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SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ADVISORY CELL

(9th Meeting)

13th July 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. A1 of its meeting of 6th July 2020, received and noted a paper, entitled 'PH Intelligence – Exit Monitoring Metrics', dated 9th July 2020, which had been prepared by the Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Health Informatics Team. The Cell was informed that since the dashboard had last been updated, there had been 4 positive cases for COVID-19 identified over the weekend of 11th and 12th July 2020. Details of the cases were discussed, including method of identification and current circumstances.

Dr. I. Muscat, Consultant in Communicable Disease Control, informed the Cell that consideration would need to be given to how to deal with people with longstanding conditions which resulted in symptoms that were similar to COVID-19, such as a chronic cough, due to an underlying respiratory problem, or hay fever. He suggested that it would be necessary to weigh up the risks posed by those people travelling and take into consideration whether, or not, they were arriving from a 'red' or 'green' country.

The Cell also received and noted statistics, dated 9th July 2020, which had been provided by the Office of the Superintendent Registrar, on the number of deaths registered in Jersey. There had been 31 deaths registered in the Island from COVID-19, of which 12 related to females and 19 to males. 97 per cent of those deaths had been in adults over the age of 60. Over the 28 days up to 5th July 2020, there had been 56 deaths in Jersey, of which only one was due to COVID-19. Of particular interest were the statistics for the year to 5th July when compared with the same figures for 2018 and 2019. In 2018 and 2019 there had been 447 and 394 deaths respectively, compared with 359 in 2020.

The Cell further received and noted a report, which had been prepared by Statistics Jersey on the Prevalence of SARS-CoV2 antibodies in Jersey and the outcome of the third round of the community antibody study. It was noted that the key finding was that the estimated prevalence rate of antibodies in the population was 4 per cent, which aligned with previous rounds of the study and also linked to findings from Spain where there had been many more positive cases of the virus, but seroprevalence was also at a comparable level. The Cell queried when the next longitudinal study would be undertaken. Ms. S. Davis, Senior Statistician, Statistics Jersey, indicated that she had been advised that the community serology programme had been paused, potentially for 3 months, because it was felt that to repeat it in 4 weeks would not be necessary, because of the relatively low number of cases, but that Mr. A. Heaven, Head of Policy (Testing

Workstream), would undertake a review and provide some recommendations for the Cell on the next steps.

The Cell received and noted a PowerPoint presentation, entitled 'Active cases and inbound travel data', which had been prepared, as at 10th July 2020, by Public Health Intelligence, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department. Dr. A. Muller, Director of Strategic Planning and Performance, indicated that, as at 10th July, the 47 direct contacts of people, who had tested positive for COVID-19, had been traced and that the tables summarised their progress through the 3 PCR tests. The Cell particularly noted the slide 'Inbound travel testing information', which provided details of the number of people who had arrived at the ports, indicated whether they had decided to self-isolate or be tested and gave the results of those tests, where they had been analysed and the average turnaround time for the results. Dr. Muller stated that confidence in the data was increasing and that more information was sought on the number of children arriving in the Island who were under the age of 11 and not subject to PCR testing.

The average turnaround times for tests, which were sent to the United Kingdom, varied between 25 and 47 hours, whereas the results of those analysed locally were available within one or 2 hours. The Cell questioned whether passengers would receive the results within those timeframes and was informed that the time was measured from the point at which the data was inputted to when it was received back from the laboratory. In the case of a negative result, the Cell understood that an automatic text message was sent, which would be almost instantaneous. In the case of a positive result, the relevant individual was telephoned by someone from the environmental health team. There were very few positive cases at the current time, so the results were communicated in short order.

Dr. Muscat indicated that it would not be possible to undertake all of the testing on-Island until August and it was expected that there would be a 'spike' in the number of arrivals into the Island and consequent demands on testing around the late August Bank Holiday. He expressed the wish to introduce 'pooled testing', which would enable groups of people to be tested with only one cartridge. If the test came back negative, everyone in the pool was clear. If positive, each member of the group would then be tested individually.

The Cell also received, for information, a paper prepared by Statistics Jersey, entitled 'Economic Indicators Week 27 – 2020'. Its attention was drawn to the number of people actively seeking work in the Island, which was lower than the previous week, but 1,080 higher than the comparable week in 2019.

