

19-21 Broad Street,
St Helier, JE2 4WE

Connétable Karen Shenton-Stone
Vice-Chair, Public Account Committee
BY EMAIL

21st February 2022

Dear Connétable Shenton-Stone

RE: PAC COVID-19 Response Review

Thank you for your letter of 2 February 2022, outlining the Public Accounts Committee's Review into the Government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the further questions you have asked me.

Enclosed are my responses to the questions outlined in your letter. These should be read in conjunction with my responses in the letter to Deputy Gardiner on 11 October 2021.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require more detail or clarification to my below responses.

Yours sincerely,



Dirk Danino-Forsyth
Director of Communications
d.daninoforsyth@gov.je

1. Please could you outline the responsibilities and actions taken by your team in responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic?

The Communications Directorate is responsible for the internal and external communication of Government policies and initiatives, including those relating to the health, care and economic measures enacted in response to the pandemic.

As the Director of Communications, I led the team during much of the pandemic response, handing over to the Head of Internal and Change Communications for three months, in May 2021, to take parental leave.

Each department in the Government has its own Head of Communications who supports their Ministers and Director General with communication priorities, and these are supported by a central press office, internal communications team, and specialists in marketing, digital and design.

At the outset of the pandemic, with business-as-usual activity being re-prioritised, the directorate came together to provide reactive crisis communications and proactive behavioural change support. Utilising the OneGov structure and approach, I flattened the hierarchy within the team and assigned groups of people to work on the various policy priorities.

These groups were responsible for supporting policy officials devise, promote and implement their initiatives; crafting and disseminating messages to all colleagues, stakeholders and Islanders; and advising Ministers and senior officials on public announcements.

Each team member was responsible for a different aspect of this work and so, on any given day, could be drafting press notices, organising media opportunities, editing content for social media, working with a graphic designer, liaising with Parish officials or coordinating internal briefings with stakeholders.

a. Can you provide an overview of the decision-making processes within the Communications function, specifically in relation to the pandemic?

The directorate enacted a collaborative approach to decision making during the pandemic, with final accountability for the advice being held by me, or the Head of Internal and Change Communications during my absence.

At the beginning of each day, we undertook media monitoring and public sentiment tracking. Following this, an all-directorate 'comms huddle' was hosted on Microsoft Teams to look at the policy announcements that needed to be made, the notices that needed cascading to colleagues, the opportunities proposed for Ministers to be interviewed, and the briefings that needed to be hosted. The proposals would be agreed and then shared with the Ministerial Support Unit, the Director Generals, and the previous Chief Executive for their sign-off and shared with the Strategic Co-ordination Group.

Proposals that were signed-off would then be worked on, with 'grip&go' meetings throughout the day to align their messaging, timings and proposed evaluation metrics.

There was a weekly Practice Heads meeting composing the Head of Media, the Head of Internal and Change Communications, and the Head of Marketing, Digital and Design and myself to make sure the team's wellbeing was looked after (many were working from home and some were isolating), the resources were appropriate (financial and people), and the

overall strategy was being adhered to and was producing the anticipated results (in contact, awareness, understanding sentiment, behaviour change, advocacy).

b. Who were the key Minister and Officers who liaised with you and your function to undertake communications work?

The Competent Authority Ministers, the Executive Leadership Team, the Strategic Coordination Group and the various Gold and Silver Commands within departments. In the public health team, there was support from behavioural scientists. For ConnectMe, we worked closely with the Chief of Staff and Parish officials. For Out-of-Home advertising, we worked with IHE and Parish of St Helier colleagues to distribute banners and posters.

c. What oversight did you have of the Communications functions in other Ministerial Departments to ensure that communications regarding the pandemic were aligned?

As the Director of Communications for the Government of Jersey, I have oversight and leadership of the corporate communications within, and from, all ministerial departments and I am the line manager for the Head of Communications in each department (overseeing their wellbeing, their My Conversation My Goals objectives, and their learning and development needs). I hosted regular meetings (at least weekly) with each Head of Communications to manage their welfare, monitor their work and guide them on objectives, challenges and opportunities.

