

Elected Members Briefing



28 April 2020

Introduction

Welcome to your latest Elected Members Bulletin covering issues relating to COVID-19 which have required national and local responses over the past week.

The **COSLA Facebook** page and **COSLA Twitter** feed are constantly updated with information and resources. The **COSLA Website** and **KHub** for Elected Members are added to daily. Joining instructions for the KHub are noted at the end of this briefing.

The number of cases and the risk level is updated regularly on the **Scottish Government Website** and **NHS Inform** continues to be the source of up to date public health information.

Key Messages

The ongoing key public health messages continue to be that it is vital people stay at home apart from for essential shopping and collection of medicines, for exercise once a day, for medical/care needs and for work where essential.

COSLA is establishing a COVID-19 Recovery Group which will be led by the Vice President. The President and Spokespeople will be members of this group which will consider the steps required as we move forward. It will report to COSLA Leaders.

A document outlining how decisions will be taken to control COVID-19 while restoring a degree of normality to everyday life was published by the Scottish Government last Thursday. It sets out the position during this ongoing period of lockdown and outlines the factors that must be considered as we move gradually to ease restrictions.

You can now find **all of the Scottish Government COVID-19 related guidance in one place on their website.**

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Workforce

COSLA President, Councillor Alison Evison, together with other senior COSLA Politicians today marked International Workers' Memorial Day. The day offers people around the world the chance to remember workers who have died as a result of a work-related injury and those who have suffered an occupational illness. Councillor Evison led COSLA's commemorations from her home this year due to the COVID-19 outbreak by lighting a candle in remembrance of those who have lost their lives. A minute's silence was also observed at the Workforce Issues Group, chaired by Councillor Evison, and which is attended online by representatives of the Local Government workforce and trade unions.

Meanwhile, COSLA has welcomed the Health Secretary's announcement that everyone who provides social care will have access to appropriate PPE. Commencing yesterday (Monday April 27) local Hubs will distribute PPE supplies to the whole of the social care sector where normal supply routes have not been successful. These hubs will extend their provision to include all social care providers, and unpaid or family carers and personal assistants. Local Government has worked with partners across the sector to develop this model to ensure those who are supporting vulnerable people within their communities and all parts of the workforce have access to the PPE they need.

In terms of testing, Scottish Government and UK Government are working together on the expansion of the UK Government Testing Programme for priority key workers in Scotland. This programme operates separately from the existing NHS testing programme in Scotland, which supports testing for clinical purposes and priority staff in the NHS and social care sector. The **Scottish Government has now issued guidance** and a prioritisation matrix which explains which key workers should be able to access testing and more information how you can assist them in accessing testing.



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Finance Update

In relation to additional costs incurred as a result of responding to COVID-19, COSLA's LG Finance Team has now received returns from nearly all councils. As well as immediate costs, the exercise has attempts to capture loss of income, other indirect costs, as well as any savings made as a result of services not being delivered. It is recognised that costs may not be fully known at this stage and adjustments may need to be made retrospectively. Direct local authority funding received to date (namely £50m Hardship Fund and £30m Food Fund) will be taken into account before information is shared with Scottish Government. This exercise will be an important first step in defining the financial impact on Local Government, both now and into the future, and in articulating the critical and unique role Councils have in both response and longer term recovery.

We continue to lobby Scottish Government to pass on the full £155m consequentials from the recent UK announcement - no formal response has been received yet from Cllr Macgregor's letter to Ms Forbes on this.

Work continues through the COSLA/Scottish Government/Local Government Project Team to progress work to further support businesses. Later this week, grant support for the newly self-employed will go live via Councils and on 5th May, the current Business Grant scheme will be extended to include support for businesses with more than one property. From w/c 27 April onward, Scottish Government intends to publish data at Local Authority level in relation to applications received and awards made.

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Education

Education Technical guidance was produced by the Scottish Government and Education Scotland on what support is available in Term 4 for children, young people and parents.

