

Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture
Conference call with Business Organisations
21 October 2020, 15:00-16:00

Attendees

- Charandeep Singh, Scottish Chamber of Commerce
- Tim Allan, President, Scottish Chamber of Commerce
- Aidan O'Carroll, IoD Chair
- Colin Borland, Director of Devolved Nations, FSB
- Philip Grant, Chair, Scottish Financial Enterprise
- Ian Wall, Chair, SCDI
- Gareth Williams, SCDI
- Professor Jason Leitch – National Clinical Director
- Dominic Munro, SG

OPENING REMARKS

Ms Hyslop thanked attendees for taking the time to meet again following their previous discussions with Liz Ditchburn over the last week. The importance of these discussions are valued in the highest regard.

Scotland is moving towards a new tiered approach which will help to introduce a more strategic approach to suppress the virus as much as possible and its effects on our society & economy. We are due to move to a five-tier system from 2 November, between now and then we are in a transition phase moving from the existing route map to the new Strategic Framework that is due to be published on Friday at midday. This needs to be seen as part of a bigger collective approach which includes vaccination and builds on our three pillars - Compliance & enforcement, Test & Protect and Workplace guidance.

There is due to be a debate in Parliament on Tuesday need parliament to seek approval for the framework. FM has been clear that she wants this to be a consultative process and for us to hear views. Sectors have made huge strides to operate under new restrictions. We need to identify any concerns or grey areas as soon as possible. Ms Hyslop handed over to Jason & Dominic to provide a strategic overview.

UPDATE ON THE COVID ROUTE MAP AND COVID STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Dominic advised the group that we are now entering a different phase of handling crisis through regional differential ways of dealing with epidemic. This approach was announced on 24 September by FM. It is important to be able to apply the right level of response depending on localised levels of epidemic. We want to align with England who have a three tiers system however need to reflect Scotland's needs. The middle three of Scotland's five-tier system broadly aligns with the UK's three-tier system. Scotland has an additional tier at the bottom which is the lowest level of risk could live without a vaccine and an upper tier at the top. This has been designed so that short, sharp interventions can be made to bring down infection levels. It will be structured via LAs but can aggregated into regions or disaggregated into smaller wardens e.g. an island in Highland Council.

Jason gave an overview of the global situation which included a breakdown globally, at a European level and in Scotland that a further 1739 cases were recorded, an increase of 49 people in hospital and a further 49 deaths. He noted that whilst the numbers are high we are also doing increasing amounts of tests. Forecasts published 14 days ago estimated that there would be 3,000 cases per day however this has not come to fruition due to the range of measures put in place. There is encouraging news around the vaccine with small numbers expected by end of year and greater numbers early next year.

Ms Hyslop invited comments and questions from the attendees.

Charandeep was keen to know how Friday's publication will interact with the existing route plan. If tiered restrictions be applied Scotland wide with then LA measures on top and how Test & Trace will support businesses. He advised he would endeavour to provide further feedback,:

Tim welcomed the nuanced approach to LAs, the clarity provided during FM's update today and the financial support that has been made available and noted that the dialogue with Liz has been incredibly helpful

Dominic responded by advising that the strategic framework will interface with route map by building upon it. He couldn't pre-empt decisions regarding nationwide or localised restrictions. Noted that the approach taken is to move to system where everyone knows the rules and businesses can see how decisions are being made and what restrictions will be imposed or eased based on data which should help with business planning. This mirrors New Zealand (NZ) approach where businesses have noted that this approach helped with continuity planning.

Jason advised that the National Management Team's role is to advise and make recommendations using a dashboard of measures to senior advisors – including public health, economic and social and will make recommendations which decisions will be based on. Weekly decisions will be made however it is likely that areas would be in tiers for three to four weeks. They are reprinting the testing strategy which will be published later this week to advise the Cabinet Secretary for Health. He also noted the limitations of the present test and the need to be clear on what it does or doesn't mean. Granular levels of data is available on Public Health Scotland dashboard.

Aidan strongly endorsed the level of interaction with Liz and the levels of info that they are able to share with members. He warmly welcomed the lowest level on the tiered system but noted that it would be good to have timescales and conditions. He suggested that businesses that have gone extra mile to be COVID safe could assist as examples of good practice to help keep businesses open when going through tiered categories. Need to ensure that we build in capacity into Test & protect so that we are ready next time we have to mobilise. Will feedback as much as we can following Friday's publication.

Ian noted that the proposals are welcome but felt they are defensive actions and need to move into the offensive space. Felt that a more comprehensive test trace protect and isolate system is required. We need to be on top of spikes to suppress them. Unless we get that system right we are not going to succeed. Private sacrifice

should be supported – individuals & organisations shouldn't be penalised, aware that levers are generally UK but SG does have some. Felt that the current spike has been around travel from across UK or abroad and SG needs to come up with ideas around on this.

Ms Hyslop agreed with the points on defensive and offensive. Raised that we need to find innovative & creative measures and that Domenic should reflect on the points made. We need to get UKG to re-think about furlough and job support scheme. Consideration needs to be given on how to manage the border control issue.

Jason reassured that public health are on the offensive and are trying to track the virus down. The present test is unable to detect the virus during incubation period of five to seven days. NZ locked borders which suppressed the virus but once they opened the borders it rose up again. Need to suppress inside the wall. Unsure about the point around imported cases – studies are going on to uncover. Need to suppress the virus with non-pharmaceuticals + test and protect until we can live with the virus once got the vaccine.

Colin noted that the tiered system was incredibly sensible and will make things easier to handle. He welcome the publication on Friday and the opportunity to engage ahead of the debate. Requested that the different tiers need to be include the different levels of business support to allow for business planning & survival. FSB have made requests to UKG about tier 3 in England and who is missing out. Issues around self-employed or no registered premises – significant economic and business impacts. Asked about how measures will be enforced.

Philip welcomed the engagement and noted that including in the framework the notice period for decisions to be implementation to help with business planning. He was keen to continue to support development and communication of policies.

Ms Hyslop reflected on the points made and noted that funding for businesses is if they are closed or not and based on their rateable value and if they are supply chain businesses effected. Need to ensure that UKG support moves into self-employed mechanism. We should share proposals about compliance to gather views on what might work. Need to build in notice period. Need to think of office issue – social and mental health – small number of people to return

Jason noted that he hoped for compliance rather than enforcement. All industries have done fantastic jobs. Risk around distance from people from other households in various settings. Public health keen to inforce themselves rather than police etc.

Dominic picked up on the point around movement and borders. Wales is keen to stop people from NW England in. Scotland asking for 4 Nations approach – need higher prevalence areas to do their bit to not to travel into lower prevalence. On Colin's point Local Authority wards e.g. makes sense in Highland for instance but central belt LA or built on LAs. On Aidan's point about reaching the lowest tier we need to be clear that R number needs to be at a low level until we can move to these lower tiers.

Ms Hyslop thanked everyone for contributions and advised that over the next few days she was keen to continue engagement either joint or one to ones on Monday and Tuesday.

COVID-19 Business Support Team, 22 October 2020