

Elected Members Briefing



31st March 2020

Introduction

This week's briefing covers new and emerging areas which have required a national and local response over the past week. It aims to provide you with the information you need to support the Local Government workforce and your communities, in addition to the specific local guidance and information that will come to you from your local authority officers.

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.

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

Key Messages

It continues to be vital that that the public message is that people stay at home apart from where essential shopping and collecting medicines is needed, for exercise once a day, for medical/care needs and for work where essential. A group of people who are considered especially vulnerable to COVID-19 have been identified and asked to completely self isolate in order to protect themselves. This is covered in the Shielding item below.

Our Local Government workforce continue to deliver essential services and an FAQs document has been developed with Trade Unions for their use and for Local Government employees. Local Government staff should always be supported, respected and their work celebrated – but it is even more important that they are in these challenging times – when they are needed more than ever as they go about delivering for our communities.

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

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Finance Update

Scottish Government Financial Assurance – COSLA's Local Government Finance team is actively seeking written financial assurance for Local Government from Scottish Government in relation to the resources that are required to deal with COVID-19.

Local Government costs as a result of COVID-19 – in conjunction with SOLACE and Directors of Finance, a financial template is being developed to capture the net additional costs to Local Government as a result of COVID-19.

Clarity is being sought from Scottish Government on the delivery of the £350m Communities fund. Only the £50m Hardship fund and £22m for Scottish Welfare Fund has been confirmed for Local Government to date.

A SOLACE/Directors of Finance working group has developed a set of key assumptions, principles and criteria for payment of suppliers and partner providers. Work is ongoing to look at how this interfaces with service specific guidance that has been issued by the Scottish Government.

Volunteering

Elected members will be pleased to know that there has been a huge interest in volunteering across the country. Local Government and partners across the country have worked to make sure that there are clear processes and extensive networks in each area to support volunteering. There is a national website- www.readyscotland.org - which is easy to find for people who are interested in volunteering and which then feeds the volunteer details to the link officer in each local authority. If you have interest from your community, you can direct them here or to a local site if you have one.

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Shielding

The Scottish Government has issued advice on shielding for those who are at very high risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Shielding is a measure to protect extremely vulnerable people from coming into contact with COVID-19, by minimising all interaction between them and others.

Around 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 have been contacted and offered a range of support.

A text messaging service has been introduced that will allow those who are shielding to ask for assistance with a weekly delivery of basic groceries, or to alert the team if they are running low on medication. Further information can be found on [NHS Inform](#).

Key Workers

To ensure that frontline staff have access to essential childcare provision, COSLA has urged employers to think critically about what staff are considered to be keyworkers. Before seeking childcare places, employers should consider working with unions and workers to identify only those staff absolutely necessary to deliver the COVID-19 response and provide essential and safe services. They should also consider taking steps such as introducing new shift patterns, working from home, recruiting more staff or dropping non-essential tasks; as well as having discussions with employees to identify if they can access any appropriate alternative childcare. We recognise the extreme pressures faced by all Businesses and employers at this time. Our priority is to ensure that vital services continue as far as possible.

A joint letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport and COSLA Health and Social Care was issued earlier this week in to Council Chief Executives and IJB Chief Officers, setting out support for the the social care workforce as key workers across Scotland.



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Employers and Employees FAQs

Alongside the SJC Trade Unions (UNISON, Unite and the GMB), COSLA has developed a Frequently Asked Questions document in a bid to help Local Government employees understand the national COVID-19 advice. The FAQs deal with matters that have been agreed nationally or, where national guidance has been set out, including that from the NHS, it will signpost you to your own local authority where the issue is more appropriately addressed at local level. The document, which includes all relevant links to appropriate guidance and will be updated on an ongoing basis, can be found on the **[COSLA website](#)**.

