



Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel

COVID-19 Review

Witness: The Chief Minister

Friday, 5th February 2021

Panel:

Senator K.L. Moore (Chair)

Deputy S.M. Ahier of St. Helier

Connétable K. Shenton-Stone of St. Martin

Connétable R. Vibert of St. Peter

Witnesses:

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré - The Chief Minister

Mr. R. Bell - Treasurer of the States

Mr. T. Walker - Director General, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance

Mr. J. Blazeby - Director General

Mr. A. Khaldi - Interim Director, Public Health Policy

Mr. P. Armstrong - Group Medical Director

[11:32]

Senator K.L. Moore (Chair):

Morning to everyone. Welcome to this Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel hearing in relation to our COVID-19 review. We are very grateful to the Chief Minister and his team for joining us this morning. It is very helpful for us to have this opportunity to ask some questions of you all as we finalise our first report for this review. We will start with the usual introductions. My name is Senator Kristina Moore and I am the Chair of this panel.

Deputy S.M. Ahier of St. Helier:

Deputy Steve Ahier, Vice-Chair.

Connétable R. Vibert of St. Peter:

Constable Richard Vibert, member of the panel.

Connétable K. Shenton-Stone of St. Martin:

Constable Karen Shenton-Stone, a member of the panel.

The Chief Minister:

Senator John Le Fondré, Chief Minister.

Director General:

Good morning, Julian Blazeby, Director General.

Treasurer of the States:

Richard Bell, Treasurer.

Director General, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

Tom Walker, Director General, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance.

Interim Director, Public Health Policy:

Alex Khaldi, Interim Director, Public Health Policy.

The Chief Minister:

We are just trying to Patrick Armstrong in, who hopefully is being called.

Group Medical Director:

Patrick Armstrong, Group Medical Director.

Senator K.L. Moore:

Thank you all. I think you all have the message now but if those who are speaking could you use their microphones and camera when they are speaking but then if they would be kind enough to turn them off when they are not speaking. If anybody particularly wishes to contribute and have not been invited to do so, they are welcome to place a message in the chat so that I can note that. We will get started, if we could, because we have a lot to get through this morning in the hour and a half that we have. I would ask that answers could be as brief and concise as they can possibly be. We will start off, firstly, by looking at decision-making. It is understood that the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell, known as S.T.A.C., operates in an advisory capacity to decision makers as set out

following the pandemic emergency planning exercise. Could you first of all just tell us how many people attend a S.T.A.C. meeting, please?

The Chief Minister:

I will hand that one to Patrick while I look up the list.

Group Medical Director:

Can you hear and see me okay?

Senator K.L. Moore:

Yes, we can, thank you.

Group Medical Director:

The number of people of attending S.T.A.C. meetings varies. There is a core membership and there are a number of advisers from public health. In addition to that, depending on what we are talking about, we will ask others to join us, being subject experts in those particular areas.

Senator K.L. Moore:

Thank you. Could you tell me how many people make up the core membership of the cell, please?

The Chief Minister:

Apologies, just repeat that, Senator.

Senator K.L. Moore:

If you could just tell us how many people make up the core of the cell.

Group Medical Director:

Sorry, there are 15 people who make up the core.

Senator K.L. Moore:

It is not recorded in the public minutes those who are in attendance for any particular meeting. Is there a record in private minutes that records who was in attendance at each particular meeting?

Group Medical Director:

Yes, there are.

Senator K.L. Moore:

Could you explain why that is that there is not a public note of the attendees?

The purpose of S.T.A.C. is to provide a safe space so that people can have open conversations and the reason that the people are not individually named and they are not put in the minutes is to allow that free-flowing conversation to take place.

Senator K.L. Moore:

I see, okay. Obviously many people attend because of their roles, and recently there have been some additions, I think, to standing members of the cell, those being the Director Generals for Justice and Home Affairs, Strategic Policy, Performance and Population and also a Group Director for Financial Services and the Digital Economy. Could we understand why those additions have been made recently, please?

The Chief Minister:

Tom, do you want to handle that?

Director General, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

Yes, of course, happy to, Chief Minister. S.T.A.C. decided that for some of the topics they needed some additional attendees and so, you are quite right, the Director Generals for the economy function and for Justice and Home Affairs are standing invitees, they are not members of the S.T.A.C. and so in that sense they do not have membership rights so they can inform the discussion and they are there to inform around things like test and trace capacity and other issues that they lead on. They are not members, they simply are invited by the Chair to attend in order to inform the members of the group when they need to understand more about things like test and trace operations.

Senator K.L. Moore:

As the Chair noted, one of the purposes of the cell in his view is to provide a safe space for discussion about these very important topics that are brought before them. Naturally - and it becomes clearer in some of the minutes - there is often a difficulty in achieving consensus in those meetings due to the broad range of views that are expressed. In that circumstance where there is a lack of consensus, what is the process for achieving a decision? Is it that the Chair has a carrying vote? Could you perhaps talk us through that?

Group Medical Director:

I think it is important to remember that S.T.A.C. provides advice so ultimately that is what we deliver and we can provide advice in a way that reflects the conversation so we would usually make it clear whether it is a united position, but equally if there is a difference of opinion and different thoughts, in my role as Chair will give the context of that advice and make it clear whether it is unanimous or

to what degree the varying opinions are and to feed back the variety of opinions that have been made in S.T.A.C.

Senator K.L. Moore:

Is that attendance at the competent authorities Ministers or the Emergencies Council your method for expressing the views or are your minutes shared with the decision-making Ministers as soon as they are agreed by your meeting?

Group Medical Director:

The Ministers, once they have been ratified. Yes, is the answer to your question.

Senator K.L. Moore:

So sometimes when time is of the essence personal attendance at a meeting is the preferred method for expressing the view of S.T.A.C.?

Group Medical Director:

In some of the bigger decisions I quite often summarise the discussion at S.T.A.C. if there is not time for the minutes to be ratified, and I will pass that around the members of S.T.A.C. and take their feedback for, again, feeding back to the Ministers.

Senator K.L. Moore:

You previously touched on that sometimes different groups and bodies do attend upon S.T.A.C. to enter into discussions with yourselves. While we absolutely understand that you are all very busy people and trying to maintain your own roles and responsibilities in your professional capacity in the first instance, as well as taking on this important role, we have seen sometimes that, for example, it is noted that the chief executives of Jersey Finance and the Ports of Jersey attended upon S.T.A.C. to share their views in relation to travel in particular, whereas other groups, such as perhaps dentists, have made it known and expressed some frustration that they have not been afforded a similar opportunity. Understanding your point about timing constraints, is there perhaps a methodology to these decisions?