A COVID-19 Education Recovery Group has been established to support partnership working across the education and early learning and childcare sectors whilst we are responding to the pandemic. The aims of this group is be able to look beyond the immediate impact to consider, from a strategic and policy perspective, how national and local government can best work with key partners to support the education and ELC sectors moving forward.

Regulations came into effect on 23 April which covered both educational appeals and placing requests. These included further flexibility over membership of appeals committees and hearings being able to take place entirely in writing if all parties agree. The regulations will apply to all ongoing placing requests, including to those where letters had issued before the regulations were laid. The statutory deadlines for request and appeals will be extended for 3 months. The regulations will be revoked by 28 February 2021 and revert to usual timelines if we returning to business as normal by then.

Children and Young People

The Scottish Youth Parliament, YouthLink Scotland and Young Scot surveyed 2,500 young people from across Scotland on their concerns about COVID-19. Around half of respondents stated they are moderately or extremely concerned about exams and coursework, two fifths are moderately or extremely concerned about their mental wellbeing, a quarter about their physical wellbeing, and two thirds are moderately or extremely concerned about the impact on their future. **The full report is online** and stakeholders are encouraged to use these insights to inform policy design and service provision locally. Young people will be encouraged to contribute to a weekly survey to track key issues.



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Housing

As the housing sector in Scotland responds to COVID-19 it is essential that bringing empty properties into use is a national priority to ensure safe and secure accommodation is available.

Where practical barriers can be overcome, and safe working practices can be implemented, continuing to allocate properties will help meet the anticipated increase in housing for those at risk of infection or confinement e.g. victims of domestic abuse.

COSLA and the Scottish Government, in conversation with Public Health Scotland, RSL and PSL landlords have developed non statutory **Allocations Advice and Information for the Housing Sector** to help bring void property back into use. It provides practical guidance for landlords, housing managers, service delivery staff, and contractors in how to safely continue processing work around voids whilst providing secure and where possible settled accommodation for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness or those in unsuitable accommodation. Additional guidance and access to frequently asked questions for providers of housing and homelessness services are available **online**.



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Criminal Justice

The Scottish Government announced on 21 April that they would be asking the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) to consider releasing some prisoners early due to material changes. These changes are due to prison officer and other staff absenteeism, along with the COVID-19 in the prison population. Public Health Scotland's view that cell sharing should be stopped to reduce the spread of the virus. As a result, 300-450 prisoners are to be released during May as part of three tranches. Only prisoners serving sentences of under 18 months and who are in the last three months of their sentence will be eligible for early release. In addition, only prisoners will be released without a requirement for supervision in the community and that early release will not be considered for those convicted of sexual, terrorism, domestic abuse or Covid-19 related offences. Governors of prisoners will also have a veto on the early release of some prisoners who pose an immediate risk to a specific individual or group of individuals. To plan and prepare for the early release of prisoners a Scottish Government- Local Government Co-ordinating Group has been established that involves COSLA, Social Work Scotland, SOLACE and ALACHO, as well as the SPS.

The **final results of a National Survey of Community Safety Partnerships** from Scottish Community Safety Network supported by COSLA indicate the majority of partnerships have put contingency and business continuity measures in operation and are linking, often daily with resilience partnerships.

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Thank You

We continue to see Local Government working closely with partners to support communities at this challenging time and we are grateful to our workforce, and those in partner agencies and organisations, for the work they are doing. We know this is a difficult situation for everyone and we continue to be proud of our workforce and our communities in how they are supporting each other.

COSLA continues to highlight the work being done by councils across Scotland on social media under **#councilscare** with increased following over the past weeks. Please continue to share these along with your local examples for us to highlight.

Further briefings will be issued, however our social media channels, **KHub** and **website** will be continually updated.

If you or your officers require any clarity from COSLA officers on policy matters, please contact the team in the usual way. If you are not sure who to direct your email to, please contact COSLA member support: **membersupport@cosla.gov.uk**

Thank you all for your efforts during this challenging time.



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