There is a daily 'diary' of communications activity across the departments, a weekly 'grid' of communications outputs, and a 'forward look' for the months ahead. These products sit alongside communication strategies for each department and, during the pandemic, each workstream (e.g. PPE, the Nightingale Ward, vaccinations, ConnectMe, co-funding payroll etc.)

These strategies were shared at Council of Ministers, Emergencies Council and, on request, with the Corporate Services Panel. A small number of States Members provided private feedback on aspects of the strategies (e.g., schools, behavioural science, Portuguese-liaison).

2. How did you ensure the timeliness of your public communications?

During each wave of the pandemic, the team worked seven days a week and were on call twenty-four hours of the day. A rota was developed to make sure the team were available and working during weekday evenings and at weekends, but also getting their rest.

This rota meant we could publish information on our owned-channels as it was updated and respond to media queries promptly. Providing a round-the-clock service enabled Islanders to receive accurate and timely information as soon as it was ready to be published.

Various team members attended Council of Ministers and Emergencies Council, working after these meetings to prepare and publish announcements according to the timeline agreed by Ministers.

- a. We note that some concerns were raised, particularly at the beginning of the pandemic, that there were delays in the public broadcast of briefings. If there were delays, how were they communicated?**

The Head of Media and I spoke daily with journalists to update them on projected announcements, press conferences and background briefings. Internally, we worked with the Ministerial Support Unit to advocate for time in Minister's diaries to undertake broadcasts.

When these were agreed we would publicise these on social media, alert the news organisations and cascade the information throughout the organisation.

3. How did you work to arrange and facilitate public briefings?

We provided as many live-streamed press conference as Ministers requested.

These press conferences usually occurred only after full agreement of policy changes from the relevant bodies (normally STAC, CAM, COM and Emergencies Council).

When I arrived at the Government, there was no designated room or facility to host press conferences or briefings. For our first series of televised briefings with medical officers, we had to use a break-out room and kitchenette inside Broad Street. This meant bringing journalists into the building via a separate entrance and bringing their equipment up three flights of stairs in order to make sure the right distancing could be kept from colleagues who were working on the emergency response.

I found this unsatisfactory and so worked with colleagues to find Government owned space that could accommodate more frequent briefings. We initially found a room that could host Ministers and journalists at 1 metre distancing and undertook several press conferences there. Finally, we asked the journalists to dial in via Microsoft Teams and projected them on a big screen in front of Ministers.

To complement these conferences, and in line with the worldwide trend of watching more video content and listening to podcasts, we set up an in-house Government owned studio in the Parade. The studio enabled us to increasing video production for use on our various channels and giving us full control over the scripting, directing, and producing of Jersey-centric content.

- a. How did you work to schedule these with Ministers and Senior Officers?**

We worked closely with the Ministerial Support Unit to schedule press conferences in Ministers' diaries. Under the Interim Chief Executive, senior officers were regularly invited for, and took part, in media interviews and these were scheduled directly through the relevant departmental Head of Communications.

- b. How did you work with the Island's media to improve the quality of public briefings and other communications?**

Whenever a major policy announcement was made, we offered a Microsoft Teams pre-briefing for journalists with subject experts. This enabled journalists to ask questions, so they could fully understand the issues before the live press conference. This gave them more time to prepare their stories, which helped them to report the information accurately, thus providing a better service for Islanders.

Journalists found this useful, and we have continued to offer this facility for major topics (e.g., carbon neutrality, safeguarding etc).

We also provided the media with the infographics created by our design team, to help them illustrate their coverage. This complemented the advertising that we commissioned across a wide spread of media.

During periods of physical distancing, we provided a dial-in facility for journalists so they could safely attend press conferences remotely. We set up a large screen so they could appear virtually in the room with Ministers and ask their questions in vision.

4. How did you monitor your function's performance and the quality of output (including, but not limited to, social media campaigns)?

Our communications activity was planned to span multiple channels in a fully integrated approach. This made sure that the critical campaign messages reached the greatest possible number of Islanders in the most cost-effective way.