Group Medical Director:

Purely and simply in terms of the discussions that were taking place in relation to dentists, very clear advice has been given from the regulatory bodies. Clear advice that we have adopted from the NHS England, which can inform us in relation to travel. Clearly we are scientists providing scientific and technical advice, we do not have a great in-depth knowledge of the intricacies of how travel works on and off the Island. It is to get that level of detail of knowledge that we require.

Senator K.L. Moore:

Okay. Could you just confirm, as the Chief Economist is often quoted in the minutes, is he a standing member or a formal member of the group.

Group Medical Director:

He is a formal member of the group.

Senator K.L. Moore:

Thank you very much. I am going to hand over to Deputy Ahier now for the next set of questions.

Deputy S.M. Ahier:

In what situations, Chief Minister, during a pandemic response would the S.T.A.C. advice not be sought?

[11:45]

The Chief Minister:

The way the structure is set up ... we started off probably originally with Emergencies Council meetings and then as time has evolved it has been more focused on competent authorities. Ultimately all the significant decisions have gone up to the Council of Ministers. At every meeting we have had I do not recall any meeting when there has not been somebody from S.T.A.C. and potentially up to 3 or 4 representatives of S.T.A.C., but certainly never no one, who has been ... in other words, we have always had someone from S.T.A.C. attending either the Emergencies Council or the competent authorities. Usually there has been more than one. The reason I was pausing is that we have had various discussions around various issues and there has always been input from representatives of S.T.A.C. whether in their personal ... well, sorry, from people who do attend S.T.A.C. who have either given the S.T.A.C. view or their professional view, depending on the circumstances and the timing of events. There have been some occasions when time has meant we have had to move very swiftly. It may be, for example, S.T.A.C. has not met on this particular issue but we have the medical professionals around the table who have given us their professional opinion and then generally what we have always sought to do is achieve a consensus of views in arriving at our decision.

Deputy S.M. Ahier:

In what situations would their advice not be followed?

The Chief Minister:

As I said, what we have tried to do is always arrive at a consensus and base our decisions on the professional advice that we have received around the table.

Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Did the S.T.A.C. representatives attend when decisions were taken?

The Chief Minister:

As I have just said, I do not think I am wrong but I genuinely cannot recall any meeting we have had either at Emergencies Council or at competent authorities ... I would say the same for Council of Ministers but I am slightly less sure of that, but certainly on competent authorities and Emergencies Council I cannot recall any meeting where we have not had somebody from the medical side of things - either the Medical Officer for Health, the Deputy Medical Officer for Health, the Acting Medical Officer for Health or the Medical Director and also Alex or his predecessors - and they are all representatives of S.T.A.C., including also, as we have heard, other DGs who regularly attend competent authorities, if not always, and again they are regular attendees of S.T.A.C. as well.

Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Why then, on 7th December, did S.T.A.C. question its purpose after discussions had been taken and announced on 2nd December in regard to the hospitality circuit breaker in the Christmas guidelines?

The Chief Minister:

The easiest way to answer that one is to hand over to Patrick initially to give some context to that and then I will follow on after that. I know some of that is around timing.

Group Medical Director:

I think as a more general observation we have to recognise S.T.A.C. is giving advice, we are not decision makers. We have a particular area of expertise but we certainly cannot have the big picture, as such, and there will be other considerations that will need to be taken into account. Ministers will have a much greater overview and ultimately they are accountable for the decisions that are taken, not us. I would never expect in these environments that you will always get consensus on every view. I am quite sure that takes place in every jurisdiction where advice has been given by medics and others to Government. In this particular instance I believe it was around timing. Information needed to be taken more quickly and therefore S.T.A.C. in its full constituent forum was not consulted, however that is advice that did come back to S.T.A.C. for review. That advice was then taken.

Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Chief Minister, had S.T.A.C. members been in attendance when the decision was taken in regard to the circuit breaker? When was that decision taken?

The Chief Minister:

The short answer is, yes, members were present. Now, the hospitality circuit breaker ... to be honest, I would need to go back and absolutely check precise dates but my recollection - and it may be possible that Tom will be able to tell us - of the circuit breaker was as you may recall we were around - I am looking on the calendar at the moment - up until about 25th November, and please take this as recollection at this stage, the numbers were actually starting to come down as a result of what we thought might have been any potential increase as a result of half term. I think it was literally the following day, on the Thursday, that the numbers rapidly started going up. From recollection, having, on that Thursday and Friday ... there seemed to be a pattern suddenly emerging, and it was not just a one-off. The competent authorities met over the weekend. I cannot recall if there were any informal discussions in advance of that meeting but my recollection is the competent authorities met on the Sunday initially saying what actions we needed to take. Announcements were therefore made on the Monday, which would have been - sorry, just checking the dates - 30th November and then further measures were put in place and announced on the Wednesday. The Wednesday was when we announced the circuit breaker and that was put in place on Friday the 5th. Some of the timing and some of the deliberations will be, for example, the balance between giving people enough notice but also a balance between, for example, not giving too much notice in order to avoid too many surges of activity in the last couple of days. We did see some of that. The other point that I would like to make at this stage, because it sometimes gets missed, but we have said it on a number of occasions, we moved pretty swiftly on that and what was very clear, and as we have seen in other jurisdictions, the action you take can take 14 days minimum, and sometimes slightly longer, to then have a consequence. We did see that and by 22nd December, I think it is, we saw the numbers starting to come down. The other point on that is because of the investment that we have all done in the testing and tracing regime through the summer and all the way through up until now, we are getting a greater visibility of the virus and you are effectively taking the decisions earlier. In other words, we certainly saw an acceleration, as we know. We know the active cases eventually went up to something like 1,000 but because we were testing at that point between 10,000 and 13,000 people a week from memory, whereas if you look, for example, in March/April of last year ... I cannot remember the exact numbers but I am going to say it was about 150 a day, and Tom or Patrick can correct me on that, but it was much, much lower, that meant that you were actively getting people a lot earlier. With the workforce testing you were going out and seeking the virus and by getting them earlier, although they will appear in your numbers, ordinarily in other jurisdictions those people would have been circulating normally and spreading the virus, whereas we were getting them and they were in isolation. That is backed up by the fact that although part of the strategy is about making sure that the health service side is not overwhelmed, the

hospitalisation rates remained proportionately lower. I remember Dr. Muscat saying that at the time. That was one of the measures, that is a real measure, of the number of patients in hospital relative to the number of people. Relative to the number of people used in the U.K. (United Kingdom) equivalents, our hospitalisation rate should have been a lot higher if we had achieved 1,000 people in the same way that the UK was calculating them. I will stop there because it will get a bit more complicated, but the point was the measure we took very clearly had an impact, you saw the numbers coming down, obviously then we went up to Christmas, we put some suppression in to avoid a potential surge as we had seen in half term on Christmas Day and New Year's Eve and that we can categorically say worked because we have not seen an uptick from the Christmas holiday period.

Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Do you regret not listening to the advice of S.T.A.C. earlier, as they had been recommending greater caution since 12th October?

The Chief Minister:

As I said, I think if you look at the measures, I am sure you have it because it was being sent to States Members as part of the slides, there are a huge number of measures that we did put in place in the October to November period and that was all focused on essentially preparing for winter. What we do not know, and I know Dr. Muscat has suggested it is plausible or is a reasonable rationale, is whether part of the acceleration we saw was because of the new variants being on the Island, which obviously at that point we were not aware of and whether that is the behaviour we have seen. As I said, yes, we saw a significant spike but I emphasise the point again that that spike was magnified because of the measures we put in place. It is the right thing to have done because by having that magnification effectively we were taking decisions earlier than we might have been in March because we could see that acceleration coming through.

Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Are there any situations in which informal discussions are preferential when the Government receives advice and, if so, what are these?

The Chief Minister:

Depends what you mean by preferential. For example, I have a weekly - near enough, looking at Patrick - discussion with Patrick, Ivan, certain officers and the Minister for Health and Social Services on Teams, obviously. That is to give us an update of where we are and we are seeing coming down the line. That is an informal discussion. There are no decisions taken. Sometimes you might seek some further information. That for me is helpful and was one of the things Dr. Muscat was very keen on, which we obviously absolutely agreed to, to formalise and get in the diaries from October.

Deputy S.M. Ahier:

On 26th October the S.T.A.C. resolved to speak to the Chief Minister and the Minister for Health and Social Services because they were wanting to delay an early debate on further measures. Did that discussion happen?

The Chief Minister:

On 26th October? It was the October half term, was it not?

Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Yes, it was in the S.T.A.C. notes.

The Chief Minister:

I would have to go back and check because you may recall that towards the end of the half term there were other matters that had been brought to political attention and potentially was causing a distraction, i.e. the vote of no confidence.

Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Thank you. I will pass over now to Constable Shenton-Stone. Thank you.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Just moving on to the recategorisation. In relation to incoming travellers you stated during the States Assembly sitting of 7th October 2020 that the risk remains low, it remains really low and that it is probably the most important thing to remember. On what advice was that opinion formed?

The Chief Minister:

That will have been based on a whole variety, I suspect, of comments and discussions we have had around the competent authorities table and with the professionals that come in at that point.

[12:00]

I believe that at that point in October - I would have to go back and check the numbers - the numbers will still relatively low. Again, I go back to that point of because we were testing so many testing, and even then the numbers were significantly higher than they were in March time, you are getting greater visibility of the virus relative to that early stage. That would have been the feedback we had at the time.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

It appears that Ministers have been made aware by S.T.A.C. of the significant risk that changing the green regional threshold from 25 cases per 100,000 to 50 cases per 100,000 would pose to the Island but its advice has not been heeded. What was the decision process behind that?

The Chief Minister:

As you will appreciate, there are more than 300 pages of S.T.A.C. minutes, I have not gone back and gone over advice or comments that were made at S.T.A.C. I am very happy to hand over to Patrick. My understanding of that position was that there were various discussions at competent authorities level - I am going to say in October, but it might have been in September - and the principle was that we had been - probably even from August, having said that - saying we need to be looking ahead to winter. That is ultimately what developed into the winter strategy. I do recall there were some long meetings that went through some iterations on the change in the travel borders. I think also because at that point obviously you were seeing increases in other jurisdictions, but the consensus that was reached at that point - and there were, from memory, at least 3 members of S.T.A.C. around the table - was to recommend to the Council of Ministers that essentially green arrivals should self-isolate until they received a negative day zero test. A new test was introduced at day 5. The consensus around that table, that included from the medical professionals that were there, was that that did represent it strengthening the position and that part of the consensus was the harmonisation of the E.C.D.C. (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control) categories going up to 50 cases per 100,000 as opposed to the original 25. The principle was that bear in mind in all of these it was about a balance of harms and the balance of harms also included the ability and connectivity of families. But the increase, certainly the day 5 test was new and was an improvement and my recollection is that the self-isolation on day zero until you received a negative test was also a strengthening. Relative to that period of time, we did strengthen the border testing regime and as a consensus around the table, that as a consensus was agreed.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Was it the view of the Medical Officer of Health that it was neither safe nor wise for relaxation of borders to take place due to the adverse impact on the protection of people's health? That was shared with you, was it?

The Chief Minister:

I have to say, you are going back to recollection in October now, obviously as we are in February. My recollection at the time is while there were long discussions on the whole issue, that a consensus was arrived at and that people were satisfied with that outcome. I might be better off handing to Patrick to see if wants to express it in further terms.

Group Medical Director:

It has been the view of S.T.A.C. throughout that our borders are a very important part of the Island's protection and that we need to be very, very cautious in terms of how we manage our borders. In this particular instance it was the view of S.T.A.C. that this would increase risk and, as the Chief Minister has just said, there were a number of discussions and very robust discussions on this point, but I would again go back to what the Chief Minister said about the balance of harm. That was really my recollection of what that conversation was about in that there could be significant impacts in terms of how we manage our borders and the numbers from a purely viral spreading the virus perspective. Yes, there are increased risks but in terms of our connectivity, economic impact, people's well-being, being able to get on and off the Island, et cetera, which are well rehearsed reasons, a consensus was reached and that did include if the decision was to go down that route then other mitigations, as the Chief Minister just referred to, needed to be put in place.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Thank you. Chief Minister, it appears that much of the decision was based on economic grounds. However, it has been highlighted that the finance sector has weathered the pandemic relatively well even during the recent periods of lockdown with no trouble. Will this influence your decisions in the future?

The Chief Minister:

Apologies, Connétable, I lost the first 2 seconds of your question. I got most of it.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Sorry. It was just that it appears much of the decision with the borders was based on economic grounds. However, it has been highlighted that the finance sector has weathered the pandemic relatively well even during the recent periods of lockdown with no trouble. Will this influence your decisions in the future?

The Chief Minister:

I will let Patrick take it up and then I will follow on.

Group Medical Director:

I will just make myself clear that that discussion was not around just the economy. It was on the full balance of harm, so social impact, people being able to visit loved ones in the U.K., the impact on people's mental health and well-being, being separated from family. So, yes, economic considerations were discussed and were an important part of it but it was not the only discussion or the only point on that. It was a much broader discussion.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Thank you.

