

# Elected Members Briefing



24th March 2020

## Introduction

The purpose of these weekly briefings is to provide an overview of the work ongoing at national and local level on COVID-19 related work to allow you to provide the necessary reassurance to your local communities. There will be specific local guidance and information that will come to you from your local authority officers.

A dedicated page has been created by COSLA which will include any updates and includes links to national public health information, guidance and travel advice. This can be found on the **COSLA Website**.

A **KHub** has also been established for Elected Members.

The number of cases and the risk level is updated regularly on the **Scottish Government Website**.

## Key Messages

This is an ever changing position and only last night as the Briefing was being finalised the guidance changed again. There was a very clear message from both the UK and Scottish Government that you must #stayathome apart from:

- To shop for basic necessities
- Take one form of exercise a day
- For medical/care needs – for example to help a vulnerable person
- To travel to and from work – but only if that is a necessity.

**For the most up to date public health information and advice visit NHS Inform.**

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## Community Leadership

We have pulled together information for elected members on carrying out their roles and responsibilities during COVID-19. A link to this guidance can be found on the [COSLA website](#).

## Volunteering

We appreciate that many of our members will feel compelled to volunteer within their communities during this unprecedented and challenging time. Whilst we all have our part to play, it is important that we take care of ourselves first before we can help others.

Only help if you can - if either you or someone you live with has any symptoms of COVID-19, please do not attempt to help others within your community in person. In this case, a safer way to show support may be to set up an online chat to keep in touch and socialise with people isolated in your neighbourhood.

If you are well, and those in your home are asymptomatic, you may wish to consider delivering calling cards within your community offering help to anyone who may be self-isolating.

Remember, if you are delivering the likes of groceries or prescriptions to those who cannot leave their homes, stay at least 2m away from them and leave any items on the doorstep. In addition, please do not place yourself in compromising positions where you may feel vulnerable or unsafe.

Volunteering efforts were discussed at meetings held by Scotland's Resilience Partnership: COVID-19 subgroup last week. The meetings reinforced that 'we are a country that looks out for each other' and 'we all have to play our part', but recognised that personal and public safety is at the heart of the national effort.

The [Ready Scotland](#) and [Volunteer Scotland](#) websites have useful information on volunteering safely.

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## **Supporting our Workforce**

Across Scotland, communities are pulling together to support each other and we are extremely grateful to our local government workforce for the role they are playing in this. Our staff will need our ongoing support as they continue to provide essential services, particularly in our most vulnerable communities. COSLA, the Scottish Government, Local Authority Representatives, and Trade Unions are working closely together to ensure staff have appropriate guidance and information. This will help ensure that issues are identified and resolved in the most appropriate way possible. Discussions are taking place daily to allow urgent issues to be addressed at pace, and to agree on how and when to communicate appropriately to staff on issues of concern. Care is being taken to ensure national guidance is understood and adhered to, and messages do not contradict or cut across each other.

## **Advice for the Most Vulnerable in our Communities**

**Advice has been issued** for those who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 due to health conditions or treatment. 200,000 people in Scotland who have specific forms of cancer, severe respiratory conditions, rare diseases, have had organ transplants, are on immunosuppression therapies or who are pregnant and have significant heart disease will be contacted and offered a range of support. Many will be advised to isolate in their own homes. It has been agreed that support from GPs and local resilience partnerships will include food and supplies where required - your council officers will be involved with this once guidance has been confirmed.



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## **Emergency Legislation**

**The UK Government Coronavirus Bill** is a 'Four Nation' Bill which means that all devolved administrations were involved in its design. The intention in the Scottish Parliament is for a legislative consent memorandum (of the UK wide Coronavirus Bill) to be considered in committee on Tuesday morning and for a motion to be debated in the Scottish Parliament chamber on Tuesday afternoon. The Scottish Government also signalled that they would bring out their own emergency coronavirus legislation, before Easter, in order to put on the statute book other urgent legislative changes specifically for our own competences.

## **School and ELC closures - childcare provision**

On 19 March, the decision was taken that all schools and local authority early learning and childcare settings should close from 5pm on 20 March. A letter was issued to local authorities from the Deputy First Minister which is **online**.

SQA exams will not go ahead as planned and there is work ongoing to develop an alternative certification model. S4-6 pupils should not attend school as initially advised.

Local authorities worked through the weekend to arrange childcare provisions for “key workers”. This will look different in every area and further information can be found on the **Scottish Government website**. Ensuring children and families are supported is a key priority and provisions for free school meals and other family support are also ongoing locally. A £70m food fund has been established which will include funding for free school meals.



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## **Health and Social Care Support and PPE**

**Guidance has been developed** to ensure that we support and maintain the sustainability of those who undertake commissioned services for us. This will cover both adult and children services. The commitment from Scottish Government is to cover “reasonable costs” and there will be a need to record costs. The guidance also covers commissioned early learning and childcare and school transport services.

A multi-agency team is now in place for the non-health elements of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) and an NHS NSS triage centre has been operational for social care since Thursday which provides a phone number and an email address for LAs/IJBs/providers to call if they are experiencing shortages of supplies that cannot be resolved at local level. Similar work is ongoing, which both COSLA and Local Government officers are involved in, looking at solutions in terms of wider workforce PPE requirements with procurement bodies including Scotland Excel.

We appreciate that additional pressure is being placed on use of telecare technology during this period, and its importance in providing care in a number of settings. Guidance has been developed by the Local Government Digital Office and the Scottish Government on telecare service continuity, providing advice on how to use telecare effectively during this period.

This can be found on the **Local Government Digital Office website**.

We know that unpaid carers may be feeling vulnerable at this time and concerned about the person they care for. **Advice has been published** for anyone providing regular support to a vulnerable friend or relative on what they can do to protect their own health and the health of those they look after during the coronavirus outbreak.



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## **Food vulnerability**

COSLA has been in close discussion with representatives of the Food Security and Resilience Group (FSRG), which is run by the Scottish Government.

Several areas of potential concern to local authorities have been identified including concerns such as the impact on single traders as local food suppliers in remote areas, the work of environmental health officers, food/site sanitary considerations, the restriction of workforce travel and the fallout from hardship due to people losing their jobs. The majority of this is outwith the immediate influence of COSLA. However, as local community leaders you can be reassured that we are part of those conversations both locally and nationally.

Food supply is currently not an issue though there may be difficulties with home deliveries in the future. Local reinforcement of the message that there is no need to panic buy would be helpful.

Food banks are under pressure, and local consideration will need to be given as to what action can be put in place to support those who rely on them. £70m of the £350m support package for communities **Scottish Government announced last week** is a food fund to support those in our communities most at need.

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## Thank You

You will appreciate that this is an extremely fast-changing situation which brings significant challenges in terms of communication. Your council will be advising you on how things are progressing at the local level.

Further briefings will be issued weekly if not more frequently as the situation evolves, updating the national position and signposting members to any national advice.

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](mailto:membersupport@cosla.gov.uk)**

**Thank you all for your efforts during this challenging time.**



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