One of the core objectives of the campaign was to make sure important messages about keeping safe from Covid-19 were accessible, clear, and widely understood. This meant material had to be translated into languages other than English, repeated in different tones, and broadcast through multiple channels and at different times of the day.

We monitored the effectiveness of these outputs through feedback directly on the channels (social media interactions, press conference questions, conversations with journalists) and through real-time assessments from the call centre, customer feedback, and policy officers in the OneGov Tactical Coordination Group (1TCG).

The below points set out how each form of media was used utilised to communicate messaging to Islanders and how it was monitored and evaluated:

Live press conferences

We hosted 47 live press conferences throughout the pandemic phases. These were broadcast on our social media channels, YouTube, and streamed live on Channel 103 and BBC Jersey. We tracked the questions answered, the comments on social media and the feedback via the radio stations.

ITV Hub and Airtime

Four adverts were created for airtime (live television) and Digital Hub (playback) to communicate key messages to Islanders. It was important to utilise mainstream media from the offset of the campaign, particularly when trying to change Islanders' behaviour around social distancing, the Stay-at-Home order, and directing them to ConnectMe for support. We received feedback from 1TCG on the behaviour change of Islanders, questions to the call centre and Ministerial correspondence.

Print advertising

To make sure we were reaching all Islanders, particularly Jersey's older demographic, advertising within the Jersey Evening Post and the community magazines continued to be an important form of communication. A total of 48 adverts have been placed in the JEP to date – the first on 6 March 2020. Our Island – a publication distributed to every house in

Jersey – featured Covid-19 messaging throughout the pandemic. We received feedback from the letter section of the newspaper and Ministerial correspondence.

Radio

In addition to English, all radio adverts were translated and produced in Polish, Portuguese and Romanian to make sure key messages about prevention, symptoms, the Stay-at-Home order, Connect Me and wellbeing were accessible to all our major non-native-English speaking communities. 46 adverts have been produced and aired to date. We received feedback from calls to the radio, 1TCG on the behaviour change of Islanders, questions to the call centre and Ministerial correspondence.

Out-of-Home marketing

Roadside banners, posters, pull up banners and vinyl stickers were produced and placed at key high-traffic and commuter points throughout the Island, including parks, roadsides, parish halls, stores, King Street, restaurants, retailers and car parks.

In partnership with the Parish of St Helier, bins throughout town were used as signage, providing clear messaging about social distancing in English, Portuguese, Polish and Romanian. The windows of empty shop fronts were wrapped in their entirety and utilised for high-impact messaging about social distancing, coronavirus symptoms and prevention.

We have also used Government-owned buildings, including the General Hospital, Jubilee Wharf and Broad St, to fully wrap doors and windows with prevention messages. The building wrapping has been undertaken by the IHE signs team to ensure costs were kept to a minimum.

PDFs of all printed material, including translated leaflets and posters, are available on gov.je so that they were accessible for businesses to print their own.

Island-wide leaflet drops

A series of Island-wide information leaflets (seven leaflets) were distributed by Jersey Post, making that key public health information made its way into 41,000 homes in Jersey – this was particularly important for targeting the non-digital population who are not traditionally active users of social media, and might not have access to the internet. We monitored the impact of this through the radio stations and the letters section in the JEP where we could judge how well the information had been seen, understood, acted-up and advocated for.

Digital marketing and social media

With lots of misinformation (and in my opinion a high level of disinformation) circulating online, but particularly on social media, the Government social media platforms were positioned from the outset as the source of fact for Covid-19 updates and particular advice for Jersey. We advised Ministers to avoid giving opinions and focused, instead, on our efforts on positioning the Medical Officers for Health.

During the pandemic, we managed a rise in organic Facebook followers, growing from 41,289 follows in February 2020 to 81,778 follows in December 2021. A larger cohort allowed us to see what Islanders from many different communities were commenting on and engaging with, and this was fed back through the Heads of Communications to their departments or to their particular working groups.

As part of Putting Children First, we designed content for parents, including how to discuss coronavirus with a child, and shared these on social media and Parent Mail. We worked with the Youth Service to engage with young adults through their social media channels and the youth digital radio station. Direct feedback was monitored from these channels.

