
STATES OF JERSEY



CHIEF MINISTER'S ASSEMBLY UPDATE ON COVID-19, UKRAINE AND GOVERNMENT ACTIONS

Presented to the States on 27th April 2022
by the Chief Minister

STATES GREFFE

REPORT

COVID-19

Ministers have been meeting to determine the next step in our COVID-19 response and to discuss the ongoing situation in Ukraine. Following our announcements in February of the Post-Emergency Strategy, today I am pleased to announce a further relaxation in our measures.

From this Friday, 29 April the legal requirement for mandatory self-isolation for positive cases will end. However, we will continue to advise anyone who is positive to stay at home for a minimum of five days and test regularly, but the legal requirement will end. Last week we also announced further relaxations to the COVID-19 schools policy, which has seen the removal of masks and bubbles in education settings, and a reduction to the frequency of LFT testing for teaching staff and students. The Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell – STAC – met for the last time last week as part of our de-escalation. Whilst the Cell will no longer be meeting weekly, they remain on standby, and a sub-group has been set up to continue to coordinate matters. STAC members have been fundamental to providing scientific and technical advice to Government throughout the pandemic response and I would like to thank each and every one of them. Their advice has been integral to the decisions we have taken as Competent Authority Ministers and the response we have marshalled as an Island.

In line with the rest of our de-escalation activity, we will also be changing the frequency of the COVID-19 data reporting from daily to once a week. The last daily update will be published on Friday, and from next week we will move to weekly reporting which will be published online every Thursday.

It has been a little over two years since the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic on the 11 March 2020. Members may recall those crucial months in March and April when Island life changed so rapidly. Within 24 hours of the WHO's announcement, the Emergencies Council had met and agreed a support package for businesses. Within days we had introduced social distancing for over 65s and opened an on-Island testing facility. In the weeks that followed we outlined a £180 million support package for Islanders, established a Community Task Force, introduced a border testing regime and constructed a Nightingale Hospital. And shortly before the end of 2020 we began our successful vaccine programme, delivering the first doses ahead of schedule.

Since those early days, almost every aspect of Island life has been affected to some degree and every Islander has had a part to play in our response. I am proud of how Jersey has acted as a community during the pandemic, and I want to thank all Islanders for their diligence, their care and for their patience over the last two years. It has been a difficult period for us all.

It is in large part thanks to the efforts of Islanders, in following the guidance and especially the majority who have gone out and got vaccinated that we are now in the position to make one final relaxation in our measures. As we learn to live with COVID-19, we will need to remain vigilante to any significant developments in the global response to the virus.

It is remarkable to think of just how far we have come as an Assembly, as a Government and as an Island during the course of the pandemic. We have worked at speed to bring together experts from across the Government and beyond in the face of this virus. We worked across Government to establish our excellent track and trace programme. We have worked with Microsoft to develop an internationally recognised border testing regime. We worked with Mastercard to develop the very successful Spend Local Card. This was the first of its kind and was later replicated in Northern Ireland.

This Assembly, during the pandemic, has worked at pace as we have tabled urgent COVID-19 related legislation and became the first Parliament in the Commonwealth to meet entirely online. I would like to thank Members for their support and their challenge, respectively and I also want to thank you Sir, His Excellency and the States Greffe for all of your support and advice as we have adjusted to new ways of working.

Today, we remain in a strong place following the emergency phase of the pandemic. Throughout we have protected lives and livelihoods and we remain in a good financial position. COVID-19 has cost our Island over £300 million in both lost income and our wide range of measures to support lives and livelihoods over 2020 and 2021. However, the latest projections, are that COVID-19 borrowing will be vastly improved and we will completely repay the debt by the end of 2025.

Ukraine

Moving away from COVID-19, all Islanders have been affected by the abhorrent Russian invasion of Ukraine. Since before the 24 February, Ministers and officials have worked at pace to respond to the risks associated with the war including a meeting of the Emergencies Council on 3 February.

We remain aligned with the UK sanctions regime against Russia and all new UN and UK asset-freezing designations are effective immediately. Members will be aware that both myself and separately the Minister for International Development visited Poland a few weeks ago. I took the opportunity to visit a refugee centre supported in part by funds provided by Jersey. Sir, we have to date, welcomed 19 Ukrainian citizens via the Family Scheme and there are more individuals likely to qualify who will also be helped to settle in Jersey in the coming weeks. We are expecting a total of up to 60 Ukrainian refugees to arrive here eventually. Support has been put in place to address their most urgent needs and additional details have already been reported.

Jersey has raised well over two million pounds via the Government's initial contribution, JOA funds and the public contributions through the Bailiff's Appeal. JOA have worked to ensure these funds are delivered to those in need, making a number of grants to humanitarian agencies operating inside and outside of Ukraine. During my visit to Poland, I was pleased to be able to meet with the country representative of the UNHCR – the UN Refugee Agency. I am incredibly proud of the fact that Jersey ranks amongst the highest per capita donors to the UNHCR and I was delighted to see first-hand their important work. This brings me on to the role JOA plays more widely in rising to the sometimes-challenging needs of the international community, such as we have seen with Ukraine. Emphasis should be given to their key work programmes more generally. To give one example, the Dairy for Development programme has significantly improved the lives of individuals in Rwanda, Ethiopia, Malawi, and soon Zambia. During the pandemic, we maintained JOA's budget, and I hope that the next

Council of Ministers will continue the trajectory to reach the ultimate target of 0.7% of GVA.

Government Actions

Since taking office in 2018, we have faced, what can only be described as an extraordinary four years, with the impacts of Brexit, COVID-19 and most recently a war in Europe. Despite this we have made progress on each of the CSP areas, which I want to briefly highlight now.