The Chief Minister:

Thanks, Patrick. I think it would feed into your direct question as well. On balance of harms and connectivity, I have had conversations and emails from all sorts of people at varying times and, frankly, it depends where you are. You get some people who are obviously desperate for that connectivity and other people who are desperate for you to shut down that connectivity, which is why it is always a balance. But I can recall, for example, quite difficult conversations with individuals where they have lost a very close relative in the U.K. and how are they going to get there to get to the funeral and that in itself, from a mental health point of view or just general compassion point of view, is something that we do bear in mind. It is also again relative to the circumstances that we are facing in the other jurisdictions, so decisions that you might have made in September and October up to the half term, based on the data you had at the time, whereas obviously we went to slightly different decisions around the Christmas period, I think it was, when we basically sent every border, every jurisdiction red, so anybody coming in is doing the isolation period. But having said all that, the other factor that has come into the thinking in the last I will say 2 months, but in the more recent period is what I am trying to say, is obviously the vaccination programme because that then becomes one of the critical focuses. Going back to the overall point, it is not driven just by the virus, it is not just driven by the economy and it is looking at the overall well-being and wider health impact and then taking the circumstances at the time and obviously listening to the professional advice.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Thank you. That is useful to know. I am just going to pass you over to the Constable of St. Peter. Thank you.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Right, we are going to have a look at or discuss facemasks. When was the Council of Ministers made aware of the possibility of the future need for mandatory wearing of facemasks? Were officers requested to proactively form policy and legislation on mandatory facemasks following an awareness from S.T.A.C. that it would likely be needed? When were you first made aware of S.T.A.C.'s view that there should be mandatory wearing of facemasks?

The Chief Minister:

I think what I will do is I will ask Tom to run through the sequencing that took place, because again I know there has been some misinterpretation of certain S.T.A.C. minutes and certainly on 2nd September they did not recommend mandatory mask wearing. One of the other issues we have had to take into account, just generally by way of background, is some of the measures you bring, if you bring them in too early when there is no perceived requirement to do it, you will not get

compliance. That has been one of the slight behavioural issues we have been aware of all the way through. There has also been issues where if you announce that you are going to do something sometimes you get mass surges, essentially, and we can always talk you through the decision-making when we went into the original lockdown, which I still recall those days. But, Tom, do you want to talk about masks? I will just say the other issue within the timeframe has been trying to get the masks law into the right place and also taking account of things like human rights.

Director General, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

Thank you, Chief Minister. Yes, masks have been discussed all the way through the pandemic, in particular whether they should be recommended or whether they should be mandatory. I think masks were first strongly recommended back on 6th April last year when the Deputy Medical Officer of Health recommended to Islanders that masks should be worn. Then the issue came up again in early September when it was discussed at S.T.A.C. on 2nd September and the Deputy M.O.H. (Medical Officer of Health) was very clear at that point that it was important not to mandate the wearing of masks too early but to find the appropriate point at which to emphasise that they should be worn. So as a result of that, the recommendation that masks should be worn in indoor public places was repeated again on 23rd October and around that same time officers had been asked to work on the necessary legislation in order to bring that forward for consideration by Ministers and the Assembly so that when it was the right time masks could be mandated. Then, of course, that was then brought into place from 1st December.

The Chief Minister:

If it helps as well, I cannot recall about questions in the Assembly but certainly in the early October period and September time I can recall quite a lot of emails and commentary being made where people were getting quite excited about being, in their words, forced to wear masks. In other words, there was certainly an element of communication being received by people who did not see the need to wear masks, did not want to do it and all that went with that. You may recall, Connétable, that I think it was on 7th October we sent I think it was a 6-page report or something to all States Members, and it would have been published afterwards, which talked about the evidence to back up the decision to wear masks. So that does illustrate part of the issue around how you get people into the right place to then justify the decision, but the actual recommendations about wearing masks and the communication around that had started earlier than that.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Yes, I think on 20th July there was a S.T.A.C. discussion. Interestingly, on 24th July the U.K. was able to make the wearing of face coverings in shops and supermarkets mandatory. I think the legal argument to me seems somewhat weak that we could not get the legislation in place because certainly the United Kingdom was able to do so. I was in the U.K. for all of August, in fact, and you

could not enter a shop without having a mask on and the public were accepting that. The other argument that we had to get people in the right place, again I do not think that that was a valid argument but there we are. I can see how the U.K. did it. I was there and I did not see many people objecting to having to wear masks.

[12:15]

The Chief Minister:

I was in France and it was the same position that it was very clear and I think, not even generally, it was being properly enforced as well. I know Tom would like to add a couple of clarification bits in there. I would need to go back and check but again it is around the timing issue and in July, for example, and August in Jersey we were in a very, very good place and that again comes back to that point about at what point do people then start complying with it. Some of that is around the behavioural side. I think from memory the U.K. even then, I might be wrong ... I know in France things were starting to change. I cannot remember where the U.K. was at that point, but our numbers were very, very low at that point.

Director General, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

Just to clarify that there was not any noticeable delay from July through to December that was down to legislative development. It was purely that the advice of the Deputy Medical Officer of Health and others was that mandation needed to wait until it was felt to be very necessary. So Ministers listened to that advice and took it. In relation to legislation, I am sure that members will be aware that we are being served by an excellent team from the Law Officers' Department, the Law Draftsman and from the policy function that have consistently developed piece after piece after piece of legislation at extremely short notice and they continue to be able to do that. So that would not delay the introduction of a measure like this.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

At what point were they first asked to look at the mandatory wearing of masks?

Director General, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:

The legislation to bring that in would have been developed during October ready for implementation when it was needed and so the preparatory work would have started in the event that it was needed. The timing around the decision-making was driven by the advice from the Deputy Medical Officer of Health and others. It was not driven around the legislative development programme. As I said, the team have been very, very good from Law Draftsman and from Law Officers and from policy. My own view is the Island has been very well served by that team throughout the pandemic who have

developed the legislation very, very quickly once it becomes clear that those decisions are going to need to be taken.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

I agree. I think they have done a fantastic job, so we must give them credit for that. Tom, you have very successfully answered all 3 of my questions, so I will hand you over to the next member of the team.

The Chief Minister:

I will make one observation and all it is - this is again from memory and I would have to go back and check dates - that we were strongly recommending before we got the law in, in other words there have been times when the guidance and the recommendations have been out there quite considerably in advance and I cannot remember - I would have to go back and check - when we first started talking about masks. My recollection is it would have been in that early October or even perhaps late September period. I might be wrong but on the basis we put out guidance ... sorry, evidence on 7th October, it was obviously in our minds and probably before then because I remember seeing a draft of that report before that date.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

I think that, quite rightly to some extent, we have dispelled the myth that people were not asked sufficiently in advance to prepare for legislation. They were asked back in October and so when it was needed in December it was basically ready to go. So I thank you for that. Thank you very much.

