

# Elected Members Briefing



21 April 2020

## Introduction

Welcome to your latest Elected Members Bulletin covering issues relating to COVID-19 which have required national and local responses over the past week.

The **COSLA Facebook** page and **COSLA Twitter** feed are constantly updated with information and resources. The **COSLA Website** and **KHub** for Elected Members are added to daily. Joining instructions for the KHub are noted at the end of this briefing.

The number of cases and the risk level is updated regularly on the **Scottish Government Website** and **NHS Inform** continues to be the source of up to date public health information.

## Key Messages

The ongoing key public health messages continue to be that it is vital people stay at home apart from for essential shopping and collection of medicines, for exercise once a day, for medical/care needs and for work where essential. There are early signs that the number of COVID-19 cases are stabilising, but it is still important to continue our collective efforts to flatten the curve. In his **latest video** Jason Leitch, National Clinical Director for Healthcare Quality and Strategy, tells us that it is vital we stick with these guidelines, staying at home to protect the health and social care services, and our loved ones.

This week the Scottish Government also launched **Clear Your Head**, a national campaign to help people cope during the COVID-19 pandemic which highlights the practical things people can do to help them feel better whilst continuing to stay at home.

You can now find **all of the Scottish Government COVID-19 related guidance in one place on their website**. This includes advice and guidance for settings including businesses, healthcare, education and housing.



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## **Interim Governance Arrangements**

The first COSLA Leaders meeting via Microsoft Teams was held on Friday 17th April 2020, and will continue every second Friday, with the next on 1st May. At their meeting, Leaders formally agreed to this arrangement, with the agenda for these considering only Covid-19 issues.

## **Workforce**

COSLA, the SJC and SNCT Unions have published a set of **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)** to accompany the Health Protection Scotland COVID-19 Information and Guidance for General (Non-Healthcare) Settings version 4.0. published on 14 April.

COSLA, the Unions and Scottish Government continue to work together to ensure that all employees and service users are kept safe by following UK and Scottish Government advice in relation to limiting the spread of COVID-19 and to maintain delivery of critical Local Government services to our communities. The FAQs have been developed to help Local Government employees understand the national COVID-19 advice. COSLA and the joint Trade Unions are clear that our workforce must have access to practical guidance to ensure they have the confidence to carry out their roles as part of this whole system approach to tackling COVID-19. The Scottish Government have provided assurance that they will continue to work with COSLA and the Unions on setting-specific guidance and that they will take all possible steps to ensure all appropriate PPE supplies are made available to the workforce. It is hoped that this will give confidence to those receiving services and those who are shielding that their safety is being prioritised.

COSLA is continuing to hold twice weekly meetings with Trade Unions, chaired by Cllr Evison as COSLA President and attended by Cllr Macgregor as COSLA Resources Spokesperson.



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## **Finance Update**

COSLA received a letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance on 17th April in relation to funding assurance, with a copy sent to all Councils Leaders. Cllr Macgregor spoke with Ms Forbes on Friday following Leaders and re-iterated the pressures facing Local Government and the need to work together to press UK Treasury for funding. Ms Forbes is extremely grateful for the Local Government response in relation to delivery of the Business Grant Scheme and the work now progressing to implement further business support by end April.

In relation to further business support, Scottish Government announced an additional £220m: £120m to extend the current Business Grant Scheme eligibility; £34m to support newly self-employed and £66m to support SMEs. The first two supports will be delivered through councils and work is underway to develop criteria and processes, learning from the current grant scheme.

Total consequentials for Scotland in relation to COVID-9 are £3.365 billion. 18th April brought a further UK announcement of £1.6 billion for Local Government in England, which should result in additional consequentials of around £155 million for Scotland. Cllr Macgregor wrote to Ms Forbes on 20th April asking that these be passed on the Local Government in full so that Councils can continue to deliver essential services and protect the most vulnerable in our communities.

All Councils are now providing Death Registration services 7 days a week and on bank holidays, from Easter weekend for 12 weeks. Scottish Government has agreed to underwrite the additional costs of providing this extended service up to £600k.



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## **New national recruitment hub for health and social care**

Ensuring that there is capacity within the health and social care workforce has been a key priority in the national response to COVID-19. COSLA and advisers have been working with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), the Care Inspectorate, Scottish Government and other national partners to support the development of a recruitment portal for health and social care. The **SSSC and NHS Education for Scotland (NES) have launched the new portal** and SSSC have written to people who have recently left these professions to signpost them to this. At the time of writing there had been over 2300 expressions of interest from people who would like to return to the social care sector. SSSC are currently processing these applications and carrying out pre-employment checks to support employers in the statutory, third and independent sector. This recruitment portal will be used to ensure that areas experiencing a workforce shortage can be prioritised to receive support.

SSSC have also developed a temporary register for social workers under the Coronavirus Act. This register aims to support social workers to return to practice as quickly as possible to enable them to provide vital support to the sector during the emergency.

## **Young Scot**

**Young Scot** have provided a briefing which is hosted on the **Elected Members KHub** setting out the resources and services for young people, particularly those who are more vulnerable, and partners including Local Authorities. This covers digital information, the Young Scot National Entitlement Card, discounts and Young Scot Rewards, resources for young carers and educational resources as well as the work in localities across Scotland.



