Angus, Argyll and Bute, Dumfries and Galloway, East Lothian, Highland, Inverclyde, Moray, Perth and Kinross, Scottish Borders, West Dunbartonshire. In addition, Falkirk, Fife and West Lothian might be considered as part of this group, although they appeared more marginal (partly because they were all areas whose geography led to a significant amount of through traffic).

20. The First Minister, Mr Swinney and Mr Yousaf would determine the final list of local authorities to be included in each category. In general, however, it seemed both sensible and credible to adopt a differential approach along the lines set out above until the full effects of the Delta variant became clear, and for the First Minister to explain this reasoning to MSPs and the public in her planned statement to the Parliament that afternoon.

21. In discussion the following points were made:

- (a) The approach proposed appeared to be prudent and credible. It would be important to lay due emphasis, in presenting the proposed changes to Levels, on the changes that had taken place since the early months of 2021 in how individual cases and wider outbreaks were managed. Prior to the arrival of mass vaccination, the only alternative had been the 'lockdown' restrictions seen throughout the winter months in most parts of the country (and only now coming to an end in Glasgow City – the last area at Level 3);