

PAC Review of Government COVID-19 Response

1. Please tell us of the impact of COVID-19 response measures on 'business as usual' activities, including:

a. Do you have a 'back-to-normal' recovery plan?

The Age Concern Jersey Centre closed to the public on 12 March 2020 following Government guidelines on safe distancing and the vulnerability of our members. Our recovery plan was based around the safety of our members and when government guidelines allowed, normal activities resumed. We closed before the official Government advice to close. With many of our members being vulnerable, and the news services providing increasingly alarming news, we decided not to wait for an official Government announcement – which came a few days later. Indeed, at the time we were closing the Chief Minister was advising people to still go on holiday.

This is not a criticism, but rather an observation. The more responsibility a Government assumes, the more it takes away from the individuals or organisations. Over recent decades the Government has assumed the bulk of responsibility for parenting, for example. Organisations should be encouraged to take responsibility for what they do and how they

b. What help did you get from the Government?

No specific help.

c. What could they have done better?

To offer timely advice and guidance to all sectors of the community. Most of our members do not have access to computers or smart phones and much of the advice and guidance was technology based, in particular vaccination booking and PCR tests and results.

Furthermore, the message at the beginning frightened many of our members, to the extent they were scared to leave their homes. Whilst it is acknowledged that a strong message on the severity of the pandemic may have been necessary to get the general population to comply with the new restrictions, there is a thin line between a strong professional message and terrorising a section of the community to the detriment of their mental health.

d. What key lessons could they learn for pandemic or emergency planning?

As above, take into consideration the perspective of all sectors in the community.

e. What would you (or those you represent) do differently next time?

Would benefit from a specific Co-ordinator/Team with an understanding of the needs of our sector.

2. How have you benefited from any support schemes by the Government to ease the negative impact of Covid?

Have not received any support from the Government, albeit, for clarity, we did not request any support.

3. What would you advise to help improve communication of Government measures next time?

To have a greater understanding of the work and support required by the 3rd sector. At the onset of the pandemic, the resources of many charities were extremely stretched and further pressures were

added to offer additional support to those who would, under normal circumstances, be served by the Government.

In the earliest months it was extremely challenging to gain PPE and sanitation equipment to safely continue with services. The term 'essential worker' was not clearly defined and as a consequence many 3rd sector workers were not offered equipment to safely continue their duties, so were therefore forced to source safety equipment for staff, volunteers and their clients.

4. How has the test, trace and vaccine roll out programmes affected you or those you represent?

Age Concern Jersey offered free transportation for vaccination appointments and also completed online applications as most of the members did not have access to technology.

PAC Review of Government of Jersey Performance Management

Working with Government of Jersey:

1. Please explain how you work with the Government of Jersey to support your organisation?

A grant of £17,438 is given by the Government of Jersey to provide a frozen meal delivery service twice a week, plus occasional provision of transport to clients receiving lunch at the Age Concern Centre.

2. Do you feel supported by the Government of Jersey?

Yes, the above grant does help to support the service, although the past 20 months of the Pandemic has brought additional pressure and demand to the service.

However, some of our members do not feel supported. Housing costs are escalating, and food inflation is a problem.

We will shortly be launching a campaign against Age Discrimination. The Government is the biggest culprit in this respect. St Helier is becoming increasingly difficult to access, the closure of the Social Security Department, and Income Tax Department, to 'pop-in' queries is a backward step.

Furthermore, the insistence that tax returns and many other aspects of Government are moved online is a retrograde step for many members.

3. What would improve both your relationship, and the level of support you receive?

The relationship works well and support is there if required.

4. Have you noticed any changes to your relationship with the Government of Jersey since the introduction of Target Operating Models and/or the Jersey Performance Framework in 2018?

The change has provided a greater understanding of the service which has opened communication channels.

5. If you had any complaints or issues, how did you raise it, what was the outcome, and were you satisfied?

If there were any complaints or issues they were raised by e-mail and would be dealt with promptly and to our satisfaction.

6. How could that service be improved?

N/A

7. Please can you provide an indication of your level of confidence in the department that supports you, and tell us how that could be improved?

As above, we are satisfied with the support we receive and do not feel it necessary to make any suggestions for improvement.

However, we are disappointed as a Committee that we will feel it will be necessary to give our members a greater voice going forward. The common strategic policies were noble aspirations but we see little evidence that Government policies are being developed to achieve them.