

(9ix) **Mr A Jarvie**

To the Leader of the Council

“Can you provide details of benchmarking against the enactment, use, scope and broader Member involvement of emergency powers and strategic decision making between the first Gold meeting on 19/03/20 and resumption of political governance on 25/06/20?”

The Council proactively engaged with both SOLACE and the Scottish Members Services Development Network (SMSDN) early on in March/April. This engagement resulted in the ‘Transitioning to the new normal: Political Governance’ study being undertaken and circulated to all SMSDN members.

The Council was in contact with the Lead Officer, SOLACE before the Council meeting in June to see if the study had been updated and it was confirmed at that point that it had not. The Lead Officer indicated that, to his knowledge, Highland Council was the only authority continuing to meet during recess.

https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.highland.gov.uk%2Fdownload%2Fmeetings%2Fid%2F76699%2Fitem_4_decisions_made_using_delegated_powers&data=02%7C01%7C%7C5f8abd8940f46574c9508d82e187871%7C89f0b56e6d164fe89dba176fa940f7c9%7C0%7C0%7C637310030051796218&sdata=zKaAFQWKUdhCbkoBP1DCv3aD6wTXDpQzBQrXbRry8VE%3D&reserved=0

As was reported to Council in June the benchmarking the Council has undertaken with other Scottish local authorities had shown that The Highland Council was ahead of the majority in terms of the extent of formal member scrutiny and decision making and, at that point in time, was the only one able to facilitate live streaming of its meetings.

To date there has been no separate formal benchmarking exercise carried out by COSLA or external audit on the use of emergency powers during the COVID-19 situation. Audit Scotland has however instructed all external audit teams to consider COVID-19 governance as part of their annual audit report. Grant Thornton, the Council’s external auditors, have requested and been provided with relevant materials and will report their opinion when the Audit & Scrutiny Committee considers their annual report on 24 September 2020.

In addition to the materials provided to Grant Thornton (attached) the Council published the decisions it has made during COVID-19 and the following links were also provided.

https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/695/council_information_performance_and_statistics/526/meetings_and_minutes/2

https://www.highland.gov.uk/news/article/12538/highland_council_publishes_decisions_made_during_covid-19_emergency