The Chief Minister:

Thank you.

Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Thank you, Constable. Now we move on to future decision-making, Chief Minister. S.T.A.C. has confirmed that it will keep an elimination strategy under review. Would you follow its advice if it sought to achieve this aim?

The Chief Minister:

It goes back to that point we have made all the way through that we take all the advice we receive and we take all the whole issue around balance of harms and if S.T.A.C. were to turn around and say: "Because evidence on X or Y or Z, taking all in the round and the balance of harms into account, means that you have to do a slightly different strategy or a significant different strategy", obviously we would be considering that fairly rapidly. But to date the S.T.A.C. advice, well, all the professional

advice we have received is that the suppression regime that we are following is appropriate for the Island. I do recall ... in fact perhaps I might hand over to Patrick because in the advice that you put out relatively recently I think you did comment on an elimination strategy or the merits of not ... or the difficulties of following one.

Group Medical Director:

Yes, I did respond and wrote a letter recently that was published in one of the local media outlets stating S.T.A.C.'s position and the reasons why we feel that at the current time it is not the appropriate path to follow.

Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Thank you. Chief Minister, is there a process underway to look forward to potential issues that might be ahead and to plan to mitigate for them?

The Chief Minister:

Yes, is the short answer. So where we are at present ... well, shall we say prepare I think rather than mitigate. So what we are obviously now considering and I have said this publicly already, we are having discussions, started last week I think it was at the Council of Ministers, we did one this week for competent authorities and we are doing another next week for competent authorities and it will be going back out to C.O.M. (Council of Ministers) which is around essentially, for want of a better expression, the spring and summer strategies and the impact going forward of what happens at various stages with the vaccination process. There are a variety of questions out there. When I say the difficulty we have it is because we are in a very good place. There is not that many jurisdictions yet who are in a position to produce really good evidence on where we go forward and by that I mean if you look at I think elements of the U.K. are now slightly ahead of us, not much, in terms of the vaccination rates but I think the leaders are still Israel and Bahrain, from memory, and we are still pretty high up there. The issues then come down to what will happen when you have 50 per cent roughly of the population having had their first jab and what does that do. For example, what impact will that have on all the various mitigations that we have got in place? What scope does that give you to open up all those types of issues? They are good problems to have, if that makes sense, but they are difficult problems to have because there is no one you can look at - as we have said, there is not a rulebook on this at all - to say that such and such have been doing X and this has been their experience, because we are pretty well at the front end of this. What we are doing is we are trying to have some discursive meetings where we go through the kind of issues. We have asked officers to go back to do some research and find out what they can. Every week there seems to be more evidence that comes through on different areas, and again I will hand over to Patrick. At the same time, you are also trying to balance the ... as our numbers are coming down because of all the actions we had taken before Christmas and during that period, how you then go back to more

normality, hence the non-essential retail opening last Wednesday. Speaking personally, I might be able to get a haircut next Wednesday if I am lucky. But these are careful steps and we then have to consider how much further we go and obviously that is part of the framework that we have already put out there. There are discussions going ahead, one on the mitigations as we ease, that is cautious and seeing how the numbers change, and also then the discussions that we are having around what happens in spring and summer as a result of the vaccination. I do not know if Patrick wants to ...

Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Thank you, Chief Minister. There has been a recent and sudden rise in cases in Guernsey. The Island entered into an immediate strict lockdown following the initial 4 cases being identified. Would Jersey's decision-making structure allow for such speed if needed?

The Chief Minister:

Yes.

Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Oh, good. Has the increased prevalence and number of COVID-19 mutations impacted the decisions being made in relation to the virus in 2021?

The Chief Minister:

I will let Patrick answer that in detail, but essentially at competent authorities categorically we are considering the various variants that are presently known about and we also have to accept there may be other variants that come through. Again, you have to take that into account of all the experience we have had since this all started near enough a year ago now and the experience we have all come through and learning from that and also, as I said, the future outlook on where we are with vaccinations.

Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Chief Minister, do you believe that the new variant, the B117, is increasing the infection rate among schoolchildren or children generally?

The Chief Minister:

I am definitely going to hand over to Patrick on a medical matter.

Group Medical Director:

The short answer to your question are new variants being considered: yes, of course they are. They appear at the moment to have a greater degree of infectivity, in other words they are more easily

transmitted and that is the natural progression that you see with viruses. So we do have to consider that and any virus that is more transmissible among adults will also be more transmissible among children. I think what we have to do is look and see what is happening in our context rather than in other contexts. That is why we advised and have been put in place very robust measures in schools and a testing regime within schools that, going back to the Chief Minister's point earlier on, will provide an early warning system so we can monitor that. But, frankly, for all the reasons that have been well rehearsed I think we should be very proud in Jersey that we are one of the few areas in the British Isles where children are actually at school. There is no doubt they are safer and their education is better and their life chances are better by being there. So, of course, if we were worried that significant transmission was taking place within schools that would then put the rest of the population at risk and everything else at risk, we would have to look at that but we have a very robust monitoring system for schools.

Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Thank you very much. I will pass over now to the Constable of St. Martin.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Thank you. I am just moving on to the Council of Ministers Emergencies Council and competent authorities meeting. As outlined in the Corporate Services letter of 19th January 2021, not all Government minutes are published. Just to confirm, are the meetings of the Council of Ministers Emergencies Council and the competent authorities fully minuted?

The Chief Minister:

Yes, they are. I think what I had better clarify as well, and it is with some irony I think, because when I and the Deputy of St. Ouen and the Deputy of St. Mary helped write the scrutiny protocols we did consider the minutes and access of Scrutiny to them, obviously wearing different hats to the ones certainly myself and Richard are wearing now. We had discussions with representatives from the Council of Ministers of the day.

[12:30]

The Council of Ministers' feedback, which we accepted, again was this point about a safe space and that is why we accepted that the B minutes should remain B minutes and, therefore, are not published. That, as far as I am aware, has always been the case for previous Emergencies Councils and I presume previous competent authorities and obviously previous Councils of Ministers. I do not recall hearing members of those bodies at that time clamouring for those minutes to be published because again it is about giving the ability for Ministers to fully express their views without essentially fear or favour. Obviously for historical records they will be there but that is the position and that was

endorsed by the then Council of Ministers, at least that was my assumption. I do recall conversations with quite senior representatives on the Council of Ministers at that point who were very clear in their views on that subject and that we accepted at that point as being the view of the Council of Ministers. I do think it is the right thing.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Thank you. You said that B minutes are not shared but it does not appear that A minutes are shared at the moment.

