

KS

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ADVISORY CELL

(5th Meeting)

22nd June 2020(Meeting held via Microsoft Teams)**PART A (Public)**

Note: The Minutes of this meeting comprise Part A only.

Monitoring  
Metrics.

A1. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (the Cell), with reference to Minute No. A3 of its meeting of 15th June 2020, received and noted a paper, entitled 'PH Intelligence – Exit Monitoring Metrics', dated 18th June 2020, which had been prepared by the Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Health Informatics Team.

The Cell was informed that there had been no new positive cases for COVID-19 over the weekend of 20th and 21st June 2020. There remained 5 positive cases, all of whom were asymptomatic and were in self-isolation. These individuals' direct contacts had been identified and had been tested over the weekend.

The Cell noted that the aforementioned paper provided details of the outcomes of PCR testing by date, age of the patient and whether they had displayed symptoms or were asymptomatic. It also identified whether patients had underlying medical conditions and whether they were accommodated in the care sector. The rates of hospitalisation and admission to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) were also set out and it was noted that since the start of the pandemic in Jersey, there had been 35 people with a COVID-19 infection in hospital, of whom eight had been treated in the ICU.

The Cell recalled that the modelling of COVID-19 that had initially been undertaken, had assumed a 50 per cent symptomatic infection rate of which four per cent were assumed to require hospitalisation and one per cent ICU admission. Based on the actual numbers over the last months, it was questioned whether further analysis of the data was required. It was noted that, due to the relatively small figures and the variety of mitigation measures that had been introduced, for which no modelling assumptions were in place, this could be challenging. Demand for hospital beds had been lower than anticipated, but it was acknowledged that shielding of the vulnerable had been effective in preventing the transmission of the virus to that group and it was emphasised that ongoing shielding would be extremely important, whilst the virus remained a threat. There were 92 beds currently available at the hospital, with additional capability at the Nightingale wing and within the community.

The mitigations, which had been put in place, had also assisted in keeping the numbers of positive cases of COVID-19 low and it was acknowledged that there was now a greater wealth of experience and intelligence on-Island and internationally in respect of the virus than had been the position several months previously.

It was reasonable to assume that the situation in respect of COVID-19 would be better in the summer and it was noted that the possibility of a global 2nd wave during the winter had been discussed. As a consequence, it was important that Ministers were cognisant that the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell's advice might need to be

adapted to take these changing circumstances into account as the year progressed.

It was accepted that the restrictions, which had been imposed as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, were having a negative impact on the Island economy and potentially on Islanders' long-term physical and mental health. However, it was also acknowledged that as those restrictions were lifted, in order to improve the welfare of both Islanders and the economy, infection rates and the number of hospital admissions would be likely to increase. Consequently, the Cell emphasised the ongoing importance of measures such as shielding, physical distancing and hand hygiene.

Border policy. A2. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell, with reference to Minute No. A4 of its meeting of 15th June 2020, received and noted a range of papers, relating to proposed COVID-19 border controls during the safer travel period, *inter alia*, Ministerial briefing slides and an interim review of the border testing trial, dated 19th June 2020, the Chair of the Cell's Executive Memo of Advice, dated 15th June 2020 and request for advice from Ministers, dated 22nd June 2020.

The Cell recalled that, at its meeting on 15th June, it had discussed the proposed scope of a border policy, which would seek to balance the risks to public health by allowing some travel, which would inevitably lead to the importation of some individuals with the virus, with the wellbeing that the ability to travel would bring to the Island's residents and economy. As a step between the current essential travel policy and the resumption of normal travel, it was proposed to have a period of safer travel, which would be based on 4 controls *viz* detailed guidance, managing travel providers, managing borders and close and continued contact with travellers. These would be underpinned by the close monitoring of public health intelligence and data, together with planned screening at scale, with testing of all people in the community who were symptomatic.

The Cell noted three potential approaches to active border management. Largely based upon the current trial, which was being undertaken at the airport, arrivals would take a PCR test on arrival, or potentially pre-departure, subject to this being viable and then be required to enter into quarantine until the results of that test were obtained. Provided that the results were negative, a further PCR test would be carried out on day 5. Potentially with effect from early July, arrivals could take a PCR test on arrival and then enter into quarantine until the results of that test were obtained. At a later date, once there was confidence that inward travel was not causing significant increases in the spread of the virus, it could be possible to move to targeted, risk-based PCR testing of new arrivals. Consideration could also be given to entering into air bridge arrangements with other jurisdictions, as appropriate and once there was more clarity around what the charter flight operators might wish to do.

The Cell noted that its advice was sought by Ministers on the following –

- the capability of the safer travel proposal to address the balance of harms, in line with the COVID-19 Strategy;
- the proposal to commence the safer travel period when on-Island transmission was controlled, with a single PCR test at day zero; and
- the proposal to move immediately to replace the current border testing regime with PCR testing at days zero and 5.

The Cell was informed that no-one, who had participated in the pilot testing regime at the airport, had been tested positive. Work was ongoing to source new, rapid, PCR testing technology, which could potentially be available by the end of July and would be a 'game changer', enabling results to be obtained in 12 to 24 hours, rather than 24 to 48 hours or longer.

