

Thursday 29 April 2021

The COVID-19 public health advice given has been effective when assessed against a strategy of least overall harm

Comptroller and Auditor General issues latest report

Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG), Lynn Pamment, has today (Thursday 29 April 2021) published a report on **Management of the Healthcare Response to the COVID-19 pandemic**.

The C&AG is undertaking an extensive programme of work in respect of the Government of Jersey's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Her ongoing work is considering:

- Overall governance and decision making
- Communications
- Procurement processes and supply chain management
- Management of the healthcare response
- Test, trace and vaccine roll out
- Risk management
- Management of public finances; and
- Schemes to support businesses and individuals.

This second report in the series focusses on the management of the healthcare response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The C&AG report considers:

- how public health risks were identified and managed
- arrangements for the healthcare response for patients with COVID-19
- arrangements for the continuation of the healthcare response for non-COVID-19 patients
- the deployment of and support for frontline workers; and
- co-ordination with third party organisations to ensure an effective 'whole system' health and care response to COVID-19.

LYNN PAMMENT

Lynn Pamment found that action was commenced early in 2020 to start to understand and monitor COVID-19 and its potential impact on Jersey. Senior Health and Community Services (HCS) staff were aware of the key risks from COVID-19 from an early stage. Whilst business continuity plans (BCPs) were in place in January 2020, a lot of work went into improving them between mid-February and the end of April 2020.

The C&AG noted that at the outset, the specialist public health function was operating at limited capacity, but the Government took action in March 2020 to re-deploy internal resources to the public health function. The fast moving pace of COVID-19 resulted in an absence of formal record keeping in the early stages in respect of how public health advice given to Ministers was determined.

The C&AG found a better audit trail, through the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (STAC) from late April 2020 of the public health advice given. However, this record of advice given was not always comprehensive, nor were there detailed records of the discussions around how this advice was created (including alternative options considered).

The C&AG noted that additional proactive community care plans were put in place during the pandemic, targeted at and delivered to vulnerable patient groups. The decision to employ the General Practitioners (GPs) was based in part on ensuring the resilience and sustainability of GP services and also on providing GP capacity to support an integrated primary and secondary care service. The services provided by GPs resulted in benefits to patients. The Government worked with third party organisations to fill the gaps and overcome weaknesses that existed in the wider health and care system during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The C&AG found that the hospital and community system did not experience significant gaps in staff deployment during the first wave despite high levels of staff absence. The reasons for this were that the number of COVID-19 patients never reached a level where the shortage of staff became an issue and that the suspension of elective and non-urgent services created staff availability. At the time the decision was made to build the 180 bed Nightingale Hospital however, it was not clear where the extra staff to support the facility would come from should the facility have been required in practice.

Lynn Pamment said:

“Jersey has not experienced the significant rates of COVID-19 infections that other countries have. As at 31 December 2020 the total of number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Jersey was 2,760 and the total number of COVID-19 deaths was 44, which represents 1.6% of all confirmed cases. The public health advice given has been effective when assessed against a strategy of least overall harm.

A full reflective and evaluative ‘lessons learned’ exercise on the COVID-19 healthcare response should be undertaken across the whole health and care system on the Island. This should include Government and third party organisations. In addition, the proposed expansion of the public health function as part of the Jersey Care Model should be reviewed to ensure that the function is properly equipped to address future health protection emergencies.”

The report *The Management of the Healthcare Response to the COVID-19 pandemic* can be found at: <https://www.jerseyauditoffice.je>

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Notes to Editors:

- The Office of Comptroller and Auditor General ('C&AG') was established in 2005 and operates under the Comptroller and Auditor General (Jersey) Law 2014
- The remit of the C&AG includes the audit of financial statements, corporate governance, internal control and wider consideration of public funds, often expressed as 'value for money'
- The 2021 Audit Plan (including further details of the C&AG COVID-19 work programme) can be found at: www.jerseyauditoffice.je
- Lynn Pamment took up the Office of C&AG on 1 January 2020 for a fixed term of seven years. Following the introduction of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Jersey) Law 2014 the term of office is fixed at seven years and is non-renewable.
- The Office of Comptroller & Auditor General is known as the 'Jersey Audit Office'.
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- The C&AG is prepared, on an occasional basis, to provide articles for publication in the local media, following a specific request and consideration of the relevant topic
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