We will put children first

We have made improvements for children and young people by introducing family-friendly reforms which have significantly increased the amount of leave for new parents. During the pandemic, we kept schools open more successfully than any other jurisdiction in the British Isles, supported home learning where needed and provided a Schools Catch-up Programme. And we have created a new Intensive Fostering Service and launched a landmark Care leavers Corporate Parenting Package. We have significantly invested in Education and increased children's income support components for eligible families.

We will improve Islanders' wellbeing and mental and physical health

We have launched the Health Access Scheme which subsidises GP visits for well over 11,000 Islanders. We have invested in, and improved access to mental health services, opening the Listening Lounge and undertaking a £7.3 million project to build a dedicated acute mental health facility.

We will reduce income inequality and improve the standard of living

We have increased the minimum wage by 23% and currently have the lowest rate of unemployment in at least a decade and have put initial measures to mitigate the cost-of-living pressures caused by inflation for nearly 12,000 Islanders. We all recognise that housing is a major challenge for Islanders. One of the biggest challenges in starting to solve this issue is on finding the sites to build on. We have therefore worked to unlock brown field sites, such as those freed up via the Office Project and (if the Hospital application is approved) the consolidation of the Health estate. We will also shortly be providing an update on our work on the education estate. Andium is on course to deliver 3,000 first-time buyer homes by 2030 with a further 500-1000 units to be constructed by Ports of Jersey via their new master plan and the SOJDC's Waterfront Development is also expected to realise some 1,000 units. We have also taken steps to stop the sale of certain homes to external investors, putting Islanders first. We all recognise there is more to do but these are tangible steps to resolve this problem and give hope to Islanders.

We will create a sustainable, vibrant economy and skilled local workforce for the future

Our Global Markets strategy has unlocked new opportunities for local companies overseas, supported by the opening of a new JFL North America office. We have seized new opportunities to diversify our economy with a support for the digital sector and the first licences in the Medicinal Cannabis sector.

We will protect and value our environment

We have presented both a Climate Neutrality and Sustainable Transport Policy to the States Assembly, established a Climate Emergency Fund and undertaken a Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change.

Capital Projects

We have made important progress on a number of major capital projects including the new hospital, Fort Regent of which phase one has started – and the new Government HQ which is well underway. We have invested in the Island's schools, including the construction of a new Les Quennevais School, and expanding Grainville and St Mary's.

Modernising Government

We have invested in the modernisation of the Government including both the culture of the organisation and its digital infrastructure, both of which were crucial in our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We have also made significant reforms to Jersey's taxation system by moving all taxpayers onto a Current Year Basis and introducing independent taxation.

States Assembly

I would like to pay tribute to all Members of this Assembly for their hard work and perseverance, and for their robust challenge. Whilst, as is the nature of politics, we will not always agree, we are all here to serve Islanders. This Assembly has dealt with a vast number of important decisions, but I will particularly refer to the debate on Assisted Dying – which was very emotive but very respectful and which in my opinion showed this Assembly at its best. We, as an Assembly, have achieved a great deal. This will not necessarily be recognised on, for example, social media but we have had positive real-world impacts on real people. I want to express my gratitude to all those Members outside of the executive who have assisted on Policy Development Boards, Political Oversight Groups, the LAP and RSG.

I want to recognise the thorough work undertaken by Scrutiny panels and their officers this term. Scrutiny will continue to have an important role to play in offering objective constructive criticism to the executive in its role as a critical friend. Separately the States Employment Board, again we have had a number of challenges but in almost all cases we have achieved solutions and I would like to express my particular thanks to the Connétable of St Ouen for his role as Vice Chair.

To those Members we have lost during this term, I would like to pay tribute to their own, outstanding work and personal contributions to our community: Deputy Richard Rondel, Connétable Len Norman, and Connétable Sadie Rennard.

I also would like to pay tribute to the Council of Ministers:

1. Senator Lyndon Farnham, as Deputy Chief Minister
2. Senator Ian Gorst, Minister for External Relations and Financial Services
3. Deputy Gregory Guida, Minister for Home Affairs
4. Deputy Carolyn Labey, Minister for International Development
5. Deputy Russell Labey, Minister for Housing and Communities
6. Deputy Kevin Lewis, Minister for Infrastructure
7. Deputy Judy Martin, Minister for Social Security
8. Deputy Susie Pinel, Minister for Treasury and Resources

9. Deputy Richard Renouf, Minister for Health and Social Services
10. Deputy Scott Wickenden, Minister for Children and Education
11. Deputy John Young, Minister for Environment

And to our Assistant Ministers who have ably supported our portfolios. It would be remiss of me to not also recognise the significant contributions made by Senator Vallois and Senator Mézec during their time as Ministers.

I have been told on a number of occasions, that I was unlucky to be Chief Minister during this time. Actually Sir, I do not regard it that way. It has been an absolute privilege to lead the Government during this time, with the team that I have had. That is what the role of Chief Minister means, and we have stepped up to the mark. I have been very fortunate to have had the love and support of my family, in particular my wife and my children, without whom this role would have been immeasurably harder. Sir, it is often easier for the negative voice to sound the loudest, but that is when one needs to stand back and look at the bigger picture. We have saved lives, we have protected livelihoods and we leave the Island in a strong financial position after some of the biggest challenges we have seen in our lifetimes. As custodians, we hand over to the next Assembly, and the next Council of Ministers to build on what we have done.

I look for solutions, to implement change. There is one phrase that I think does sum up what we should be about as States Members – it is better to light a candle, than to curse the darkness - to make a positive contribution in our role in this Assembly. If there is one lasting impression that I would like to leave behind, it would be that we have worked determinedly to take those long term, generational decisions which will ultimately only be to the significant benefit of Islanders now, and those Islanders of the future.