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SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ADVISORY CELL

(14th Meeting)

10th August 2020**PART A (Non-Exempt)**

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

Minutes. A1. The Minutes of the previous meetings of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell, which had been held on 3rd and 4th August 2020, were noted and attendees were invited by the Chair to provide any comments thereon to the Secretariat Officer, States Greffe.

Monitoring Metrics. A2. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell, (the Cell) with reference to Minute No. A2 of its meeting of 3rd August 2020, received and noted a paper entitled 'PH Intelligence: COVID-19 Monitoring Metrics', dated 7th August 2020, which had been prepared by the Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Health Informatics Team and received a PowerPoint presentation, entitled 'Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell Monitoring Update' from the Principal Officer – Public Health Intelligence, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department.

The Cell was informed that whilst the paper indicated that there were currently 7 active cases of COVID-19, one had recovered and 3 new positive cases had been identified over the weekend of 8th and 9th August 2020. Of these 3, two were arrivals and a third was a symptomatic contact of one of those arrivals. Details of the cases were discussed, including method of identification and current circumstances.

Since the start of the pandemic, 80 per cent of cases identified in Jersey had been asymptomatic. Over the last 14 days, the number of positive cases per 100,000 population was 10.2 and the Cell noted that this data was a new inclusion in the paper. The Consultant in Communicable Disease Control, asked if it would be possible to run calculations to enable comparisons in this rate from the inbound travel cases and local source testing cases and to break down the latter by health care workers and others. The Principal Officer – Public Health Intelligence indicated that this would be possible and whilst some validation of the data was required, she hoped to be able to provide it to the Cell for its next meeting.

Of the 345 positive cases that there had been in the Island, the majority (217) fell into the age group 18 years to 59 years. The last confirmed case of an individual with underlying medical conditions had been on 4th August 2020.

Since 1st June 2020, there had been 39,330 PCR tests carried out, of which 70.2 per cent had been on inbound travellers. The Cell noted that the information on the average turnaround time for tests was now being presented in a line graph format and over the last 7 days had been 30 hours. A total of 1,603 online notifiable disease forms had been submitted by 1,562 people since 20th April and over the 7 days to 7th August there had been 98 calls to the helpline, with only 8 asymptomatic callers. The Cell noted the breakdown of symptoms reported on the helpline calls by cough, fever, muscle ache and headache and also noted the breakdown by age band. The majority of recent callers had been in the age group 18 years to 59 years.

In respect of the number of inbound travellers, it remained the case that the figures for only 4 days of the previous week were included in the report, so it was not possible to make a direct comparison with the previous, complete, week, although the Cell noted that the number of confirmed cases as part of the border testing had increased in recent weeks. Since 3rd July 2020, when the borders had re-opened, there had been 24,520 arrivals and 22,687 swabs taken. Since the same date, 18 inbound travellers had tested positive, of which 13 were considered to be active infections. The other 5, who had tested positive on arrival, had subsequently undergone serology tests that demonstrated that their infection was 'old'. Of the aforementioned 18, 13 had arrived by plane and 5 by sea, 7 were Jersey residents and 11 were visitors.

Globally, there had been over 19 million cases of COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic and 715,555 deaths. From data, which had been provided by the Office of the Superintendent Registrar, it was noted that there had been no new deaths from the virus in Jersey since the previous week, but the number of overall deaths had increased to 411, which was still lower than for the same period in 2019 and almost one hundred lower than in 2018 (510).

