

Children, Young People, Education and Skills



19-21 Broad Street | St Helier
Jersey | JE2 3RR

6 December 2021

To Deputy Inna Gardiner
Chair of Public Accounts Committee

Sent by email: c.tomlinson2@gov.je

Dear Deputy Gardiner,

PAC: Covid-19 Response Review

Thank you for your letter of 5th November, requesting responses to questions raised by the PAC Review into the Government's, and specifically the Department for Children, Young People, Education and Skills', response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Attached to this letter are the Department's responses which I hope you find to be helpful as you progress your review.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require more details or clarification of any of the information provided.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Rogers". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Mark Rogers
Director General

Government of Jersey - Children, Young People, Education and Skills
19-21 Broad Street | St Helier | Jersey | JE2 3RR
T: +44 (0)1534 449486
E: m.rogers@gov.je
W: www.gov.je

cc Paul Martin
Rob Sainsbury

Questions on the Response to COVID-19

1. How did your responsibilities as Director General change during the COVID-19 Pandemic? What new responsibilities did you take on and what responsibilities did you hand over to other officers?

In essence, the Director General responsibilities didn't change. It was more a case of having to reprioritise how time was allocated to ensure that some of the pre-existing but infrequently deployed governance arrangements – Gold, Emergencies Council, Competent Authorities Ministers, Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell, etc – were supported and serviced effectively.

As with Executive Leadership Team peers and the Department Leadership Team, I contributed flexibly and responsively to the Government's pandemic response – but to do so was already in the role remit.

a. How was this tracked?

As the role responsibilities didn't change, it was necessary to track anything.

b. What new responsibilities did your department take on and what responsibilities did you hand over to other departments? How were these tracked?

The Department didn't take on new responsibilities. Whilst uncommon, responding to emergency situations is part of the brief. Rather, it had to develop a range of dynamic business continuity responses and plans to ensure that the priority of putting children first was integral to the pandemic strategy. Such plans were developed with Director General and director-level oversight, reviewed sometimes daily and adjusted according to prevailing pandemic conditions and the Government's strategy.

c. How did you work with other departments and key stakeholders to identify new areas of work to mitigate the impact of the pandemic?

It depended on the issue. However, at key phases, there was a Gold Strategic Coordination Group – supported by a flexible Tactical Coordination Group (the One Gov Covid-19 Response Team, incorporating the Business Continuity Team) – that identified and managed multi-department or cross-government issues and responses. The SCG was chaired consistently by the Director General for Justice and Home Affairs to reflect experience in managing emergency responses and to ensure consistency.

The Executive Leadership Team was the other key forum where, weekly, strategy, operations and key issues could be raised, considered and resolved as required.

2. We know there has been a huge impact of COVID-19 response measures on departmental business as usual activities, including the secondment of Government staff to other departments to aid the response effort. Do you have a 'back-to-normal' recovery plan for your department?

The Departmental Operation Business Plans for 2021 and, especially, 2022 provide the route back to business as usual. A key aspect of these plans is the People and Culture programmes being developed across all Departments and facilitated by Team Jersey. Taking a lead from the findings of the BeHeard survey, these programmes are designed to wrap a set of wellbeing offers around staff to support their ongoing functional work and, crucially, their emotional, physical and mental health.

a. In respect of the secondment of Government staff to other departments to aid the response effort, how did you ensure disruptions to certain workstreams were prioritised in an objective and consistent way?

There weren't significant levels of secondment as the Department effectively prioritised identifying alternative ways of delivering frontline and support services. (The most significant secondment was the Head of Informatics and this was enabled by good succession planning whereby another senior informatics officer [from children's social care] was quickly and successfully supported into position.) Where secondments did occur, either directorate-level or service-level business continuity discussions and/or plans identified potential secondees and mitigation arrangements.

b. What would you do differently next time?

It would be an option to have a standing "mutual aid" plan based on a range of plausible emergency scenarios so that mobilisation could be speeded up. It would also help significantly to ensure the timely implementation of the ITS programme to ensure that datasets (notably HR-related ones) are easily accessed, integrated and used to create at-your-fingertips business intelligence as the Government is still too reliant upon the manual joining up of data derived from outdated and, increasingly, unsupported systems. (Huge amounts of time was given over, for example, to cleansing and combining data about the impact of Covid-19 on schools – pupil and staff attendance, etc.)

3. How have you monitored the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on departmental business as usual activities and the disruptions to it?

Through the usual Departmental processes: monthly Programme and Performance Boards, in particular, but also via weekly Strategic Departmental Leadership Team meetings and as often as daily (presently thrice-weekly) CV19 review and tasking meetings. All Director General-level chaired.

a. What tools were developed by your departments to monitor this?

The Department used existing, tried and tested processes (Programme Board, for example, is enabled by the comprehensive and systematic deployment of the Perform tool).

b. How do you minimise the impact on services and key deliveries?

Principally, through the regular and frequent development and review of Business Continuity Plans and the Department Operational Business Plan. The Department also has an in-built default mindset of prioritising frontline services and the most-in-need. For example, in the first lockdown, resources across CYPES were prioritised to ensure a line-of-sight was kept on the most vulnerable children and those of key workers – both of which groups were able to access in-setting early years and statutory education before it resumed more widely for the general population.

c. What decision making tools/approach did you use to decide on who should be seconded, and to where?