To make sure we were being as inclusive as possible, all key messages shared on social media were translated into Portuguese, Polish and Romanian, and British Sign Language videos were also shared on the Government social media channels. There are a limited number of BSL signers, and none accredited to the required level to communicate key messages. To ensure we did not exclude this audience group, we added subtitles to all our videos, including our live press conferences. We did translate some key messages with RAD (Royal Association for Deaf people UK), and would then share the videos on social media and add to YouTube. The turn-around would take a few days, which unfortunately created some delay in delivery of the messages.

A gov.je site wide banner was used when required. The banner is front and centre when users visit any page of the Government website, and we used this to drive Islanders to find out more information. We monitored the click-rate on these banners and made sure they were providing a smooth user-journey for people trying to get to the information they needed.

Working in partnership with the Co-op and Jersey Post, we displayed coronavirus communication digital screens in store and in post offices. Paid-for digital advertising was placed on Liberty Bus Station screens, on the St Helier's clock tower, in the Bailiwick news site, on JEP digital, and at the airport. Direct feedback is not possible in these channels, but they formed a core part of our saturation-of-message strategy (which I deemed appropriate during a global pandemic).

To engage with our business stakeholders, emailers were sent out to our businesses database, including our registered Supply Jersey suppliers and Arm's Length Organisations, to inform them of business-specific updates. We received direct feedback from these emails.

Telecommunication

A memorandum of understanding was signed between Government and all of the local telecommunication providers to enable the mass communication of Government messages in relation to the public health emergency caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The Island-wide SMS messaging function has been particularly effective in alerting Islanders to significant updates and announcements, and changes to advice. We have monitored feedback on social media to these messages.

How did you define success?

For each channel, there were specific metrics attached to what outcomes (clicks, engagements etc.) we defined as success. This was particularly important when looking at the cost per item or engagements. When we did not meet these success measures, we looked first at our own graphics, messages, and overall design and then at the product placement, timing, and relevance to that channel.

For overall success in each campaign burst, we looked for feedback from the 1TCG and from the Public Health teams who were monitoring Islanders understanding and compliance of the measures.

To measure sentiment, and to advise Ministers on how their decisions were being received, we looked at public comments on social media, callers to the radio station, letters in the Jersey Evening Post, and Ministerial correspondence.

How did you identify lessons learned?

We identified tactical lessons learned if an announcement or a new measure was not quickly understood or acted upon. This would usually be done within two days, with new messages or artwork created and run alongside to see which was better engaged with and understood.

Sentiment and long-term behaviours were assessed before each Emergencies Council and were then shared with the participants for their feedback and steer.

4. How did you work with other departments or officers to understand what the needs were from a Communications standpoint?

We had communications representatives on all the forums connected to the Government's pandemic response and took bids from these forums to make sure all needs were being met. Priorities were discussed in the morning meeting and signed-off by the former Chief Executive or Interim Chief Executive.

a. What advice did you provide to Ministers and officers regarding communications?

The advice I gave evolved over the course of the pandemic and was briefed to each session of the Emergencies Council during the 'contain, delay, shield' stage of the pandemic in March 2021. The core approach I repeated was to provide Islanders with messages and advice that were timely, clear and consistent. I advocated the segmentation of Island audiences into sub-groups and the delivering of specific messages to them, focusing on factually accurate messages that could support behaviour change.

By the end of April 2021, when the situation was improving dramatically in the Island, I briefed a Scrutiny Liaison Committee on our communications approach to date and highlighted the following:

"be as transparent as possible with Islanders so there is single version of the truth.

"give clear advice in simple language that does not need to be nuanced.

"The simplicity of message is key to adherence.

"make specific messages in Portuguese, Polish and Romanian. Targeting [with bespoke messages] these communities with action-based messages."

b. How frequently did you meet with Ministers, the former Chief Executive, Interim Chief Executive, and other Director Generals to discuss communications and your department's work programme during the pandemic?

Each Head of Communications briefed their Minister in their weekly ministerial meeting, though many Ministers were in daily contact with me, and some Ministers were in greater contact than this.

