

Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People

SUPPORT FOR ISOLATION – LOCAL SELF-ISOLATION ASSISTANCE SERVICE

Purpose

1. To seek your agreement on a financial model for the delivery of the Local Self-Isolation Assistance Service to mid-January 2021.

Priority

2. Routine – though an early decision will support meeting COSLA's timescales over the course of next week to clear the governance requirements of the Settlement Distribution Group (SDG) relating to funding allocation; and to provide formal reassurance to local authority Directors of finance on the funding package for the service that commenced on 12 October.

Background

3. My submission of 9 October 2020 recommended commencement of the Local Self-Isolation Support Service from 12 October. From the 26 local authorities who have provided staffing returns through COSLA representatives to date, there are a reported 216 whole-time equivalent members of staff delivering the service nationally. Initial data for the service is anticipated to be available by the end of week commencing 19 October 2020 with a more detailed data return to be provided from early November on both inbound and outbound support calls.

4. That submission set out an indicative budget of £9.1 million annually to deliver the service, modelled on providing the initial service to approximately 200 positive cases daily and around 1500 of their close contacts. The prioritisation model agreed in response to that advice is intended to ensure that given the volume of positive cases and close contacts, the service focuses on offering support to groups of people most likely to require it.

5. The existing National Assistance Helpline, and associated interventions, have been funded by 'Support for People' funding as well as additional funding provided as part of the Communities Fund. This funding agreement came to an end at the end of September. COSLA and SOLACE representatives, and officials, have been engaging to consider how an extension of this funding could contribute to provision of a 'two-way' service offer, the National Assistance Helpline and the Local Self-Isolation Assistance Service delivering support for both 'inbound' and 'outbound' contact.

Support for People – Funding Extension

6. The National Assistance Helpline commenced on April 14 and provides a single point of contact for requests for support relating to self-isolation. Calls are made to a central phone line which then routes each call to the relevant local authority. A range of support can be provided, where the person calling does not have informal or other support whilst self-isolating, including food, essential medication and referral into pre-existing statutory or local services. In the six months of operation to date, the service has received just over 54,000 calls.

7. Including calls routed through the National Assistance Helpline, local authorities report having received approximately 230,000 phone calls related to Covid-19.

8. It is clear that with the recent rise in positive tests for Covid-19, and the linked close contacts who have been asked to self-isolate, even in the best case scenario, demand for the service is likely to continue to rise over the coming months.

9. The continuation of the National Assistance Helpline, and the delivery of the Local Self-Isolation Assistance Service, would provide both reactive and proactive routes for engaging people self-isolating with the practical or financial support they may require to adhere to a request to self-isolate. As part of a rationalisation exercise to formalise both support services into one offer and to develop the service to enable both the potential for expansion and to embed new targeted forms of support into the delivery model, we recommend that the National Assistance Helpline is extended to mid January 2021.

10. This extension will ensure that the vital support needed by people self-isolating continues to be provided whilst officials consider additional support proposals that can expand the offer as part of one service framework for Supporting Isolation from January 2021. This proposed framework will be informed by both the work of the Compliance Advisory Group and the Government's broad strategic direction in response to Covid-19.

11. COSLA and SOLACE representatives are amenable to this approach and, if you are content, are willing to continue to engage with officials on options for expanding the support offer to additional groups of people who have needs not met through the existing service offer. Early work has been commissioned through the Test and Protect Design Pathway to formalise the service structure and further advice will follow on options for the expansion of this service offer in due course.

12. The cost of the continuation of the National Assistance Helpline to 11 January would be £596,850. We recommend that you agree to the extension of the helpline to 11 January.

Local Self-Isolation Assistance Service - Update

13. As you know, the Local Self-Isolation Assistance Service commenced on 12 October and delivers an initial triaging call, as well as two follow up calls, to people who are required to self-isolate. The purpose of these calls is to ensure that people

self-isolating can access support services to enable them to comply with self-isolation guidance including:

- food and food deliveries;
- essential medication;
- access to statutory services including through social work departments;
- access to other local services including emotional support or community volunteering services.

