

KS and the coronavirus situation

The Norwegian Coronavirus Commission has been established by the Norwegian government and has the task of undertaking an independent, thorough, and complete evaluation of the authorities' handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The commission is to look at both the preparations made before the pandemic and how the crisis has been handled. KS has closely followed coronavirus developments and has been in on-going contact with the authorities and other relevant actors.

The following describes KS' role during the pandemic and has been sent to the coronavirus commission.

KS has:

- A. acted as contact point and coordinator between the local government sector, parliament, government, and directorates.
- B. had responsibility for the local government sector's negotiations and co-operation in matters of employer/employee relations.
- C. supported municipalities and county authorities by spreading and gathering information.
- D. established and administered digital meeting places for municipalities and county authorities both within the sector and national authorities – both centrally and in each region.
- E. been a body of expertise that has provided knowledge and information about crucial areas of society, such as municipal finances, working life (employee and employer-related), education and pre-school, health services, the social situation locally (in each municipality), and shared digital tools (track and trace, etc.).

Elaboration of these points:

A. Coordinator between the local government sector and national authorities

KS has had particularly close contact with the Norwegian Directorate of Health, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, the Ministry of Health and Care Services, the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Local Government and Modernization - and with both the other parties within employer/employee relations and the professional authorities, through joint meetings arranged by the Norwegian Directorate of Health on, for example, the definition of critical functions and critical personnel, the design of infection guidance, other advice and guidance documents, and exemption laws/Covid-19 regulations/temporary legislative amendments and regulations.

KS participated in the daily meetings with the Norwegian Directorate of Health and the working life partners. KS has also participated in the National Emergency Preparedness Council for Biological Incidents.

In addition, KS has been in contact with the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration about solutions for people who are dependent on social assistance, introductory schemes, qualification programs etc.

As a sectoral policy actor, KS has ensured that there has been ongoing dialogue between our members and the government. Statements from the county municipalities on behalf of the county mayors have been sent to the Finance Committee, the Local Government and Administration Committee, the Transport and Communications Committee, and parliamentary leaders at the Storting.

An example from the transport sector:

- Provided documentation of loss of income for public transport.
- Have discussed economic and social/practical consequences for public transport and the taxi industry.
- Provided input in connection with the design of the Norwegian Directorate of Health's work with two proposals for infection guides for public transport, including practical challenges in reopening schools, especially with regard to school transport and infection control considerations.
- Proposed that the regulations for taxis that were planned to enter into force on 01.07.2020 were postponed.

B. Negotiations and co-operation in matters of employer/employee relations

Advice and guidance on working life issues has been given to municipalities and county municipalities. During the first two months after the corona closure, 1,100 individual corona-related enquiries relating to collective bargaining and labour law were answered via KS' Member Service. The enquiries covered a wide range of issues, for example:

- Working hours, redeployment of staff and changes in work tasks
- Corona-related absence and quarantine, including questions about sickness benefits and care benefits
- Holiday settlement
- Financial conditions for doctors
- Access to the use of furlough

KS' Member Service was staffed with extended opening hours and availability on weekends and public holidays (Easter).

As responsible for negotiations, KS has had regular contact and good dialogue with the trade unions throughout the period. Several agreements have been negotiated in addition to joint statements/guidelines:

- Protocol on the postponement of wage settlement/continuation of the main collective agreement
- Joint statement on the work in municipalities and county municipalities during the corona situation
- Collective agreement on exceptions from the Working Environment Act (extended limits for overtime and shorter notice period when changing work plans)
- Collective agreement of exception from the special agreement on fire and rescue services
- Joint guidelines on holiday settlement
- Joint guidelines on working hours and organization of kindergartens open during Easter

KS has participated and contributed to meetings of the Working Life and Pension Policy Council, which proved to be an effective and relevant meeting place between the authorities and the parties in working life. The collaboration with other employers' organizations has also had great value with the exchange of experiences, sharing of information and coordination of goals/positions in the negotiation processes about, for example, working hours and holidays. It is the agreements/documents prepared in KS' field that have largely been the template for identical statements within the other tariff areas.

The IA agreement (The Letter of Intent on a more inclusive working life), and the industry programs have been regularly discussed by the authorities and the parties in working life. It was considered that the corona situation made it necessary to supplement the IA agreement with an additional protocol and put the matter "on hold".