Early Learning and Childcare - 1140 Hours

Legislation has been laid in the Scottish Parliament to revoke the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) (No. 2) Order 2019, which will have the effect of removing the statutory duty on education authorities to make 1140 hours of ELC available to each eligible child from 1 August 2020. This decision was made jointly between Scottish Government and COSLA, in recognition that due to the ongoing response to the COVID-19, planned works to deliver the expansion such as construction, recruitment and induction of staff, cannot go ahead, with the priority being providing critical childcare for those who need it most. It is recognised that local authorities were on track to deliver this and a communication has been issued jointly by COSLA and Scottish Government providing further detail and can be found on the **[Scottish Government website](#)**.

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Local Business Support

The Business Gateway service has quickly adapted to offer small and medium business owners one-to-one appointments with our network of over 150 advisers via video or telephone calls offering all businesses critical advice with contingency planning, closing temporarily, HR, switching to online sales and more. Local Business Gateway offices have also moved all their workshops to webinars to deliver live tutorials on a wide range of relevant issues. Including explanations of the funding support that has been released, how to get your business through the Coronavirus period and trading online.

Online Business Support

The Business Gateway National Unit has been working closely with Councils to create a suite of new resources which have been developed to support businesses trying to adapt to new circumstances. This includes guides, articles, checklists and video tutorials on business continuity planning, working from home, managing remote teams, how best to use digital channels to communicate with customers and employees and support for those experiencing stress and anxiety and more. Along with that we moved swiftly to record a number of video tutorials on topics such as Crisis PR and Marketing and then have been released onto our website. **A dedicated section of the website** is being updated daily and we will continue to release and co-develop support where required.

Government Grant Support for businesses

COSLA and Local Authorities have been working closely with the Scottish Government to develop and roll out the grant support that the UK and Scottish Government's recently announced. This has been achieved at considerable pace and the recent launch has seen hundreds of applications being received daily by Local Authorities across the country. Links to the application form for every Council area have been added to the **Business Gateway website** so that businesses can easily find these.

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Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

The COVID-19 outbreak paired with current social distancing and self-isolation measures have been shown in the experience of other countries to date to heighten prevalence of violence against women. Women and children are at risk of being trapped in unsafe situations with limited access to vital support and escape. Services, organisations, centres and groups across Scotland are working hard to provide the vital support victims need. They are adjusting their services to offer helplines and remote support for those in need and require ongoing support to do so.

Those at risk or experiencing gender-based violence require to be reassured that they are not alone. Perpetrators require to be held account for abuse.

The Scottish Women's Rights Centre have **compiled a helpful list of services and helplines available** with current opening times. They will continue to add and review the information.

Engender has created a helpful **'Women and Covid' briefing** that explores some of the ways in which the differences between men's and women's lives play in to COVID-19, and describes critical issues that Members can include in their thinking about crisis response, and medium-run mitigation programmes and spend.

Public Health Scotland

Public Health Scotland (PHS), the new national public health body for Scotland launches tomorrow Wednesday April 1 and will be at the forefront of the rapidly evolving response to the current COVID-19 pandemic. PHS is jointly accountable to the Scottish Government and COSLA and will encompass Health Protection Scotland, Information Services Division and NHS Health Scotland, bringing together a wealth of diverse public health expertise and experience.

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Thank You

As you can see, there have been a number of developments over the past week, demonstrating the pace at which the Local Government workforce are having to work and adapt. Sharing and celebrating the good work that is going on should be encouraged during these challenging times, thanking those who are continuing to deliver essential services for our communities.

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

Signing up to Knowledge Hub is easy. Go to <https://khub.net/sign-up> and complete the registration form, you will be sent an email verification. Click the link in the email you receive to verify your account, then go to <https://khub.net> and sign in with the password you created at registration. Once you've logged in, go to the group direct to request to join: <https://khub.net/group/scottish-elected-members-coronavirus-network>. We will only accept membership requests from official council email addresses that belong to elected members. If you register with a personal email, we will need to verify this through your council.

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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