The Cell noted the position and thanked officers for the updates.

Schools –
potential
guidance for
September.

A2. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell, with reference to Minute No. A3 of its meeting of 29th June 2020, welcomed Mr. M. Rogers, Director of Children's Safeguarding and Care, Mr. S. O'Regan, Group Director of Education, Mr. K. Posner, Director, Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department and Ms. L. Jones, Environmental Policy Officer, in connexion with a discussion paper, dated 10th July 2020, on the potential for all children to return to school on a full-time basis from September 2020.

Ms. Jones informed the Cell that there was currently no requirement for children of primary school age to physically distance, but they remained in year group 'bubbles' to restrict their contacts. As a consequence, most primary children had returned to school on a full-time basis, mindful that drop-off and collection times had been staggered. Officers from Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department would work with the primary head teachers over the summer to provide support to facilitate a return

to full hours and the provision of pre- and after-school activities, as previously.

In relation to the secondary schools, it was noted that a physical distance of at least one metre was required between all students and adults. Consequently, this restricted the number of children that could be accommodated in the classrooms and the schools had been unable to return to a situation where all children were able to attend school on a full-time basis. The secondary school head teachers had made it clear that it would not be possible to operate full timetables for all children in September, whilst the necessity to maintain a distance of at least one metre remained in place. Moreover, timetabling requirements, where students attended different subjects from their peers, would make it difficult to establish 'bubbles' or to stagger arrival, break and lunch times.

Accordingly, it was proposed that, whilst in teaching areas, pupils in the same year group would not need to maintain a physical distance of at least one metre, but should endeavour to do so outside of the teaching area. All teachers and school employees would be required to adhere to physical distancing and appropriate measures would be taken to reduce the likelihood of different year groups coming into close contact with each other. This could involve staggered start times and break times and defining different geographical areas of the school for use by different years.

The Cell was reminded that the week commencing 13th July 2020 was the last week of the summer term and was informed that the Minister for Education was eager to circulate a statement to parents and staff on the plans for the schools for September.

Dr. A. Muller, Director of Strategic Planning and Performance, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department, drew the attention of the Cell to a report, dated 2nd July 2020, from the Netherlands' National Institute for Public Health and the Environment ('RIVM'), which was researching the role played by children in the spread of the COVID-19 virus. At the start of the pandemic, all municipal public health services in the Netherlands had undertaken source and contact tracing and had monitored how many contacts had been infected. This had shown that source patients aged under 18 did not infect others and, as a consequence, in the Netherlands, no children under 18 were required to adhere to physical distancing. The Cell agreed that it would be of assistance for Dr. Muller to forward this report to the officers from Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department.

The Cell agreed that unless something exceptional were to occur over the summer, such as large numbers of cases of COVID-19 appearing across the Island, it would be beneficial for all children to return to school, as normal, in September. This message would remove some of the anxiety and uncertainty that currently existed in the community and it was important to be cognisant of the benefit to the economy and Islanders' mental wellbeing of enabling parents to return to work. The proposal contained within the discussion paper was agreed, thereby requiring adults to remain at least one metre away from students.

Mr. Posner informed the Cell that he was due to meet with colleagues from the Unions on 15th July 2020 and that it would be helpful to provide an official letter of guidance from the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell at this meeting, together with a presentation from Dr. Muller of the research findings from the Netherlands. It was agreed that a letter would be prepared and Dr. Muller indicated her willingness to attend the meeting.

On a related note, Mr. Rogers, indicated that Ms. R. Williams was preparing a business case for continuation activity around essential worker testing and he had asked her to consider the extent to which teaching staff could be included in such testing, particularly those in secondary school settings. It was noted that, across the education estate, there

were approximately 1,500 teachers and ancillary staff. Some concern was expressed that if someone within a school tested positive for COVID-19, it had the potential to cause alarm. The Cell was informed that officers were working with Ms. A. de Bourcier, Head of Environmental and Consumer Protection, in this regard and that template letters were being finalised that head teachers could send out in a timely and appropriate manner to parents in the case of anyone in a school setting testing positive for the virus.

The Cell thanked the officers from the Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department for attending and they withdrew from the meeting.

Guidance for
higher risk
individuals.