It was noted that testing and quarantine requirements varied by country. Much of continental Europe had opened its borders from 15th June, some jurisdictions using temperature checks at the airports. Island jurisdictions, such as Madeira, Cyprus and Iceland required arriving passengers to provide a negative PCR test. Discussions were ongoing with officials in Madeira, who had provided a list of laboratories from which they would accept a pre-departure negative test certificate. In light of the number of Islanders who had close links with Madeira, it was suggested that this might be an appropriate jurisdiction with which to establish an air bridge. Madeira was also able to obtain its test results more rapidly than Jersey, which was an issue that officers were seeking to resolve, particularly as the requirement to quarantine when awaiting a result would be a barrier to business visitors, who, in normal circumstances, would arrive in Jersey in the morning and leave by the evening.

Mr. M. Thomas, Chief Executive Officer, Ports of Jersey, informed the Cell that EasyJet, which had initially expressed the wish to fly into the Island from 3rd July 2020, had now indicated that it could not commence operations before the 20th July, because of the lack of certainty around the testing regime. British Airways had mooted a start date of 10th July, but this had not been confirmed. Unless the Government was prepared to meet the cost of the border testing arrangements, the operators would need certainty that they could sell sufficient tickets. In the view of the airlines, Jersey was falling out of alignment with countries in the European Union, which posed a risk, because the Island was not integral to their operations and they might decide to relocate their fleet until the Autumn, after which it would be more difficult to encourage them to return.

The Cell was reassured by Mr. S. Skelton, Director of Strategy and Innovation, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department, that if increased volumes of passengers were permitted to travel to Jersey, it would be possible to scale up the testing. However, the challenge would be to establish the testing centres. Mr. J. Blazeby, Director General, Justice and Home Affairs Department, indicated that he had been in conversation with Condor Ferries in respect of the possibility of constructing a testing facility at the harbour, if necessary, mindful that this could be costly.

Having discussed at some length the foregoing and on the basis of information provided around the significant impact on the economy and health in the short, medium and longer term, the Cell decided to recommend a move to arriving passengers being required to undertake a PCR test on arrival (or prior to travel), without the need to enter into quarantine until the results were obtained. It was pleased to note that no passengers, who had participated in the pilot scheme, had tested positive for COVID-19. However, the Cell agreed that as much testing as possible should continue, in order to retain public confidence and agreed that it was for Ministers to decide where responsibility for paying for the testing should lie.

Ms. S. Davis, Senior Statistician, Statistics Jersey, informed the Cell that if the decision was taken, with immediate effect, to move to day zero testing, this would interrupt the baseline for information captured in the last 3 to 4 weeks, which had been obtained from testing at days zero, 4 and 7. Dr. I. Muscat, Consultant in Communicable Disease Control, reminded the Cell that as mitigation factors were lifted across Europe and on-Island, transmission rates would grow and it was important to be mindful that the prevalence of the virus in Jersey could increase.

The majority of the members of the Cell agreed the aforementioned recommendation, but acknowledged the view expressed by Ms. Davis.

Safe Exit Framework – Level 2. of its meeting of 8th June 2020, received and noted a paper, dated 18th June 2020, entitled ‘Level 2 policy update proposal: for STAC discussion’, which had been prepared by Dr. M. Mathias, Group Director for Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department.

The Cell recalled that, on 12th June 2020, Jersey had entered into level 2 of the COVID-19 Safe Exit Framework. It had been publicised that, as part of the level 2 policy, the requirement for people to keep to a safe physical distance of 2 metres from people outside their household would be kept under review and, if it proved safe, might be reduced to one metre. The Minister for Health and Social Services had indicated that, subject to the medical advice remaining in favour, he intended to replace the safe distance guidance of 2 metres on 25th June 2020, with advice to keep a minimum of one metre distance as a minimum.

Dr. Mathias informed the Cell that over the weekend of 20th / 21st June 2020, the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture had sought clarification that the move from 2 metres to one would be reflected across guidance provided to businesses and would mean that it would be possible to have people from different households eating at the same table in a restaurant. He had also requested that the current public health restrictions on restaurants opening beyond 10.30 p.m. should be lifted, on the basis that the requirements imposed by the Licensing Assembly should be sufficient.

It was acknowledged that the move to one metre safe distance would be of assistance to the hospitality sector, but, where possible, 2 metres was preferable and the Cell expressed reluctance to deal on an *ad hoc* basis with individual requests to ‘tweak’ the requirements, which could lead to it being overwhelmed with requests for consideration. It felt that this was a matter that would be a matter for guidance issued by the Medical Officer of Health, but the Cell indicated that if the changes did not lead to large groups of people gathering indoors and not adhering to physical distancing requirements, it had no strong opposition to the proposal.

It was suggested that the levels contained within the COVID-19 strategy and the schedule for moving through these levels, were now out of kilter with the data. Not all people had been adhering to the 2 metre physical distancing requirement, but there had not been an upsurge in the number of cases of the virus in Jersey. People were engaging in physical contact, of varying levels, with one another and it was important that any guidance reflected the reality of how Islanders were living. It was suggested that people should be urged to restrict the number of individuals, from outside their household, with whom they had close physical contact and to avoid routine hand shaking and cheek kissing.

In the event of a marked increase in the number of cases of COVID-19, it was agreed that it was important to have the facility to increase restrictions, in short order, if necessary.

Next meeting. A4. On the basis that it had not been possible to complete consideration of all items on the agenda, it was agreed that the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell would reconvene later during the week of 22nd June 2020 for that purpose.