

Deputy Inna Gardiner  
Chair, Public Accounts Committee

**BY EMAIL**

6<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Dear Deputy Gardiner

**PAC request for Covid-19 response information – Customer and Local Services**

I'm pleased to provide the responses below to your questions about our Covid-19 response as set out in your letter dated 5<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

1. How did your responsibilities as Director General change during the COVID-19 Pandemic? What new responsibilities did you take on and what responsibilities did you hand over to other officers?
  - a. How was this tracked?
  - b. What new responsibilities did your department take on and what responsibilities did you hand over to other departments? How were these tracked?
  - c. How did you work with other departments and key stakeholders to identify new areas of work to mitigate the impact of the pandemic?

In response to the pandemic, Customer and Local Services (CLS) supported islanders by running/administering a number of new services:

- Covid Helpline
- Co-funded Payroll Scheme (CFPS)
- Fixed Cost Support Scheme (FCSS)
- Visitor Accommodation Support Scheme (VASS)
- Covid Related Emergency Support Scheme (CRESS)
- Isolation Benefit
- Spend Local
- Community Task Force/Connect Me
- Parish Registration

All of these initiatives were delivered through standard project management disciplines, governance and oversight relevant to the size of the project.

The pandemic also changed existing customer demand (e.g. increased Income Support claims, Test and Trace recruitment – People Hub) and this was handled through our Operational management structures and oversight.

I was jointly Accountable Officer for CFPS along with the Treasurer. The Community Task Force was led by the Chief of Staff. The Community Task force also acted as a route for

Parishes and voluntary/community groups to raise issues that might be impacting specific parts of the community.

In March 2020, the command structure for Strategic (Gold) and Tactical (Silver) response was centrally established. The Gold team comprised of senior officers from the Government (Co-ordinated by Justice and Homes Affairs) and key partners across the Island.

The Silver team was formed as the One Gov Covid-19 Response Team (1GCT). This comprised of a central coordination team, which embedded the Business Continuity Team. The Silver response was led by a Group Director. The purpose of the Silver team was to co-ordinate the response and “management of all cross-government activities to support and protect the Jersey community against the threat of Covid-19”. The Silver Team formed operational cells to manage specific activities (such as community response, supplies and supply chain, business continuity and emergency resourcing).

2. We know there has been a huge impact of COVID-19 response measures on departmental business as usual activities, including the secondment of Government staff to other departments to aid the response effort. Do you have a ‘back-to-normal’ recovery plan for your department?
  - a. In respect of the secondment of Government staff to other departments to aid the response effort, how did you ensure disruptions to certain workstreams were prioritised in an objective and consistent way?
  - b. What would you do differently next time?

Whilst initial Covid responses were staffed by BAU-seconded resources (both CLS & from across government) ongoing support services like the Covid Helpline are now resourced with additional staff from covid funding. Where BAU individuals are still supporting/leading covid responses secondments are in place to ensure individuals are backfilled & supported appropriately. Requests for resourcing were handled through the 1GCT to ensure prioritisation across Government.

The Departmental Operational Business Plan for 2022 sets out the plan for the year and this includes managing the ongoing impacts of the pandemic alongside business as usual activities i.e. back to normal.

There are clear benefits in establishing a level of risk appetite at the beginning of a project to ensure that all parties involved understand and can deliver within that risk appetite. This was highlighted in the C&AG report on CRESS as something that should be adopted in future.

3. How have you monitored the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on departmental business as usual activities and the disruptions to it?
  - a. What tools were developed by your departments to monitor this?
  - b. How do you minimise the impact on services and key deliveries?
  - c. What decision making tools/approach did you use to decide on who should be seconded, and to where?

- d. How did you compensate for staff seconded to other departments to aid the response effort?

CLS Senior Leadership Team have held regular meetings since the start of the pandemic to discuss and address any Business Continuity issues and to prioritise resources accordingly. Good communication has been proven essential to ensure all areas of the department were up to speed with key activities and requirements.

This fed into the corporate Gold and Silver corporate reporting structure and we were required to provide a weekly RAG status.

In relation to secondments, CLS received secondees from other government departments to initially help resource the helpline. Other secondments were made internally within CLS to deliver the new services outlined in question 1 above and were made in discussion with the individuals concerned.

4. Was any departmental authority changed during the Pandemic, including as a result of crisis management efforts, and if so, were they consistent with existing laws and regulations?

