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SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ADVISORY CELL

(13th Meeting)

4th August 2020(Meeting held via Microsoft Teams)**PART A (Non-Exempt)**

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

Exposure
notification
App.

A1. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (the Cell) received and noted an undated paper, entitled 'Options for an Exposure Notification app in Jersey', which had been presented to the Council of Ministers on 23rd July 2020 and received the Chief Executive Officer, Digital Jersey, in order to discuss the same.

The Chief Executive Officer informed the Cell that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, different jurisdictions had been exploring automated ways of tracing people who had come into contact with someone who had the virus, or was symptomatic. Singapore had launched the TraceTogether App, which had not been a success, following resistance from the public to the GPS tracing and it was widely accepted that such apps could not replace manual contact tracing. They had, however, gradually improved and could be a complementary tool. The Council of Ministers had decided to invest in an app, acknowledging that it would not be a panacea, but could be of assistance to the contact tracing team, particularly if someone was unaware that they had come into close proximity to someone else, or had spoken to someone on the bus, for example, but did not know who they were.

Different approaches had been adopted to digital contact tracing, both of which used Bluetooth connectivity to identify when smartphone owners were in close proximity to each other. Under the centralised model, which had been trialled on the Isle of Wight, the data was uploaded to a database, which carried out the contact matches on a remote server. This had been criticised by people who were concerned over loss of privacy. Moreover, it was not supported by Apple and Google and there had been issues around functionality, noting that it would not work when the phone was being used for something else and impacted on battery life.

Under the decentralised app architecture, which was supported by Apple and Google, the functionality would be built into the underlying platforms and the records of contacts would be stored on the phone, rather than in a database. No personal data would be collected when downloading the app, which would simply be linked to the smartphone. When a person was contacted by the Environmental Health Team upon receipt of a positive test for COVID-19, they would receive an automatically generated code to key into their smartphone, which would trigger an advice warning to anyone who matched certain criteria parameters, in terms of distance from and time spent near the infected person and when that contact had taken place. It was envisaged that the Cell would be asked for its advice on those parameters at a future meeting.

The Chief Executive Officer informed the Cell that the Council of Ministers' preferred option was to use an Irish development company (NearForm), which was already working with Eire, Northern Ireland and Gibraltar, in addition to some states in the United States and Scotland. That company would develop a white-label app, which would be tailored for Jersey, with a design that would be drawn up in consultation with

the Communications Unit – although using something ‘softer’ than the red branding - and would employ the inter-operability delivered by Apple and Google. In order to prevent a proliferation of apps, only one would be recognised per jurisdiction and would require ‘sign off’ by the Public Health Authority. The app would be available from the App Store, so it was important that people knew which one to download for Jersey and this would require clear communication and naming of the app, which would include Jersey in its title, potentially ‘Jersey Covid alert’ or similar. When people travelled to Jersey, a link to the app would be included in the paperwork that they were required to complete prior to departure and reminders to download the app would be posted at the ports.

In addition to the exposure notification functionality, the app could be used to convey key messaging associated with COVID-19 and also include an anonymous symptom tracker, although the preference was to keep it as simple as possible at the outset. The Cell was provided with the costs of the initial development and monthly support and maintenance fees, which were felt to be good value for money.

Whilst it would be a Government app, it would be promoted as a community effort and work would be undertaken to encourage as many people as possible to download it in order to make it as effective as possible. Discussions had been held with General Practitioners, telecom companies, the media and the larger companies in the Island to assist in this regard. It was hoped for a 60 per cent uptake, which was felt to be achievable in Jersey, where a strong community spirit prevailed and there were significant numbers of people with smartphones that had the requisite specification for the app.

The Cell, having been informed that the app had been operational in Eire for several weeks, questioned how useful the contact tracing team in that jurisdiction had found the app. The Chief Executive Officer offered to put the relevant teams in contact with each other, in order that a discussion could take place.

The Cell was of the view that the app would not have a significant impact on the spread of COVID-19 and could not act as a substitute for the Environmental Health contact tracing team. However, it would complement the team and might assist in the identification of a previously unidentified contact, for a relatively low level of investment. Accordingly, it indicated its support for the app and thanked the Chief Executive Officer for the presentation.

Safe Exit
Framework:
monitoring of
move to Level
One.