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## **Vulnerable Communities**

COSLA Leaders agreed a paper setting out the actions being taken by SOLACE, COSLA, Scottish Government and partners to support and protect those who are most vulnerable in our communities. Multi-agency Chief Officer Groups (COGs) have a statutory role in Scotland in terms of multi-agency approaches to risk, vulnerability and public protection. There are specific areas which Leaders agreed should be given consideration, including addressing hidden homelessness, supporting minority ethnic communities, and safeguarding children and young people. In addition, COSLA is considering the response to mitigating the impacts of COVID-19, the Recovery Phase, particularly at the end of additional funding and services, and the anticipated long-term challenges for people and communities. It was agreed that a joined-up policy approach from Scottish Government, COSLA and partners is needed to address vulnerability at national level which focuses on community/system wide measures, rather than individual risk factors and policy interventions.

## **Violence Against Women and Girls**

**Guidance for social landlords on Domestic Abuse and COVID-19** has been developed by the Chartered Institute of Housing and Scottish Women's Aid, with COSLA's engagement. It highlights what social landlords can do to support women and children experiencing domestic abuse.

Staying at home is particularly difficult for women and children experiencing domestic abuse as social distancing and self-isolation will mean that women and children will have reduced contact with support networks. Experts have warned that pandemics have been linked to increased violence against women and girls. Women already face complex decisions and a wide range of barriers preventing their ability to safely escape an abusive partner which exacerbates challenges in escaping abusive partners.



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## **Supporting Migrants with No Recourse to Public Funds**

COSLA has **called on the UK Government** to suspend the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' rules that prevent some migrant families and individuals from accessing state support. We have also published **a new framework** to help councils to provide emergency assistance to migrants in these circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic. This sets out the legal basis for providing support and advice on actions that can be taken to deliver emergency accommodation, financial assistance and other essential services under statutory Public Health and safeguarding duties during this period.

Without a change in immigration rules, however, people who have 'No Recourse to Public Funds' are at severe risk of falling into destitution and struggle to comply with social distancing and social isolation guidelines. This includes many essential workers such as NHS staff, shop workers, and delivery drivers. The condition also applies to overseas students and short-term visitors, and asylum seekers who have been refused sanctuary in the UK. People with NRPF are restricted from accessing the benefit system or mainstream homelessness services. But, like the rest of the population, many now find themselves unable to work. Without being able to apply for benefits, these migrants have nowhere else to go, and are turning to councils to help.

COSLA, along with the UK's other Local Government associations, have written **a joint letter to the UK Government** calling on them to suspend the restrictions while we fight the pandemic. Numerous charities and support organisations, along with MPs, have also done the same. The letter states that the rules are undermining the response to COVID-19, adding to the complexity and pressure on services and leaving people highly vulnerable during the crisis.



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## **Free School Meals**

Currently around 140,000 children and young people across Scotland are being supported with the provision of a free school meal as part of efforts to support our most vulnerable children during this critical time. An additional £30 million of new investment to support families unable to access food as a result of COVID-19 was made available in the £350 million Communities support package announced last month which £15 million for free school meals and further funding to support individuals experiencing food insecurity in the wider community context. Continued high level monitoring is in place to ensure that this funding continues to meet growing need. COSLA has also worked with Scottish Government to produce **guidance on the Food Fund** to support local decision making in planning and delivery of food insecurity measures.

## **Employability**

Changes in the labour market due to COVID-19 will have the biggest impact on those on the lowest incomes and in the most precarious jobs. A reported five-fold increase in Universal Credit claims tells a story as does the unprecedented demand for Scottish Welfare Fund Crisis Grants. COSLA is working with Scottish Government and partners and a set of priorities is being established, which from Local Government perspective include: an urgent need for DWP local authority level intelligence on a reported 5-fold surge on Universal Credit claims, work with employers and employability clients to respond on job opportunities arising from COVID-19, re-purposing employability programmes and funding which is already with local government, and to consider provision for 2020 education leavers. A joint communication will be issued to stakeholders this week, building on the COSLA/Scottish Employability Partnership Agreement.

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## Thank You

We have extended the deadline for the Elected Members survey, set up by the Improvement Service in order to learn how we can continue to best support you as our Members. Please take a couple of moments to complete **this survey** by 28 April in order that we can quickly act on your needs.

COSLA continues to highlight the work being done by councils across Scotland on social media under **#councilscare** with increased following over the past weeks. Please continue to share these along with your local examples for us to highlight.

Further briefings will be issued, however our social media channels, **KHub** and **website** will be continually updated.

Signing up to Knowledge Hub is easy. Go to **<https://khub.net/sign-up>** and complete the registration form, you will be sent an email verification. Click the link in the email you receive to verify your account, then go to **<https://khub.net>** and sign in with the password you created at registration. Once you've logged in, go to the group direct to request to join: **<https://khub.net/group/scottish-elected-members-coronavirus-network>**.

If you or your officers require any clarity from COSLA officers on policy matters, please contact the team in the usual way. If you are not sure who to direct your email to, please contact COSLA member support: **[membersupport@cosla.gov.uk](mailto:membersupport@cosla.gov.uk)**

**Thank you all for your efforts during this challenging time.**



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