Aberdeenshire

COUNCIL **BUSINESS SERVICES**

REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL – 25 JUNE 2020

COVID-19 COMMITTEE: CALL FOR VIEWS ON REFINING OR REDUCING CURRENT LOCKDOWN ARRANGEMENTS

1 Reason for Report / Summary

1.1 This report details Aberdeenshire Council's response to the Scottish Parliament's Covid-19 Committee's Call for Views on Refining or Reducing Current Lockdown Arrangements.

2 Recommendations

The Council is recommended to:

2.1 Acknowledge Aberdeenshire Council's response submitted under delegated powers and following consultation.

3 Purpose and Decision Making Route

3.1 The consultation aims to gather views on transitioning out of current lockdown arrangements. There is a particular focus on decision-making processes around changes to restrictions, the data that decisions are based on and the messaging strategy for communicating decisions and guidance.

4 Discussion

4.1 The Call for Views is available to view on the Scottish Parliament website.

4.2 The consultation was emailed to all councillors and chief officers on 22 May 2020, with a closing date of 26th May 2020. Responses were collated prior to the submission closing date of 1st June 2020.

4.3 Responses were received from councillors and Business Services. The collated response is attached at Appendix 1.

4.4 Due to the timelines of Full Council meetings, the draft response was sent to the Chair, Vice Chair, and all Group Leaders for review and approval. The response was approved and submitted on the consultation closing date of 1st June 2020.

4.5 In summary, Aberdeenshire Council is supportive of a clear messaging strategy and clear communication of the evidence that changes to restrictions are based on.

5 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

5.1 This report is relevant to all of the 11 Council Priorities as reopening of all council services and all Aberdeenshire communities are affected by the transition out of lockdown arrangements.

5.2 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation is agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial			X
Staffing			X
Equalities			X
Fairer Scotland Duty			X
Town Centre First			X
Sustainability			X
Children and Young People's Rights and Wellbeing			X

5.3 An equality impact assessment is not required because this is a response to a consultation and does not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.

5.4 The following risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:
Changes in government policy, legislation and regulation - this is controlled through COSLA membership, SOLACE membership and membership of professional bodies at both corporate & individual level.

6 Scheme of Governance

6.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments have been incorporated into the report. They are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

6.2 Full Council is able to note this report in terms of Section A9.1 of Part 2 A - List of Committee Powers in the Scheme of Governance.

Section A.22 of the List of Officers Powers in Part 2B of the Scheme of Governance authorises Chief Officers to submit a Council response to an external consultation on any policy matter where the timescale for responding does not permit an opportunity for approval by the appropriate policy committee. Any response submitted under this delegated power shall be made following consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair and main Opposition

Spokesperson of the appropriate policy committee, where possible, and must be reported to the next Council or Committee meeting.

Ritchie Johnson, Director of Business Services
Report prepared by: Erin Wood, Policy Officer, 29th May 2020

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Aberdeenshire Council response to Call for Views

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO "COVID-19 COMMITTEE: CALL FOR VIEWS"
MAY 2020

- The approach being taken by the Scottish Government in its COVID-19 Framework for Decision Making

While there is a review of the conditions of the lockdown every three weeks by the SG, the current pattern is for the government to announce a week before what they intend to do at the time of the review. There have been reports from residents to say this is confusing. Consideration needs to be given to the messaging that supports any announcements so it is clear when new guidance becomes effective.

The measure for transition between phases is dependent on the R value and the number of infectious cases (IC) – and the WHO's six criteria. It would, therefore, be helpful to have this information – the two measurable input [R & IC] - published daily as well as the thresholds to be met when moving between phases. The observation from reading the roadmap is that the thresholds are quite vague. For example, to move to from Phase 0 to Phase 1 requires an R below 1, yet in its own paper [see below], the SG have indicated an R below 1 since early April, so is it the IC figure which is currently controlling the move to phase 1? What is the threshold target IC figure, is it 4250, i.e. the number of COVID bed capacity in Scotland?