The Minister for Social Security made the following changes to delegations and operational requirements due to Covid. These were extended twice and are currently extended until the end of 2021.

- Delegations of powers to Assistant Ministers
- Enabling payment of Isolation Benefit
- Changes to proofs required for Income Support claims

5. Who is responsible for monitoring the performance of services established in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic within your department?

- a. What and how have you documented lessons learnt?
- b. How do you intend to incorporate lessons learned from the performance of these services into the wider performance of your department?

All of these initiatives were delivered through standard project management disciplines, governance and oversight relevant to the size of the project. This includes performance of the service. A lessons learnt review would take place at the end of the project. The C&AG noted this best practice in her review of CRESS.

6. How were self-assessment frameworks and Key Performance Indicators used to ensure that key services continued to operate?

- a. What worked well?
- b. What would you do differently?

Reflecting the changing circumstances of the pandemic, within CLS we introduced two new high level aims for the department to ensure everyone understood the new priorities:

- To ensure the safety and wellbeing of the public and colleagues.
- To ensure that government can continue to deliver critical services to the public.

Existing performance indicators and goals continued underneath these. Each new initiative had it's own performance measures.

The pandemic also changed existing customer demand and this was handled through Operational management structures and oversight. Where it was clear that the likely demand would exceed existing capacity processes were subject to a rapid improvement review and changes developed and prioritised. The best example of this is 1000 new Income Support claims in 6 weeks. The process was moved to online to ensure that there would be no delays in getting claims into payment.

7. What role did your respective Ministers play in deciding on resource and staff reallocations? What level of consultation was provided to them?

- a. What level of responsibility as the head of your department did you have on how staff should be reallocated and what resources could be taken from your departments and applied to the COVID-19 responses? How was this decision making formalised?

The Social Security Ministerial team were kept up to date on developments and performance throughout the pandemic through weekly meetings with the DG for CLS, policy and communication officers.

All resourcing/staff allocation decisions were taken by CLS Senior Leadership Team.

8. Can you update us on how your department has responded to the recommendations made by the C&AG on the response to the COVID-19 Pandemic? Have any recommendations been implemented?

- a. Have any changes made to the operations or working practices?

All recommendations in the report by the C&AG on CRESS were accepted and are being actioned in line with the committed timescales. Responses to the reports on CFPS & FCSS/other support schemes are being developed.

9. What thought has been given to 'future proofing' services?

Within CLS the pandemic enabled a number of planned or desired improvements to be accelerated - these will remain in place going forward:

- Online applications for Income Support
- Face to face appointments at La Motte Street
- Uptake of online Library Services
- Live streaming of services at the Crematorium

The potential to use SpendLocal style cards for benefit payments for a specific group of customers is being progressed.

10. How did you work with Commercial Services to understand your department's procurement needs during the pandemic?

Commercial Services were able to support the rapid procurement of the supplier for SpendLocal which enabled the programme to be delivered in a cost effective way and to hit the ideal time to deliver fiscal stimulus to the economy.

11. How have you measured, monitored, and reported on your performance, financial management (including value for money and cost benefit analyses) and impact on work programmes during the Covid-19 pandemic? What 3 things could be improved?

In its broadest sense, performance and financial management has been reported through the conventional corporate reporting methods of Annual Report & Accounts and Department Operational Business Plan updates. Service performance measures have been published for Q1-Q3 2021 also.

The existing governance cycle for CLS continued through the pandemic which provided CLS Senior Leadership Team with oversight over all activities and new schemes. This includes a monthly financial performance review.

All new initiatives were delivered through standard project management disciplines, governance and oversight relevant to the size of the project. This includes a closure report (when appropriate) which would review the success of the scheme, financial performance and include lessons learnt.

The C&AG has made a number of recommendations in her reports on CRESS, CFPS and other business support schemes which would be improved upon in any future schemes.

12. What would you do to improve how your department communicated with the rest of the Government of Jersey and external stakeholders?

Overall, the department communicated well both internally and externally during the pandemic:

- Ministers were informed of issues, performance, activity
- CLS Colleagues had a numbered covid email update to create a single channel to pull together all important information.
- Community Task Force to flow information to and from Parishes & voluntary/community groups.
- Economic data released via Stats unit on a weekly basis.
- Promotion of CFPS, Spend Local (& other support schemes) through webinars to business

With the benefit of hindsight some of the communications around CRESS applications could have been simplified to make them easier to understand.

Yours sincerely



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