

COVID-19 REVIEW – SUMMARY DOCUMENT

The COVID-19 Review

Overall effectiveness of the Bailiwick's response

Overall, considering the nature and scale of the emergency faced within the Bailiwick, it should be considered that the Bailiwick of Guernsey's response to COVID-19 proved effective in meeting its objectives of:

1. Protecting and preserving life
2. Minimising the impact of COVID-19 on the community
3. Minimising economic, social and environmental impacts
4. Promote the restoration of normality as soon as possible.

Evidence to support this includes relatively low case numbers of COVID-19 especially before the roll-out of the vaccine, significantly fewer deaths involving COVID-19 per 1,000 residents than other jurisdictions within the British Isles, much shorter 'lockdown' periods than other jurisdictions, and an earlier return to normality than other parts of the British Isles with Guernsey being the first to remove its last remaining COVID-19 emergency provisions on 17 February 2022.

This was made possible because of an evidence-based strategy that developed with new information, combined with timely decision-making that was clearly communicated.

The COVID-19 Review explores many features of this strategy in detail, which each played a critical role, including:

- The effectiveness of on-island testing and on-island sequencing strategies
- The role of border restrictions and self-isolation requirements
- The approach to contact tracing
- The development of IT solutions, including the Travel Tracker and vaccination certification
- The vaccine roll-out

The COVID-19 Review also details some of the significant planning that went into more 'worse-case' scenarios that did not ultimately arise because of the success of the response, such as the preparations for large numbers of excess deaths.

Decision-making and scrutiny

The report outlines the political structures in place for decision-making and for scrutinising those decisions, and the steps taken during the pandemic to ensure those structures could continue to operate despite the restrictions imposed in order to protect the health and wellbeing of the community.

The report acknowledges that the Civil Contingencies Authority (CCA) was effective in providing quick decision-making and communicating decisions effectively. The States Assembly provided scrutiny through the approval of regulations and other parliamentary tools available to States Members. But the review acknowledges the quasi-executive nature of the Authority does not sit easily in a consensus system of government, particularly where the emergency is for a prolonged period. It recommends a review of whether there is a more suitable alternative legal mechanism by which to manage an emergency response of such nature in future, based on the learnings from the pandemic response, and to present this for political consideration.

Preparedness

The report also looks at the full timeline of events, including the Bailiwick's pre-pandemic preparedness, the emergence of SARS-CoV-2 in the Bailiwick, entering and exiting both the first and second lockdowns, the introduction and lifting of travel restrictions and the roll-out of the vaccine. It recognises that the timeliness of a pandemic influenza table-top exercise not long before the arrival of the virus in the Bailiwick meant plans were reviewed and political and operational decision-makers were more prepared. Work to prepare for a possible 'No Deal Brexit' in the period before the pandemic also meant a range of preparations had been well-developed which could be adapted for other emergencies, including the COVID-19 Command, Control and Co-ordination Structure.

The report highlights the importance of emergency planning and to continue to have a schedule of testing and training as a key learning. It also recognises that services' business continuity plans did not anticipate an extended period of disruption or how the full impact of disruption in other services would have knock-on effects for them, meaning plans are being updated so there is more shared cross-organisational emergency planning.

Another finding notes how the pandemic resulted in an increased use of technology to provide solutions, and therefore an increased reliance on IT. Work is required to ensure there are also paper-based solutions in case, under other circumstances, this became a necessity.

Education

The Education office, schools and colleges had business continuity plans in place but the extended nature of the pandemic meant having to develop solutions to continue the provision of education and support students and families. With IT being key during the lockdown periods, families were provided with devices where needed. As schools welcome students back on site, operational guidance was effectively put in place to make this possible and maintain a low risk of the virus spreading.

However the pandemic has had an impact on children, with increased numbers of cases and increased severity of mental health issues such as anxiety.

Results for children in primary schools, which are assessed by teacher assessment, were down when compared with previous years, with the biggest drop for children in key stage one. It is highly probable that this is indicative of the impact of COVID-19 rather than a fall in the quality of education provided by schools.

The financial cost of COVID-19

The Review includes details of the business support scheme introduced as part of the COVID-19 response. These were necessary to ensure viable businesses could survive the period of COVID-19 restrictions, and be in a position where they could continue trading after these were lifted and the Bailiwick has seen the economic bounce back faster than expected. £74m was spent in total across all of these schemes. There were also additional operational revenue costs (£17.3m) and capital costs (£3.7m).

Communications

A key finding of the review is the impact of transparent communications with the community to instil confidence and a sense of togetherness. The review highlights the deliberate use of clear, open and regular communications across a wide range of channels as key to the community's success in the COVID-19 response.

Whilst this is not something that will be applicable to all States' business all of the time, the learning, general principles and good practice that has been developed will be embedded into the comms strategies of major policy development and emergency planning moving forward.

Thanks to the #GuernseyTogether Community

Importantly the Review makes clear that the successful response to COVID-19 in the Bailiwick is not because of any one service or organisation, and would not have been possible without all areas of the community co-operating and pulling together in order to protect each other and the Bailiwick as a whole. That also extends to many individuals and agencies outside of the Bailiwick and thanks goes to everyone involved for the role they played.