If this information is published it will give the public confidence that the decisions taken are driven by and supported by data.
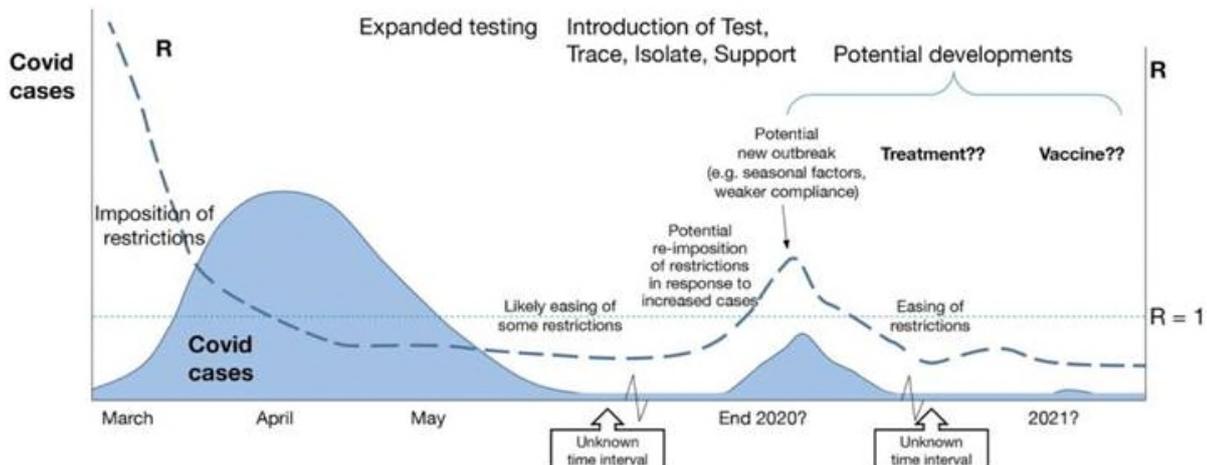
- The scope for a differentiated approach to easing current restrictions on an area by area basis across the UK and in Scotland

We would support geographical variations, this is perfectly reasonable across Scotland as the regions are quite diverse. However, there would be a need to be tracking the information [R & IC] for each of these regions and again this information needs to be published so that it supports decisions being made, informs the public of improvements resulting from the efforts made and ensures their continued participation.

- How do we maintain public confidence and support in the public sector response to COVID-19 as determined by the Scottish Government whilst easing current restrictions?

The data should be published and the reasons shared for any change to the data occurring in different regions so that corrections to 'poor' behaviour effecting a negative change can be made. Clear and consistent messaging is essential, supported by national messages which local agencies can adapt to reflect local circumstances.

- How should different interests in civic society and the economy be involved in the decision-making process about amending restrictions and what would enable the final decisions to be widely supported despite any necessary trade-offs that may require to be made

Councils should be encouraged with/through elected members to engage with residents and businesses to have their voice by responding to consultations, feedback so that the SG is able to determine what geographical variations to the phased change can be implemented in line with R and IC figures.

- Could the current decision-making processes used by the Scottish Government to respond to COVID-19 be improved and if so how;

The process could be improved with more data, which is clear to understand and easily accessible. More regional differentiation of the data would be helpful, and more information on the causes that are effecting the change (rise or fall) of data.

- How robust is the current data used to inform the on-going response and are there areas where further development is required;

The described computation for R in the roadmap has so many variables that without clearer explanation it makes it difficult to trust if this value is actually representative – one figure for R is clearly is not representative for the whole of Scotland. If the SG's own Framework for Decision making paper has an R below 1 since early April, it would be helpful to have an explanation as to why we would not be entering phase 1 in late April i.e. 3 weeks later?

- How should the messaging strategy be developed by the Scottish Government as we ease parts of the current lockdown (and may potentially need to create other restrictions).

The messaging should continue to be simple and appropriate. The strategy should be developed in consultation with local councils and police, because it is they who must implement the changes and manage the public's expectations.

There is a need to make use of data and evidence to ensure that messages are landing correctly (e.g. are police reporting increases in people not following guidance which requires more focused communications?).

Messaging should be clear and succinct, making full use of all available media (TV and newspaper adverts, in addition to social media). Public agencies should be asked to continue to reflect national messaging to ensure messaging remains consistent. And misinformation and speculation should be tackled robustly. The messaging strategy needs to help people appreciate that the future is going to look very different, there is unlikely to be a return to what was in the past – be that services, the economy, their ways of life, things people take for granted.