The Chief Minister:

A minutes should be published. Funnily enough, I was having a conversation with one of the officers quite recently. I think A minutes generally really just show who was attending and there is not that much in them. I think they are behind in getting them up on the website and I have asked them to pursue that, so I will chase it again. They should be shared.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Thank you. Why are the Council of Ministers' meeting minutes uploaded in bulk at the end of the year and not quarterly or bi-yearly?

The Chief Minister:

If that is the A minutes, I am not entirely sure there is that much in them, but I do agree and was only recently made aware that it was done as a bulk process not as a regular process because we approve them as they come through. Sometimes you will get modifications that then they get batched up but we do approve them as we go through on the meetings.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Thank you. Will those minutes identified as exempt be forwarded in a confidential manner to the Corporate Services Panel in order that we can better understand the decision-making that has taken place?

The Chief Minister:

That was the discussion I have just alluded to. That was the agreement that came through from the then Council of Ministers and the then Scrutiny side, as I said. My assumption on the basis of that meeting or those discussions was that all Ministers of the day were in agreement that the minutes stayed as B minutes and they did not get shared with Scrutiny. Bear in mind, at that point the president of the Chairmen's Committee, as it was called, myself and I think all the representatives of the Chairmen's Committee accepted that on the basis of the representations from the Council of

Ministers. On that basis, and I think now I do understand it and I do believe that the point of the safe space does make sense.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Thank you. I just wanted to clarify that. We note that the competent authorities have met multiple times in the previous weeks. What items have been discussed?

The Chief Minister:

Well, as I said to Deputy Ahier, one of the things we are discussing at the moment is it is a discursive meeting, if that makes sense. In other words, to identify concerns, issues, whatever you like, in terms of looking forward to then start informing what we might start calling the spring and the summer strategies.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

The broad composition of the Emergencies Council and the competent authorities comprises of the same Ministers. Could you clarify the strategic thinking and skills analysis completed when deciding which group should meet?

The Chief Minister:

Obviously it is laid down by law, as in the membership, and fundamentally in the early days the Emergencies Council tended to meet more and that was, I think, around things like ... the last one would have been around agreeing the winter strategy. The competent authorities tends to be - I was going to say more operational, that is the wrong expression - dealing with more regular items that come up, but what we are aiming to do is, therefore, the Emergencies Council obviously meets less frequently as we are going through where we are at this stage. Obviously if matters were to change then we bring in the Emergencies Council to give that kind of wider view from, as you know, members including the Comité des Connétables, including the Bailiff and the Lieutenant Governor.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Thank you. When did the competent authorities start meeting to discuss COVID actions?

The Chief Minister:

I would have to go back and check. I know with the first formal meeting of the Emergencies Council, I cannot recall if that was mid-February or the beginning of March and then the competent authorities started meeting, I think, fairly shortly after. I would have to go back and check the minutes.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Do the Ministers receive political advice from external companies or advice or coaching?

The Chief Minister:

Sorry, advice or ...

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Or coaching from external companies.

The Chief Minister:

What do you mean by coaching?

The Connétable of St. Martin:

It might have been erroneously put in the question. It should be do the Ministers receive political advice from external companies?

The Chief Minister:

We certainly do not, not to my knowledge, receive political advice from external companies. I do not think that would be appropriate at all, but we receive advice from all sorts of areas. If you go into the financial territory, obviously we have had reports and things produced by external consultants if we have been doing financial analysis or whatever, not necessarily just for COVID, but generally most of our information comes from internally either the Government or within the Island. Sorry, what I am trying to say is that most of the advice is through the normal process you would expect. There obviously have been times when we have been taking soundings from the community.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Can you say who was giving advice guiding political decision-making? If anybody has or anyone has, are there associated costs?

The Chief Minister:

Well, as I said, I am cautious around advice on political decision-making in terms of the expression. What I am trying to say is that if I use the example when we were putting the first economic support packages in place - and I am going to say in March, I cannot remember the exact dates because that time was certainly a bit of a blur and a long time ago now - I do recall coming in and there were meetings going on in a variety of rooms in Broad Street with representatives, all sorts of industry representatives, to understand the challenges that they could see coming through from the potential of all the measures we were having to put in place to combat the pandemic. I do recall seeing representatives from Scrutiny at those meetings. So that will have then informed and officers would have been present and then the officers would have taken that input, that information, directly from,

if you like, the coalface to then generate the measures and the support packages that were then put together. They would have then gone quite swiftly up through the normal process - I am looking at the Treasurer to speak - to receive the blessing, shall we say, of Treasury, or support perhaps. Then it would have come up to the relevant Ministers and, from memory, the competent authorities for essentially a political consideration. No doubt during that process at the very least the Minister for Economic Development and the Minister for Treasury and Resources were a lot earlier involved. I know certainly the Minister for Economic Development was present at the original discussions that were going on with industry. Hopefully that gives you a flavour that that all took place and moved quite swiftly to get the initial packages in place. Obviously over time as experience has developed and the timeframes and all the mitigations as they have come in or been eased reflect all the measures that we have put in place accordingly.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Thank you. Have you identified any improvements in emergency decision-making structures that will be implemented?

The Chief Minister:

As I said previously, what I have not done is kind of looked back with hindsight yet because essentially we keep having to ... well, you have to keep looking forward on this to deal with the issues that you can see coming down the line. Our timeframe at the moment is looking ... we have got a window, I would suggest, at the moment, I may be proved wrong, of up to some time after half term and perhaps maybe as far as the end of March for us to get the strategies in place that I have alluded to already. That is our focus at the moment. Obviously parallel to that, as I have already said, we are dealing with how we ease the mitigations. So from the perspective of that has got to be the focus is keep looking forward, we obviously do apply the experience we have had over the last 12 months to the decisions we are facing going forward, but I have not gone back yet and looked at the issues we have had around are there changes in the law and things that we need to do. That will come through at some point but I would suggest the priority remains combatting the pandemic. Although some of the structures in early days were slightly more clunky than we would have liked, I think we have got into that mode of it working well and all the way through decisions have been made swiftly and on time.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Thank you. What work has been undertaken to update the exit strategy in light of the vaccination programme? For example, will the vaccination programme allow for a return to normal life, as normal as we can know it?

The Chief Minister:

Well, that is what I have been alluding to, to the discussions we are having right now and the development of a spring and summer strategy. As I said, we are balancing 2 streams of work, if you like. One is returning and reducing the mitigations that we have got at the moment and, as I said, non-essential retail this last Wednesday, hopefully close contact, provided the numbers carry on as they are, next Wednesday, and then we will be considering the next phase. I think that is coming to us probably next week to consider in that time period, but then, as I said, the separate piece of work is considering the impact of the vaccination programme and what that will mean in the longer term. That is the discursive elements that we are doing at the moment.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

When is the critical mass of vaccinated population expected in the Island?