The Cell noted two maps, which set out the geographic distribution of 14-day cumulative numbers of reported COVID-19 cases per 100,000 population on a worldwide and European basis. These showed that the Americas were red, with over 120 cases per 100,000 and that was also the case for the Catalonia region of Spain. Some areas of France, as well as other countries, were amber. In the Ille-et-Vilaine Department of Brittany (in which St. Malo was located), the 14-day rate per 100,000 was over 34, which placed it into amber. The Cell was reminded that the whole of France had fallen into the category of amber when it had averaged 26 live cases per 100,000 and had officially been designated an amber country from midnight on 8th August 2020. The Consultant in Communicable Disease Control informed the Cell that the number of cases in Iceland had recently significantly increased and he understood this to be as a result of the testing function at the borders being overwhelmed, which had resulted in some people entering that jurisdiction, without having undergone a PCR test. He emphasised the importance of ensuring that the number of people permitted to enter Jersey was limited to those that could be tested. The Cell recalled that it had previously suggested adopting a risk-based approach if the numbers of arriving passengers exceeded the capacity for testing, but agreed that it now wished for all arrivals to be tested, so it was important to ascertain exactly what the ceiling figure for testing was. The Cell recalled that the current off-Island laboratory, which was used to analyse the tests from arrivals had a good turnaround time at approximately 30 hours and it would be clarified what its daily absolute maximum capacity was, which was believed to be in the order of 2,400 tests.

The Cell noted that the North West of England, with a rate of 34.08 and Yorkshire and the Humber (26.31) were also showing as amber on the map and the Consultant in Communicable Disease Control reminded the Cell that it needed to make a decision on whether regions within countries should be treated differently. This was a separate issue from insular regions within countries, such as Portugal and Madeira, or Spain and the Canary Islands, where it was easier to make a distinction. It was recalled that this had been the subject of a discussion at the meeting on 3rd August 2020, but no firm conclusion had been reached. The Independent Advisor - Epidemiology and Public Health, expressed the opinion that it was time to move away from the cluster case system that was used to rank countries, because of issues around testing capacity. He suggested that increased testing in France could be the reason why the number of positive cases in that jurisdiction had jumped. He endorsed a regional-based approach and suggested the need for qualitative as well as quantitative data when ranking countries / regions. These views were endorsed by the Cell. In assessing the risk posed by people travelling into Jersey, it was not simply a case of looking at the positivity rate

14th Meeting
10.08.20

from the country of origin, but also the number of arrivals from that country. The Island could be under more threat from a country that was the origin for 80 to 90 per cent of its arrivals, than from a higher risk country from which only a few people travelled.

The Cell recalled that it had previously been informed that those people, who had tested positive after travelling to Jersey, were classified by the World Health Organisation ('WHO') as Jersey cases, rather than 'belonging' to the country from which they had travelled. The Chair informed the Cell that he had clarified this for politicians and that if a country wished to remain 'green' it did seem to be a disincentive to test. It was recalled that those jurisdictions, such as Jersey, which had rigorous testing regimes at the ports, were identifying more cases and subsequently ran the risk of appearing more adversely impacted by the virus than others. The Consultant in Communicable Disease Control agreed, but indicated that it was the sensible way to manage the virus, rather than not test. Ongoing discussions were being held with the WHO, to ascertain if it might be possible to report positive tests broken down by travellers and those who had not left Jersey. In the meantime, it was important to provide an unambiguous breakdown of those testing positive on the gov.je website, so that the public could see how many people had been tested, the number of positive cases and the circumstances in which they had been tested.

The Cell received and noted the weekly epidemiological report, as at 6th August 2020, together with a chart showing the number of positive cases for COVID-19 and calls to the helpline. This indicated that the daily number of calls, whilst remaining low, had increased as the borders had re-opened, declined slightly and then had increased a little over the previous week.

The Cell also received and noted the Economic Indicators for the week from 27th July to 2nd August (week 31), which had been prepared by Statistics Jersey, together with the footfall report for King Street, St. Helier, for the same period. In respect of the former, it was noted that there had been a decrease in the number of people registered as actively seeking work when compared with the previous week and this was also the case in respect of the number of active Income Support claims. The total number of vehicles travelling through the Tunnel had augmented and the number of bus passengers had also increased slightly when compared with the previous week. The footfall in St. Helier had grown by 1.2 per cent, compared with week 30, but remained significantly down (44.5 per cent) on the same period in 2019.

The Cell noted the position and thanked the Principal Officer – Public Health Intelligence for the comprehensive update.

Safe Exit
Framework:
move to Level
One.

