

From: Member of the public

Dear Scrutiny Panel

As you may be aware, I have been heavily critical of the Government's response to the Covid-19 crisis here in Jersey. I wanted to send this email to more fully explain in order to support the scrutiny process going forward.

For me, the greatest issue has been the Government's approach to communication throughout the crisis. There has been a huge lack of ability to empathise with the general public and, I would suggest, at times this has gone as far as to treat Islanders with contempt.

The Chief Executive Charlie Parker's suggestion that the public had too much time on our hands, because we were taking to social media to complain about the lack of information coming from the Government, demonstrated a complete lack of ability to empathise with the feelings of fear and frustration among Islanders.

It has been reported that the announcement surrounding the building of the Nightingale Wing of the General Hospital at Millbrook came as a surprise to many local residents. In response to their complaints, the Health Minister Richard Renouf said they should have known because it had been discussed during the States Assembly. He failed to realise few Islanders listen to States debates in their entirety and demonstrated, again, a lack of empathy in terms of how the uninformed public may experience anxiety surrounding such a decision.

To say I was surprised when it was announced that schools were to fully reopen on 22nd June without the need for physical distancing between primary aged children, would be an understatement. I knew there was a possibility that my son would be returning and had felt fine about the arrangements that had been put in place for Year 6 children already in school. However, the sudden announcement that physical distancing would not be in force for younger children when the rest of the population was still subject to the two-metre rule, was difficult for me to comprehend. The fact that this was announced via a press release emailed from schools without the attached supporting statement from STAC, demonstrated an appalling lack of consideration for the feelings and concerns of parents. The cessation of the public press conferences a week earlier meant there was no means of finding out any further information.

The World Health Organisation states that an integral part of emergency planning for such an eventuality as a pandemic, is effective communication with the public in order to bring everyone together to act collaboratively and maximise the impact of the community response. In two of his recent interviews, the Chief Minister Senator John Le Fondré, refuses to concede that communication has been an issue. He insists the Government be judged on the outcomes. However, I take issue with this. Although the statistics in terms of numbers of cases and deaths are positive, I don't believe the outcomes have been altogether favourable.

The lack of communication at the beginning of the crisis, as well as the difficulty in obtaining greater information throughout, in my personal case and I am sure for others too, has been extremely detrimental for my mental health and wellbeing. The repeated references to a need for most of the population to contract the virus, the announcement about the ethical framework and the refusal to allow medical officers to appear at press conferences has taken its toll. I have experienced a rollercoaster of emotions throughout and am now feeling exhausted in the face of an uncertain future.

I believe it is important that the Government reflects upon its handling of the communications throughout this crisis so far because it has implications for the way forward. The issue is cultural, highlighted even more so by the example set by our Island neighbours. In Jersey, we have been preached to from a lectern on a podium. In Guernsey, the public have been consulted and well informed.

To this day, we still have not had an explanation as to why Jersey is so different to Guernsey that we could not have done the same as they have. This too, makes me angry. I was momentarily convinced by the outcome of the States Assembly debate around Jess Perchard's proposition, however, seeing how incredibly positive elimination has been for Guernsey, I am no longer satisfied that this could not have been viable for us. The fact that the economic projections for the viability of a temporary internal economy with air bridges to other places that have achieved elimination had not been done, demonstrates such a possibility was never even contemplated. The Government has repeatedly expressed concerns for the mental wellbeing of Islanders. I would suggest that elimination would have been much more positive for the wellbeing of the elderly and vulnerable, as well as the general population and local businesses, who are now experiencing living in limbo with no end in sight.

The chosen strategy of contain, delay, shield (now suppress) impacts upon the whole population in different ways. All of our lives have been significantly affected by this choice of strategy. We have a vested interest in the choices that have been made on our behalf. We should be included in the conversation, not held at arms length. There has been very obvious control over the dissemination (or not) of information. I have felt as though I am being managed in order to manipulate the way I respond and react. This has felt conspiratorial. Had I been consulted and included in the decision making process, I may have felt more positive about the physically distant future I am now facing. I may have felt more able to accept that, for the foreseeable future, I will no longer be able to experience the same relationship with my family members who are in the vulnerable category.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my views.