The Chief Minister:

Well, as we have said publicly previously, the first jab, for want of a better expression, to everybody over 50 is still on track to be by the end of March and then obviously there is other steps going through. I might just hand over to Julian or Patrick on that front.

Group Medical Director:

I think you have to bear in mind, as the Chief Minister alluded to earlier, we do not know exactly what the vaccination means. We do not know how much impact it has on people who have been vaccinated, their ability to transmit the virus to others, and we do not know the exact impact it will have in terms of disease, so you can be infected with the virus and it causes you no harm, as we already know for some people with COVID. But the real question is going to be how much does it reduce serious illness and serious disease and putting people in a position where they then need to be looked after in a hospital. That is simply not known yet and going back to the earlier question about new variants, that also has to be taken into consideration. It is likely that COVID in some form will be around permanently. The question is how much disease will it cause. It is likely to develop into something along the lines of influenza and so it is not going away completely any time soon. It is likely we will probably see an improvement in the summer but we will still have to be mindful of what happens in the winter. These are questions that every jurisdiction in the world is struggling with, but we will hopefully all learn together.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Thank you. I appreciate that.

The Chief Minister:

Would you like me to give you an update on the numbers, Connétable?

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Yes, please.

Director General:

Good afternoon. As the Chief Minister said, we are on course to give, up to the end of March, a significant number of people over 50 in terms of the first dose and then by June we should have completed the programme of getting the second dose into most of those groups as defined by the J.C.V.I. (Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation). There are still ongoing conversations with both the J.C.V.I. and here in Jersey in terms of the programme post-June, but the really positive thing is that the programme to date - and hopefully you have seen the figures that have been released - is really good. We are getting good supplies of the vaccine still. The team at Fort Regent is doing an excellent job. We have been processing over 1,000 people per day over the last week and, as I say, we are still on course. I am very confident of delivering the vaccine to the vast majority of people over 50, which are the people who have been determined as those in high risk in terms of the challenges of COVID, by June.

[12:45]

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Thank you. My final question for you, Chief Minister, is what is your view of those experts who are urging caution and a longer-term plan for moving away from physical distancing and other measures even as the vaccination programme is rolled out?

The Chief Minister:

Sorry, can you clarify the question?

The Connétable of St. Martin:

What is your view of those experts who are urging caution and a longer-term plan for moving away from physical distancing and other measures even as the vaccination programme is rolled out? As you said, the world falls into 2 sets of people. Some people are far more cautious than the others. So it was just asking what is your view.

The Chief Minister:

In other words, the view of the people who want us to retain measures in place for longer potentially?

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Yes. Sorry, if I did not put it correctly.

The Chief Minister:

The short answer is that this is all part of the discussions that we are having. For every measure we put in place there are consequences. For the sake of argument, this is why the economic argument is still valid in the context of the overall well-being of the Island because, frankly, if somebody loses their job and depression sets in and, for the sake of argument, they commit suicide that, in itself, is a consequence of actions that we have taken. That is why I talk about mental health. I am obviously giving an extreme example but one has to bear in mind the consequences of everything we do. For many people, what for them might be a blindingly obvious course of action because it is particularly pertinent to their own circumstances ... and I can think of all sorts of difficult conversations I have had or the Minister for Health and Social Services has had or the competent authorities have had on all sorts of individual instances that come up. That is why the decision-making process we have has to take all things into the round, and we will do in relation to how and when measures get eased. That is what we go through each time. We do take account of the advice that we receive, the professional advice we receive, and the impact on the overall balance of harms that either introducing a measure or releasing a measure will have. It will also take account of what is happening around us and again in the context of us as a connected Island. So I think what I suppose I was trying to say is I try not to be influenced personally by who shouts loudest or who is shouting at the present and listen to the professional advice we receive. To date that has served us very, very well. We are in, I will say, a good place and particularly with the vaccination programme rolling out as it is. I think we have been incredibly well served by all the teams that we have got in place to bring us to this point with all the challenges that we have had. I look in the context of what is happening around us as well.

The Connétable of St. Martin:

Thank you. I will hand over to our Chair, Senator Kristina Moore.

Senator K.L. Moore:

Thank you. Chief Minister, you have made it very clear this morning that you have neither the time nor the inclination to look backwards as you prepare for the spring and summer strategies. If that is the case, do you consider that it might be of use to yourself or to the S.T.A.C. to have a group who do that backward-looking review, who can help to provide advice to avoid some of the pitfalls that have been experienced in this first year of dealing with COVID, in order to best move forward and deliver a successful spring and summer strategy?

The Chief Minister:

I would not have quite phrased it the way you did, Senator. What I would say is we are constantly learning and so from that perspective we do learn from the experiences we have had. I think it might be helpful, particularly as he has been having a very easy ride so far, that perhaps Alex might want

to comment on how we do learn but also on the 2 pieces of work, one we had in the past and one that is kind of going through some iterations, which is learning from the experiences of other jurisdictions and what measures have been put in place. Alex, would you like to comment very briefly?

Interim Director, Public Health Policy:

Thank you, Chief Minister and Senator. The learning from experience in the context of a pandemic emergency is absolutely vital and I think it is important to note that that learning is continuing throughout and being applied throughout. Indeed, as we look forward to spring with vaccination plans much better progressing than was anticipated in the winter strategy published in November, we are very conscious of the remarks that have been made by your colleagues in this panel about the importance of balancing a number of factors, including disease spread but also relating to the wider harms to society and to individuals that need to be achieved. I would suggest strongly that some of the learning in the context of, for example, the way our test and trace function is continuing to improve and evolve is apparent. Indeed, with the application of test and trace in the schools environment, for example, an awful lot has been learned and indeed in the period over October and November when cases were rising and the numbers of children that were being placed in isolation as a result of being direct contacts, work by our teams with schools developed a policy and an approach that continued to maintain a level of safety while placing many fewer children, and indeed teachers, in isolation as a result. Indeed, in the context of recent days the identification of a small number of cases in the retail sector did result in very quick action being taken both from an emergency response perspective but also from a decision-making perspective involving S.T.A.C. and C.A.M. (Competent Authority Ministers) to ensure that the risk associated with those cases was mapped very quickly, all of the relevant preventive actions were put in place. Indeed, there was considerable improvement in our ability to manage that potential risk as a result of the learning that we have undertaken. I do not think it is for me to comment on whether or not there ought to be any special looking-back exercise but I can assure that learning from experience is an abiding kind of concern of both officers and indeed Ministers in terms of how we move forward to spring and summer.