A3. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell, with reference to Minute No. A2 of its meeting of 4th August 2020, recalled that it had received the draft COVID-19 Safe Exit Framework: Level One Policy and had received a presentation on proposals for the phased introduction of Level One.

The Cell further recalled that whilst it had been supportive of the introduction of some relaxation measures that had been contained in the announcement, it had strongly suggested that STAC's preferred option was to frame the small package of changes as a further extension of Level 2 and that framing the change as a move to Level One could risk people becoming more complacent - and it was important that they remained alert and continued to take all necessary precautions, in order to reduce the risks for everyone.

The Cell's views had been communicated to the Competent Authorities Ministers in an Executive Memo of Advice, which had been considered at a meeting on 5th August 2020, but the Competent Authorities had taken the decision to move the Island into

Level One with effect from 8th August 2020.

The Members of the Cell indicated that they had some serious concerns that the signal sent by the announcement of Level One may have placed the Island on a ‘slippery slope’ towards even less compliance with public health measures, despite the (welcome) changes to the actual content. It was agreed that it would be useful for the Cell to receive information on how the public had reacted to the announcement of the move into Level One, because, from anecdotal evidence, it seemed that many people believed that everything had returned to normal and were not fully cognisant of the messaging around an increase in monitoring. The Group Director for Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department, indicated that, on 11th August, she was due to meet with the Deputy Chief Minister, Senator L.J. Farnham, who had assumed responsibility for leading on COVID-19 during the temporary absence of the Chief Minister and Minister for Health and Social Services. She felt that it would be helpful for the Chair of the Cell and the Consultant in Communicable Disease Control, to attend that meeting with her in order to provide direct feedback to the Deputy Chief Minister.

COVID-19
weekly
operational
snapshot.

A4. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell, with reference to Minute No. A2 of its meeting of 27th July 2020, recalled that the Group Director for Public Protection and Law Enforcement, Justice and Home Affairs Department, had undertaken to provide weekly reports, containing non-scientific assessments of the effectiveness and impacts of the current strategic public health measures (suppress, contain and shield) that were in place around COVID-19. In this connexion, the Cell received and noted a paper, dated 7th August 2020, entitled ‘COVID-19 – weekly operational snapshot’.

The Cell noted that there had been no reported breaches of isolation for the 7-day period to 6th August 2020, although confirmation was awaited of 2 cases, which had been identified on 7th August. The States of Jersey Police were continuing to ensure compliance, with a focus on licensed premises, aided by colleagues in the Honorary Police.

It was noted that younger residents, aged from 18 years to 30 years, continued to be problematic, with the States of Jersey Police receiving an increasing number of nuisance reports.

The Group Director for Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department, informed the Cell that she attended weekly meetings with those agencies that provided input for the weekly operational snapshot, in order to ascertain the context of some of the comments contained therein. As an example, in relation to compliance with measures, the States of Jersey Police had reported ‘no serious COVID-19 incidents of note / concern’. It was important to understand their viewpoint when making this statement, which might have related only to physical distancing, as an example, rather than the wider framework. The Group Director for Policy indicated that the information contained within the snapshot would be tailored to become of increased assistance to the Cell.

The Cell noted the position.

Public Health
Policy Team
priorities.

A5. The Group Director for Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department asked the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell to clarify what work it wished the Public Health Policy Team to prioritise during the month of August 2020.

She suggested that efforts to document the re-escalation approach to the virus should be undertaken, together with further work to update the border policy to include regions, noting that this had already commenced. The role played by asymptomatic individuals in transmitting the virus had also been mooted as an area for research.

14th Meeting
10.08.20

The Cell agreed with the foregoing proposals.

- Appreciation. A6. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell noted that the Group Director for Policy, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Department, was due to leave her position at the end of August 2020. It expressed gratitude to her for all the support she had provided the Cell and the incredible work that she had undertaken and conveyed all good wishes to her for her future endeavours.
- Next meeting. A7. It was noted that the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell was next due to meet on 17th August 2020. The Chair of the Cell, indicated that he would be on leave for that meeting and the following week, so requested that the Medical Officer of Health and Vice-Chair preside over those meetings.