A3. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell heard from Ms. B. Sherrington, Head of Policy (Shielding work stream) in connexion with her Powerpoint presentation entitled 'Update: High Risk (Significantly Vulnerable) Levels 2 and 1 of the Safe Exit Framework'. Ms. Sherrington indicated that separate advice had been given to those significantly vulnerable to COVID-19 and as the transition to level 1 approached, consideration should be given to whether that group should continue to receive different advice from other Islanders, which was impacting on them economically and mentally.

A single database of those at high risk of COVID-19 had not already been in existence, so a significant piece of work had been undertaken by the primary care team, in consultation with General Practitioners ('GPs'), to create the same, thereby identifying those who would most benefit from a vaccine, once one became available. These people would be written to by their GP and letters could also be distributed from the oncology and other specialist clinics, as applicable.

The Cell noted that between 2 and 3 per cent of the whole population of Jersey fell into the high risk category, which included between 600 and 1,000 people of working age and 16 children. Level 2 guidance was that the children were not currently expected to attend school unless they would benefit more from being at school, rather than home, in which case they were advised to adhere to physical distancing and follow public health guidance. Employers were encouraged to be flexible and not to require employees to return to work if they were in the high risk category. The Cell urged caution and indicated that it was important to carefully phrase any messaging going into Level 1. The Cell advised that many of those in the high risk group were very motivated to return to work, but if they believed this would not be possible, it could have an adverse impact on their mental wellbeing. It was also noted that not all of the 600 to 1,000 people of working age were unable to work because of shielding. Some were currently incapable of so doing due to their underlying health condition. It was noted that the Social Security Department had indicated that Income Support would be available to those who were shielding.

Mindful that the Island was likely to move to level 1 at the end of July, it was felt that any decision to delay any change in advice for those in the high risk group should be for 4 weeks after that date, to enable any impact of the change to be assessed. The Cell provided guidance that it should be for individuals to assess the risk to them, in consultation with their GP, hospital doctor and employer and dependent on the nature of their work. If they did decide to return to work, they would be urged to avoid higher risk activities, such as using public transport and to follow physical distancing guidance. Members of the Cell expressed the view that these individuals would need to be provided with mental health support and emphasised that this had been a concerning time for them.

The Cell thanked Ms. Sherrington for her work in this regard.

Advice to the

A4. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell, with reference to Minute No. A2

9th Meeting
13.07.20

Council of
Ministers on
quarantine.

of its meeting of 22nd June 2020, received and noted electronic mail correspondence between Deputy R.J. Renouf of St. Ouen, the Minister for Health and Social Services, Mr. T. Walker, Director General, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department and Dr. S. Turnbull, Medical Officer of Health, in connexion with a query that had been raised at a meeting of the Council of Ministers by Senator S.Y. Mézec, Minister for Children and Housing, when discussing the Proposition of Deputy J.H. Young of St. Brelade, entitled 'Open Borders arrangements' (P.89/2020).

Senator Mézec had queried whether a compulsory quarantine period, whilst travellers awaited a negative PCR test result, was less safe than no quarantine. Dr. Turnbull had provided a draft response for consideration by the Cell, before being sent to Ministers. She had highlighted the balance of risks and the low likelihood of importing COVID-19 from the United Kingdom and had summarised the discussion that had taken place at the Cell's meeting on 22nd June 2020.

The members of the Cell indicated that they were happy with the content of Dr. Turnbull's response and requested the Acting Chair to send it to Mr. Walker and the Minister for Health and Social Services, advising them that the views contained therein were endorsed by the Cell.

Enhanced
COVID-19
exit strategy
communi-
cation
(P.88/2020)

A5. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell was informed that Deputy K.G. Pamplin of St. Saviour had lodged a Proposition, entitled 'Enhanced COVID-19 exit strategy communication' (P.88/2020 referred), which was due to be debated by the States Assembly during the week commencing 13th July 2020 and requested, *inter alia*, the Assembly to agree that a dedicated page on the gov.je website should be established, onto which the Cell's membership, minutes and evidence considered would be uploaded.

The Cell was reminded that its Terms of Reference stipulated that its minutes should be published at an appropriate time and, if P.88/2020 was approved by the Assembly, there would be the need to have both previous and future minutes available in short order. To that end, the members of the Cell were asked to review any minutes and provide any feedback thereon to the Secretariat Officer, States Greffe, in a timely manner.