A2. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell, with reference to Minute No. A5 of its meeting of 3rd August 2020, reprised the discussion with the Group Director for Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department, in connexion with the COVID-19 Safe Exit Framework Level One Policy. The Cell recalled that it had been proposed that Level One should be introduced in a phased approach, commencing from 7th August 2020, with additional steps being taken in September and October, subject to cases of the virus remaining low in the Island.

The Group Director for Policy presented slides, which summarised the Cell’s key messages from the discussions held on 3rd August, which had been as follows –

- whilst the number of positive cases of COVID-19 in Jersey remain low, the virus still posed a risk, as evidenced by the clusters of cases in North West England, Brittany and Spain;
- it had significant concerns in respect of compliance with the guidelines by some Islanders and businesses, particularly, but not uniquely, linked to the night time economy and believed that a move to Level One would convey the wrong message; and

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- Government should not give the impression of a further progression of relaxation of measures and those that had been identified as 1(b) and 1(c) should not be announced, nor given a target implementation date, although they could be used for internal planning purposes.

The Group Director for Policy indicated that, in discussions with colleagues, she had found it challenging to articulate the consistency of agreeing that it was safe enough to relax some measures, but not move to Level One, in which the easing of those restrictions had originally been sited. Accordingly, she was of the view that the framing required revision and that it would be preferable to identify that Level One was about living safely with COVID-19 and to ensure that Islanders and businesses were adhering to public health guidelines in order to keep everyone safe whilst the virus continued to spread across the world. Therefore, the key Level One measures would be to significantly increase adherence and enforcement and to step up communication and engagement on how to stay safe.

The compliance and enforcement plan, which had been endorsed by the Director General, Justice and Home Affairs Department, included the following –

- noted that some enforcement activity had already commenced, such as the Health and Safety Inspectorate action which had been taken on construction sites and licensing checks on venues, focusing on physical distancing, capacity and levels of intoxication;
- proposed a compliance campaign on the taking of contact details by venues;
- proposed increased monitoring and enforcement of isolation, in tandem with a communications campaign; and
- there should be a standing agenda item for the Cell's weekly meeting on monitoring the measures, recording any concerns around compliance and prioritising enforcement activity.

The key communication messages associated with the move to Level One would be that it was not the 'new normal' and if it felt normal, it was wrong; that people should not be complacent about their health and wellbeing, or livelihood; that there remained risk around the world and it would be preferable to adapt to the measures, rather than having to enter a second phase of lockdown, as had happened in other jurisdictions. Businesses would be required to follow the guidance in order to prevent a shutdown and Islanders should continue to practice good respiratory and hand hygiene, stay in smaller groups, at a safe distance and provide contact details, if required.

The new measures that it was proposed to carefully introduce at this stage in Level One were as follows:

- to remove home working as the default model for office-based businesses, but to continue to encourage the same;
- to permit close contact face-to-face services, with strict mitigations;
- to enable changing rooms and showers at gyms / swimming pools to reopen;
- to provide updated guidelines for dentists and allied healthcare;
- to provide updated guidelines to retail businesses and reduce the fallow period for clothing from 72 hours to 24 hours;
- to enable private buses to operate in accordance with guidelines;
- to permit estate agents to facilitate open house viewings, within guidelines;
- to plan in August / September to pilot a safe opening approach with individual performing arts organisations, such as the Jersey Arts Centre, Cineworld and the Opera House; and
- to plan in August / September to pilot a safe opening approach with individual sports organisations, such as Jersey Reds and Jersey Bulls, in partnership with Jersey Sport.

Nightclubs, which were proven to pose a significantly high risk for the spread of COVID-19, would remain closed until such time as the evidence changed, as would children's soft play areas. Larger events, which were potentially high risk, would also not be permitted. Any further changes would depend on the number of cases of the virus remaining low in Jersey and subject to the Cell advising that the conditions were safe, following an assessment of risk.

Members of the Cell reiterated the views expressed on the previous day that they felt it preferable to remain in Level 2 and to relax some measures, because of the likelihood that some individuals would assume that a move to Level One meant that there was no threat from the virus, whereas the number of cases worldwide and in neighbouring jurisdictions had increased significantly, which was a cause for concern.

