COVID-19 Impact on Record Keeping in Scotland

14 May 2020

During the last two weeks of April 2020, the NRS conducted a survey into the impact of COVID-19 disruption on the public sector recordkeeping community in Scotland. The purpose of the survey was to capture a national picture of the impact of COVID disruption to Scottish public authorities, to inform our plans for sector support now and in the future, and to understand the reality of this sudden change to our normal ways of working.

We received 71 responses to the survey, this represent 41% of PRSA stakeholder community. Unsurprisingly our largest number of respondents came from the Local Authority and Health and Social Care Sectors. These sectors have perhaps been most directly affected in the delivery of key services during the COVID crisis. In addition to the PRSA public authorities, we also had responses from independent RM consultants who work in the Scottish Records and Information Governance sector and, routinely, with public bodies named under the Public Records (Scotland) Act.

The high level summary of the key themes to emerge from this survey.

- **Significant reduction in RM resource**. 20 % of respondents have had adjustments made to their roles, responsibilities and RM activities in order to support delivery of key services within their organisations. Caring responsibilities, staff isolation and communication limitations has also reduced capacity across the sector.
- **Access to digital information vital to support home working**. 32% of respondents successfully working from home supported by agile kit and digital record keeping environments. Access to reliable , digital records and information has been key to supporting remote working and digital service delivery.
- **Significant impact on statutory responsibilities of FOISA and DPA**. 26% of services are reliant on hybrid recordkeeping systems and this has inhibited their ability to fully meet the requirements of information requests for FOISA, DPA and the delivery of services particularly in social care.
- **Records Management Business Continuity Planning has been vital and successful.** 95% of records management business continuity plans have stood up to the challenge of this crisis. Ongoing agile development of these plans is continuing as the situation evolves.
- **Widespread cessation of records and information management development work**. Reprioritisation across the public sector in Scotland has reduced resource availability to push forward on development activities and records management activities. Although records and information management is important to ensuring remote working, it is a secondary priority to the resourcing and delivery of key services and the COVID response. 81% of respondents note significant impact to continuous improvement or development initiatives and fears that some of the very positive steps made across the sector since PRSA was introduced and may be undone as a result of the crisis.
- **Concern for capture of the public record and historical documentation of Scotland's COVID response.** 100% of respondents have not yet formally considered or adapted their retention and disposal schedules to ensure the preservation of COVID records of significant importance are captured for archiving purposes. These are public bodies creating public records, so there is a substantial risk that some information will be lost if this is not addressed in the very near future. The accelerated roll out of new technologies, software and communications which do not form part of the existing records management infrastructure has also raised fears around the ability to comply with statutory and regulatory responsibilities, e.g. FOISA and DPA.

- **An opportunity to raise the profile of records and information management in Scotland**. Although there are definite areas of concern, 54% of respondents felt this crisis offers an opportunity for the sector. Good record keeping has been proven to be vital to supporting the home working model the crisis has necessitated. There are aspirations from colleagues to drive this positive message forward and to utilise this crisis to accelerate the adoption of digital record keeping systems and improved information governance structures.

Next steps
We will continue to engage with the PRSA community during the coming weeks and months to continue to understand the impact of COVID on the sector and what the medium and long term impacts of this might be.

It is our intention to repeat this survey later in the summer to capture any emerging issues and further developments. During this time we will continue discussions through the Knowledge Hub forum and will encourage all our colleagues to use that platform to share their experiences .

We welcome any feedback and observations from our NRS colleagues on the survey findings.

PRSA Team

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1. Introduction

1.1 Used for a major report to a Committee, Board, etc. (i.e. one which has a number of conclusions and recommendations – e.g. business case). Would usually be a number of sections over a number of pages.

2. Conclusions and Recommendations (Optional)

3. Main Body