14. NHS National Services Scotland and Public Health Scotland continue to work towards refinement of the data feed that provides the list to local authorities of people in their locality who have been asked to self-isolate.

15. 26 of the 32 local authority teams have reported confirmed staffing numbers for this week. Of those who have reported staffing numbers, the total staffing reported by those 26 local authorities is 216 full-time equivalent staff nationally delivering the service.

16. Officials have agreed an interim reporting template to be completed by each local authority weekly covering call volumes including initial triaging calls, follow up calls and failed contacts. This interim reporting process will be in place for the first few weeks of delivery and we'll provide a note in due course on initial service volumes.

17. Health and Social Care Analysis officials are in the process of agreeing a more advanced reporting template that will be in place for early November. The data returned from this exercise will give a more detailed assessment of the support required with self-isolation and inform further advice on potential expansion of the service offer.

Local Self-Isolation Assistance Service - funding

18. As you know, COSLA and officials have been engaging to agree a funding proposal for the Local Self-Isolation Assistance Service. As set out in my previous submission of 9 October, COSLA and SOLACE are amenable to an interim funding level to support the delivery of the service to January and to continue to engage, informed by the output of data returns and the emerging compliance evidence base, on a broader service offering.

19. The annualised cost to deliver the service to up to 200 index cases and 1500 close contacts per day was modelled at £9.1 million. Whilst evidence on demand for the service, and outputs, will emerge as part of the interim delivery, it is clear that with the volumes of index cases and close contacts notified by contact tracing teams daily of the requirement to self-isolate at current levels, the demand for the service is likely to be significantly higher than this indicative costing.

20. However, whilst many of the support services that are accessible through this service will provide support to people in the priority groups set out in my previous submission, officials are working to consider further types of support that would support people outwith these groups to comply with self-isolation guidance.

21. As part of developing these further proposals, and to ensure that the vital support individuals require offered through this service is available, we recommend that you agree to fund the service to 11 January. The cost from 12 October 2020 to 11 January 2021 of this is £2,275,000.

22. COSLA representatives note that local authority Directors of Finance (DoFs) are content with a formula based distribution for this interim service. There may be a requirement to consider a volume based funding package as part of the longer term approach to meet local demand. Further proposals on this will follow with the advice on the expanded service offer to commence from January 2021.

Budget

23. The costs set out in this submission are not budgeted and as such will be funded, along with other Covid-19 related costs, from Health Covid-19 funding consequentials which are currently being confirmed with the UK Government. We will review the funding position again as part of the January 2021 review.

Recommendations

24. We recommend that you:
- note the contents of this advice;
 - agree to the proposal to extend the Support for People funding for the National Assistance Helpline to 11 January 2021, at a cost of £596,850;
 - agree to the proposal to the interim funding arrangement for the Local Self-Isolation Assistance Service to 11 January 2021 at a cost of £2,275,000;
 - note that the costs set out in this submission are not budgeted and as such will be funded, along with other Covid-19 related costs, from Health Covid-19 funding consequentials which are currently being confirmed with the UK Government;
 - note that if you're content, we'll provide a draft minute for comment to form the basis of an update to Cabinet Secretaries on the delivery of these services and how they meet early proposals on the strategy to increase levels of compliance across the general population; and
 - note that further advice will be provided in relation to a longer term model for support for isolation in line with the broader strategy in relation to improving compliance to prevent transmission.
25. I am happy to discuss further, if helpful.

NR

Testing and Contact Tracing Policy Division
Covid Public Health Directorate
19 October 2020

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

Copy List:	For Action	For Comments	For Information		
			Portfolio Interest	Constituent Interest	General Awareness
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport			X		
Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing			X		
Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government			X		
DG Health and Social Care Richard Foggo Joe Griffin Stephen Gallagher Caroline Lamb Richard McCallum Jamie MacDougall Niamh O'Connor John Nicholson DD Test and Protect Pathways John-Paul Liddle NR NR NR NR Liz Lloyd NR Lisa McDonald Jeanette Campbell					