Senator K.L. Moore:

Thank you. Is that conducted in a formal process or as a formal group, that learning process?

Interim Director, Public Health Policy:

There are formal groups on the officer side that do undertake that learning and indeed I point to the Strategic Co-ordination Group and the test and trace programme board who are continuing to evolve thinking over time. The application of rapid testing devices in the schools environment is a good example of how that learning is progressing to continually improve our test and trace function

capability. I attend the test and trace programme board, which is being held weekly, and that learning and that thinking is crystallised in that environment. Indeed, in the context of S.T.A.C. and Ministers, again consideration by S.T.A.C. and Ministers ultimately of policy options, what we can learn from previous experience and how that learning can be applied to policy going forward, is done on a continual basis in the context of an emergency situation, which COVID is. I can assure that that learning is taking place on a continual basis.

Senator K.L. Moore:

Thank you. As you mentioned the schools testing programme, it would be really helpful to understand a little more, if we could, about how that information is collected and shared and decisions are taken, because at the moment we only really receive a weekly update about the position within schools.

Interim Director, Public Health Policy:

Well, I do not have to hand the schools test data, but I can tell you that insofar as I understand it, the lateral flow device rollout in secondary schools, primary schools and for ages 15 to 18 or years 11 to 13 has progressed very well and no positives have come back from that testing programme to date. In terms of how that policy was developed, what we have been very careful through S.T.A.C. and other forums to point out and to ensure is communicated well is that these devices offer an additional layer of protection to schools, identifying the potential for cases to be identified more quickly. They do not and should not replace the current. P.C.R. (polymerase chain reaction) testing system, which was made available before the start of spring term to those teachers and older pupils. So that is a difficult balance to strike and one that we are continually monitoring. We do not want any of that rapid testing to be seen as something that could be an alternative to the more accurate P.C.R. testing that we are currently carrying out, but on the balance of risk we believe, and indeed events have shown in terms of the safe return of pupils, that for the time being at least the strategy formulated over the Christmas period and before the start of school spring term is working well.

Senator K.L. Moore:

Thank you. We would just like to ask a couple of questions about communications if we could now. Could the Chief Minister perhaps describe how the communications strategy is changing? We are led to believe that there is now going to be some greater consultative measures put in place to gauge how the public is feeling about particular aspects such as the vaccination programme.

The Chief Minister:

There is a considered survey being run - I cannot remember the exact dates on that - which is around getting feedback on the vaccination programme. I think it has been commissioned and, assuming it has been commissioned either by the vaccination programme or by the vaccination team, I think,

Julian, if you want him to, can talk to that further. As I said, the communications process, if we can continue to improve we will continue to improve. I note that the various media reach, et cetera, has significantly increased over the last 12 months. From memory, I cannot remember if it is Facebook impressions or something along those lines, it has gone from 12 million to 60 million. It is that kind of number that we have had. But Julian do you want to talk about the programme?

Senator K.L. Moore:

Given the time, I think we had better move on, but perhaps if there are any papers for us to receive in relation to the communication strategy and its progression, that would be really helpful. I am going to hand over now to the Constable of St. Peter who has some further questions.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Thank you. Chief Minister, looking at financial support, what prioritisation of financial support will you be discussing with the Minister for Treasury and how much more are the Government willing to contribute?

[13:00]

The Chief Minister:

So this is looking forward rather than looking back, is it?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Yes, looking forward.

The Chief Minister:

From memory, the Co-Funded Payroll Scheme is in place, I am going to say, to the end of April. The Treasurer is nodding at me, so that is fine. Obviously we have done various measures to support hospitality. As ever, what we have said all the way through is we have tried to support, where we can, as many people as we have been able to, but bearing in mind working in the context we are operating in of absolutely extraordinary times. The return, for example, of non-essential retail, in theory then some of that support package eases off again according to basically how the measures come in and how they go out again.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Thank you. Low income families, will you be looking at any additional support for low income families? I know, Patrick, you have had concerns in this area.

The Chief Minister:

On the overall issue, I do know that Deputy Martin, as Minister for Social Security, does occasionally attend the competent authorities when we are dealing with those sort of issues. To date, my understanding is they consider the packages that are in place for support to be reasonable. However, if there are further measures that need to be put in place obviously we will consider them and almost certainly put them in place. Patrick, I do not know if you want to make a comment.

Group Medical Director:

No, you are quite right, we have raised that as an issue. The measures almost inevitably affect people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who already have more challenging health needs. We have raised it and as far as I would say it has been taken on board or certainly we have been listened to when we have raised it.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Thanks. That is good to hear. My final question is really one about the finance industry. Is the Council of Ministers considering any further COVID-related legislation and in particular consideration given to legislation allowances for working remotely to support the finance industry during the reduction in travel? What we are really looking at is that there are certain instances where board meetings, et cetera, should require an online presence and certainly with the restrictions that can be difficult. Do you consider we might have to make any legislation changes should the situation arise that people cannot be there for board meetings within Jersey?

The Chief Minister:

Do you mean on Island?

The Connétable of St. Peter:

On Island, yes.

The Chief Minister:

I have to say that has not come across my desk but that does not mean it is not being considered, so I will very happily take that question away and send it to the Minister for Economic Development and the Minister for External Relations. But having said all that, the Treasurer did gesticulate at me so I think he may be able to give you some greater information.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Excellent.

Treasurer of the States:

It is on our radar in Treasury and Exchequer in respect to Revenue Jersey and in particular through the economic substance measures. It is on our radar and we are giving it consideration.

The Connétable of St. Peter:

Thank you very much. I think I can now hand back to our Chair because I think we have just overrun our time by 4 minutes.

The Chief Minister:

We will not hold that against you.

Senator K.L. Moore:

Thank you. Well, we did start 5 minutes late. But as the Treasurer was just appearing there, I would like to ask him a further question, if I may. It has come to our attention that the terms and conditions of the payroll scheme have not yet been published. I wonder if you can tell us when they will be published so that businesses can fully understand the terms of the payroll support scheme.

Treasurer of the States:

The terms and conditions of the payroll scheme have not been issued? They were signed off a week ago and my understanding was they are available and if they are not then I will make sure they are online. If you are alternatively referring to the fixed cost scheme, those guidelines are in progress in terms of being worked up and I will seek an update from the economy team.

Senator K.L. Moore:

Thank you and, you are absolutely correct, it was the fixed cost scheme, so we will be most grateful if that could be expedited. Thank you. With that, we thank you all for your answers and your time, especially this morning and this afternoon, and I close the hearing. Thank you all.

The Chief Minister:

Thank you very much.

[13:05]