No formal tools we used in the Department as this wasn't necessary. The overall approach was to develop and review Business Continuity Plans (which already existed but needed frequent review and updating) as these enabled the identification of areas of business where secondments might be possible.

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

Business Continuity Plans principally identified any necessary mitigations.

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

No.

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

The Director General, in concert with the Department Leadership Team: with oversight from the Chief Executive and the Executive Leadership Team. This approach was complemented by regular (usually weekly) reporting to the relevant Minister/Ministers.

It should be noted that, strictly speaking, no new services were established. Rather, existing services were kept under continuous review and new interventions introduced via existing staff teams to ensure maximum responsiveness to the pandemic. Planned new services (the Children and Families Hub is the best example) were stood up sooner than planned.

a. What and how have you documented lessons learnt?

Strategically across Government, the Gold and Silver structures garnered and disseminated lessons learned.

In the Department his was complemented by real time sharing of learning, principally through the dissemination of minutes and action points of formal meetings, accompanied by formal monitoring of business continuity plans by the Head of Governance (and reported into the Department Leadership Team).

The Strategic Coordination Group also ran a small number of scenario planning sessions to help inform forward planning. And feedback from key stakeholders, such as the Trades Unions, has been solicited at regular and frequent intervals through the pandemic.

b. How do you intend to incorporate lessons learned from the performance of these services into the wider performance of your department?

Learning is shared in real time and, where appropriate, integrated into future responses through the regular review of the Department's programmes, projects and performance at the Programme and Performance Boards.

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

Through the structures and processes set out above – eg Programme Boards, Strategic Departmental Leadership Team meeting and, at the next level down, Directorate Leadership Team meetings.

a. What worked well?

The most useful mechanism was the (often daily) CV19 review and tasking meetings because this is where the problem-solving and lesson-learning was most frequently and most directly focused on ensuring the safeguarding and wellbeing of children and young people.

b. What would you do differently?

The use of a Team A and Team B command structure within the Department (financial and human resources permitting) to ensure that it wasn't always the same people on duty all the time. To have two teams would have relieved some of the significant time commitments. This approach was attempted as a business continuity response, but principally to inhibit the possibility of cross-infection, rather than as an arrangement to manage working hours. In other words, Team A and Team B operated remotely from each other; but they still work almost continuously since March/April 2020 because of the capacity requirements of managing the pandemic.

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

The relevant Ministers were briefed at least weekly (essentially a sit rep); and advice proffered and sought as and when required – which, as per the sit reps, was frequently. Given the importance of the resilience of the education system in the Government’s strategy, the majority of decisions of significance were made in the context of the appropriate Minister/s attending and advising Emergencies Council and/or the Competent Authorities Ministers meetings.

It should be noted that the focus of engagement with Ministers was at the strategy and policy levels: ie where the law or other governance (CAM, for example) required them to recommend and/or make, singly or with other Ministers, a decision under consideration. Ministers were not – and the present Minister does not – take the day-to-day operational decisions about staff deployment: this sits with the Director General and the Group Directors/Directors.

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

I took full responsibility for secondment / “mutual aid” decisions. These were decisions that sat firmly in my operational remit. I have previously described the formats used for discussion and decision-making.

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

The principal response of the Department has been to keep under continual review its approach to the balance between business continuity and business as usual to ensure that the 2022 Departmental Operational Business Plan takes account of the ongoing impact of CV-19 whilst also being ambitious for delivering the next Government Plan ambitions.

The Department is also mindful that it needs to ensure that its role is both formative and consultative in the consideration and/or formulation of any future emergency legislation that may be needed and would potentially impact children.

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

The Department had strong governance prior to the onset of the pandemic and these arrangements were “stress-tested” and, as required, strengthened in the light of practice over the last 20 months.

Like the whole of Government, the Department continues to explore the optimal arrangements for future flexible working, engaging with staff teams on their experience of a range of ways of working within the policy guidelines issues by People and Corporate Services.

Given that so much of the public facing work of the Department requires direct, face-to-face interaction with citizens, the focus has mainly been on how to do this safely.

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

Extensive business continuity planning has informed the Department's thinking about this. The principal learning is that it will be useful to a range of business continuity scenarios "on tap" to allow for quicker scenario planning in the future.

The other aspect of future proofing lies in effective tracking of Covid-19 impacts on communities and this is being addressed by the Social Recovery work being led by Public Health on behalf of the Council of Ministers. The Department fully supports developing the insight capacity and capability of the Government (through its public health function) as evidence is what needs to drive future spending, including new investment, in responding to Covid-19 impacts. The Department is contributing to the Social Recovery programme by proposing key areas, based on its insight, where short or longer term investments will be needed to ameliorate community impacts.

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

We had minimal engagement with Commercial Services as the big procurement issues (eg PPE) were not within this Department's remit.

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

The Department has utilised all its pre-existing governance to do this as set out in previous sections of this report), along with contributing to that at the whole of Government level. Measuring, monitoring and reporting have, therefore, been as per the Interim Chief Executive's report to the Public Accounts Committee from September 2021 (please reference section 6, pp 15-15).

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

Enhanced the Department's communication capacity (which would have required funding or mutual aid) as the thirst for timely, clear and accessible information was considerable.