

PAC Government Covid 19 Review

Autism Jersey response

Please accept our sincere apology for the delay in responding to your request. We appreciate this opportunity to submit our response.

It is important to note that, along with Governments across the world, Jersey has had to respond to an unprecedented situation with the impact of covid 19 and the subsequent actions to maintain public safety.

As a charity we were impacted significantly in maintaining the provision of the services we provide both as commissioned services, contracted and funded by the Government, and the services we provide to individuals and families that are 'free at the point of delivery' which is funded directly by the Charity.

Although we did not have a 'back to normal' recovery plan, we developed a Business Continuity Plan using the model that was provided by the Government. This allows us to assess all areas of the service and adjust accordingly. This proved to be very helpful to us at those times where we had to take difficult decisions about what services we could maintain, and those we need to stop.

Overall, the response and support from Government departments was good and was a great source of support to us.

Firstly, we found it very helpful to eventually be able to source PPE from a single source, and for it to be provided free of charge, as it had proved incredibly difficult to consistently acquire the equipment we needed and was proving costly. Attending the regular updates on PPE was also very helpful to us.

From the finance point of view we benefitted from:

- funding for the shop managers' salaries. This was the only area we could claim for as SOJ continued to fund contracted operations staff. Payment was made promptly against the claims.
- A delay in payment of social security for two quarters, which allowed us to manage our cash flow around the problems caused by lockdown
- Free PPE – this was obviously invaluable and saved us admin time as well as the purchase cost

In addition to this one of the biggest issues we had was finding the correct and up to date information. The gov.je website was not user friendly!

It is difficult to say what we could have done differently. Our Operational management Team plans were comprehensive and allowed for managed progress through lockdown.

What could the Government have done better?

1. Contingency planning could have been better – working with individuals who receive 24/7 support in their own homes presented with some potentially difficult scenarios should they or any number of the team been infected – the only resolve/plan in place is to call Rachel Williams in the event of any difficulty.
2. Availability of PPE at an earlier stage - private care providers had limited supplies and were sharing what stock they had. We had individuals we were supporting with symptoms and no PPE to protect staff – sourcing the correct PPE at this point was very stressful.

3. Support staff weren't eligible for any payments from Government as support services were classified as critical workers and therefore able to work. I believe that there is a risk in that the majority of third sector providers don't provide prolonged sick pay (2 weeks full pay and 2 weeks half pay at AJ) this meant that staff who had already exhausted their sick leave may have been less likely to test/isolate as they would have been significantly affected financially – Given the risk of impact of C19 in the care/support sector Autism Jersey extended our sickness policy to ensure staff would still be paid if they were off work with C-19. This however was only temporary as it is unsustainable for the charity and could have been extended by with Government support as a protective measure.

What would Autism Jersey do differently next time?

1. Improve our contingency planning for unique situations
2. Have immediate availability of PPE from Government stocks should it be required to support a member of the public safely

One of the issues we found particularly difficult was regarding the consequence of covid 19 causing a delay in autism assessments for children. Due to this impact the Government looked to outsource support to be able to complete assessments, and we, as a Charity, were very keen and interested to assist with this. However, in attempting to apply for the tender via the online portal, this proved very difficult for us to do so due to IT issues. On three separate occasions we were registered in the portal, only to wait up to one and half hours each time, to then be unable to proceed. Despite there being efforts to support us from within the Government departments, we were unable to complete a tender application in time, and, therefore, were unable to apply. This was very frustrating and disappointing for us.

Kind regards,

Chris Dunne

Chief Executive Officer