The former Chief Executive was briefed every morning and several times during the day. I briefed the interim Chief Executive very regularly too, though his time at the Government coincided with less emergency orientated phases of the pandemic.

Depending on the issue, I discussed our work programme with Director Generals weekly or more.

5. How did you work to ensure that communications between the Government of Jersey and the public were direct, easy-to-understand, and accessible?

Our aim is always to provide clear, easily understandable information to Islanders. This can be a challenge when communicating technical topics like the unpredictable behaviour of a new virus.

Communications colleagues worked to translate technical information into clearly worded material for the media, social channels and press conferences. We offered interviews with Ministers and subject matter experts so the media could access the people who were making the decisions and providing the technical advice.

We arranged online 'Ask the Expert' and 'Ask the Ministers' sessions so Islanders could ask their own questions directly and also encourage Ministers to host Twitter Q&As, attend Radio Jersey interviews and respond to Ministerial correspondence and letters in the Jersey Evening Post.

We took advice from behavioural scientists when considering how to develop communications that could be better understood by, and resonate with, Islanders.

From all these opportunities, we would monitor feedback closely and try to amend products and messages to make them more easily understood.

6. How did you monitor budgets and total spend to respond to COVID-19? Was it tracked separately to the rest of the spend within your function?

For Covid-19 communications, each department had their own budget for specific activities and any communications support that was required was approved by the departments ahead of launch, and as an integral part of their success. The detailed activities were recorded monthly on a campaign-by-campaign basis so they could be fed back to their budget holder as part of the levers that were delivering their desired effect.

a. Were additional resources or staff moved to your function? If so, how was this need identified?

Yes, due to the increased activity on our social media channels, the number of campaigns we were required to deliver, and the videos required to support the messages. We identified the need by seeing which comms outputs (products) were being delayed and so where more human resource needed to be directed.

From Arm's Length Organisations, we secured two additional communications officers.

From the network of professionals in the Island, we secured one senior communications officer to support in delivery of campaigns like 'HomeTime' and 'Back to School' and a videographer to support the digital team.

b. How did you track the movement of resources, including funding and officers?

We worked with People Hub who co-ordinated the onboarding of the additional resource.

VisitJersey seconded us two communications officers at no cost. The senior communications officer and the videography were sourced via our network and were placed on zero-hour contracts.

Given the small number of resources onboarded, we tracked them through our usual line-management and goal setting systems.

7. Please could you identify the lessons you and the Communications function learned during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Notwithstanding the breadth of communication outputs, and their success in supporting public health and economic objectives, we identified a few major learnings and have actioned them following a review by the Directorate.

1. Communicating a nuanced policy position, that balanced Islanders' freedoms, their wider mental and physical health, and their household economy, against the health effects of Covid-19, was a challenging task. Sometimes the language of policy officials, or the diverse opinions of Ministers, were too precisely reflected and this meant that simple and plain-English messages were not in our leading communications;
2. Communication officers were not engaged early enough in planning Ministers' diaries;
3. The views and opinions of young people, while being collated, were not weighted during the response and so whilst practical policy deliberations always included the issue of children, due to the need to brief all Islanders in a rapid manner the communications effort did not prioritise them;
4. Press notices that referenced Ministers did not usually get their sign off unless they were directly quoted.

a. How will these be integrated going forward?

1. Plainer language will be used, and Ministers will be encouraged to adopt social media where these shorter, less formal messages can be conveyed directly from the decision makers. This would complement, not replace, our current strategy of using radio and television interviews and placing adverts in the Jersey Evening Post.
2. The Ministerial Support Unit and communications officer are working more closely than ever before, with daily calls and 'grip&go' meetings throughout the day.
3. The department for Children, Young People, Education and Skills has brought funds to the directorate to provide increased communication and engagement support for children and young people. This includes a dedicated digital communications officer who is providing regular reports back to the department on the views of young people.
4. Press notices now require sign off from the lead Minister.

b. Have you conducted an internal review of your function's work and performance during the pandemic?

Yes.