The Island had managed to keep the numbers of positive cases relatively low and had an effective track and trace system and it would be a shame to sacrifice all that had been achieved by moving too quickly into Level One. Cases were being picked up at the borders, but it was acknowledged that some asymptomatic individuals could be getting through and inadvertently spreading the virus and, anecdotally, people were no longer adhering to the physical distancing guidance. It was suggested that there might be merit in remaining in Level 2 and trialling the relaxation of various measures, or, alternatively, moving away from a system of levels and, instead, describing how Islanders should live with the virus, encouraging compliance through different routes.

It was agreed that the Island had reached the stage where it was really now having to weigh up the balance of 'high risk' activities and people's wellbeing. If the current restrictions remained in force and the number of positive cases of COVID-19 increased, the Cell would be justified in having adopted the stance it suggested. However, if it recommended moving to Level One and the numbers increased, it would be criticised. It was suggested that, whilst it was a subjective matter, many Islanders were content with the level of freedom they currently had, particularly the more vulnerable, who were 'shielding'.

The Director of Communications acknowledged the difficulty of the position, but committed the communications to focus on enforcement and hygiene measures and not the new relaxations. In crafting the messaging around how the new relaxations would be perceived, he indicated that if the Island remained at Level 2, but relaxed some measures that were an essential part of Level One, it would be challenging to explain what the differences were and, with many Islanders eagerly anticipating a move to Level One, make sure that individuals understand what was in the new Level and what was not. He was concerned that if the measures could not be clearly defined as in either Level, some Islanders might decide to no longer adhere to any guidance and so committed to focus communications on enforcement and protecting each other.

The Director of Communications highlighted the positive aspect of a message of moving into Level One being the ability to attract media interest and effectively inform the public of the changes, with the opportunity for significant political and social communications. Ministers could give a live press briefing and take the opportunity to challenge the behaviour of some people. This would be amplified by the Government social media accounts which would push the call for strict compliance.

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In respect of the proposal to relax the number of people who could attend controlled events to 80 indoors and 150 outdoors - including staff - the Cell was informed that consultation had taken place with various groups and these recommended figures were lower than businesses would have liked, but would, nevertheless, enable some events to take place. It was recalled that controlled events would include funerals and faith ceremonies. The Group Director for Policy indicated that the events companies had expressed a willingness to gather and share information on any upcoming functions, which would include such things as weddings, funerals, corporate conferences and parties held in hotels or large private gardens with marquees. The Bailiff's Entertainment Panel ('the Bailiff's Panel'), which comprised representatives from the States of Jersey Police, Fire and Rescue Service, Ambulance Service, Health and Safety Inspectorate, Public Health Department and the Comité des Connétables, had taken the view that no large public events would take place for the remainder of 2020 and had expressed a willingness to provide assistance in enforcing the guidelines around controlled events. The Environmental Health Consultant, indicated that the Bailiff's Panel could be strict around granting permission for events at which alcohol was served and he stated that if agreeing the aforementioned figures, it was important that these were the maximum that were permitted to attend, which could be verified by ticket, rather than those present at any one time.

Members of the Cell suggested that whilst the numbers attending funerals should be extended to a maximum of 80, most other events were unnecessary. However, the Group Director for Policy indicated that the approach adopted by Government was not to constrain what people could do, unless there was an evidenced risk associated with it.

The Cell advised that events were high risk and could lead to clusters, or outbreaks, of positive COVID-19 cases. As a consequence, it felt that uncontrolled events should remain at a maximum of 20 people and controlled events, if they were to be permitted, would require a separate risk assessment to be undertaken, whether that was by the Bailiff's Panel, or another independent panel. The Cell could provide guidance on what things gave rise to a higher risk of the virus and the event organiser would need to provide a plan, which set out how the issues around COVID-19 would be addressed.

The Cell's view was that any controlled event should be limited to 80 indoors and 150 outdoors and still felt that the figure of 80 might be a little high, because with that number of people in a confined space, there would be a lot of interactions, shouting and laughter, all of which transmitted droplets quite far. Significant emphasis would need to be placed on ensuring that attendees complied with physical distancing requirements, that the numbers were not exceeded, that contact details were provided and that good hygiene was adhered to. The Environmental Health Consultant suggested that Environmental Health officers would have a clearer idea of the risks posed by such gatherings once all the pubs had been inspected. Any organiser who wished to lay on an event, at which the number of attendees would exceed these figures, would need to demonstrate to the independent assessment panel that there was an exceptional reason why it should proceed.

The Group Director for Policy thanked the Cell for its input and indicated that an update on nightclubs would be provided at the next meeting.