C. Information to and from the local government sector

KS has had close contact with municipalities and county municipalities - both directly and via its regional apparatus, with special focus on:

- quarantine provisions
- test regimens
- access to and distribution of infection control equipment
- input to recommendations/advice and guidance of the national professional authorities
- prioritization challenges
- scenario planning and establishment of contingency measures
- organization of distance learning in school
- effects on the municipalities' (and county authorities') statutory duties as kindergarten and school owners
- the consequences for public transport and school transport
- conducting meetings of elected bodies
- ability to delegate and collaboration with volunteers
- input to the government's crisis packages regarding the use of the municipal sector in these packages

In addition, KS has:

- Mapped and presented the economic consequences of the corona crisis for the whole of 2020 for the municipalities and county authorities, in close collaboration with large and medium-sized urban municipalities and county municipalities. KS' calculations of the municipal sector's loss of revenue and expenditure increases have been based on both macroeconomic analyses and several rounds of feedback from a selection of municipalities and county authorities.
- Established a R&D member network with a focus on knowledge needs related to Covid-19, which is used for both the dissemination of information about various R&D initiatives and feedback and assessment of the initiatives.
- Through the umbrella organization CEMR (Council of European Municipalities and Regions), disseminated contact and experiences with sister organizations about how local and regional authorities in Europe have faced the Covid19 crisis.

KS lawyers have assisted in providing advice and legal assessments to municipalities regarding local regulations and the interpretation of legislation both through member services and legal assignments.

D. Digital meeting places

During the period, KS arranged three large digital meetings on corona information (especially relating to work and infection control issues in kindergartens and schools), Akson (a collaborative project for a shared patient record solution in the health sector) and the Municipal Bill/revised national budget. A minister, a state secretary and representatives of relevant directorates attended the meetings and answered questions. The meetings were attended by about 1000 people.

In the regional apparatus in KS, there has been great activity through digital meetings. Frequent meetings with mayors and municipal directors in the regions have provided broad access to input and signals that have been passed on to national authorities, including about:

- The availability and distribution of infection control/protective equipment: too little and too late, as well as failing coordination.
- Strong concern for the municipal economy: coverage of costs and loss of income that comes on top of the fact that restructuring assumed in the 2020 budget has been postponed/has not been possible to work with in the crisis situation.
- Travel restrictions - including cabin bans.
- Capacity for opening kindergartens and schools.
- Capacity for school transport upon reopening.
- The situation for vulnerable children and young people.
- In some counties, interaction and requirements for capacities for corona patients in hospitals and in municipal beds in the isolation ward.
- mapping of "oven-ready" projects as a basis for rapid stimulation of local companies in connection with the crisis package and the revised national budget.

E. Expert body

KS has provided essential information within municipal finances, the local government sector's areas of responsibility, and working life.

KS' website – ks.no – was rebuilt and specially adapted to the situation with its own corona-related pages with articles and collections of frequently asked questions. From March 12 to the end of June, there were 1,467,729 page views on ks.no. Of these, 233,362 were page views of the corona-related pages. 453 articles were published in the same period.

Links to information regarding the coronavirus situation on ks.no (in Norwegian):

- [Ofte stille spørsmål](#)
- [Arbeidsgiver](#)
- [Kommuneøkonomi](#)
- [Helse og velferd](#)
- [Barnehage og skole](#)
- [Verktøy og ressurser](#)
- [Lokaldemokrati og styring](#)

Examples of information are the rules of the Local Government Act and infection control rules that have become active due to the pandemic. This includes topics such as holding meetings during the pandemic, delegation rules, the authority municipalities have under the rules of the Communicable Diseases Act – including the authority to issue local regulations that go beyond the state's own rules - and information about the Norwegian Directorate of Health's orders and circulars. The website has also been used to inform about property taxes.

KS has put in a lot of work related to the preparation of guidelines, including for local infection control rules - including the legality of establishing "Southerner" quarantine rules. The work with guidelines has especially involved the assessment of legal rules and the review of draft guides with proposals for changes, but also meetings with the ministries and organizations such as the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise.

KS has assisted with both legal and more political input related to consultation work regarding temporary legislation during the pandemic, including planning and building law, the ability to hold remote meetings, temporary rules for schools and kindergartens and other legislation.

KS has contributed with proposals on the need for changes in the procurement regulations, in the area of property tax, the opportunity to make direct procurements, announcements of competitions during the pandemic, change ongoing contracts, provide legal support to industries with financial challenges, promote that current regulations give municipalities great autonomy in the area of infection control, and clarification of municipal doctors' ability to share information in the work with infection detection and tracking.

Research and innovation in digitalisation

Within innovation, research and digitalisation, KS has functioned as liaison between its members and national actors and authorities related to the municipalities' handling of the pandemic.

The allocation of NOK 80 million for acute e-health measures led to a good process between the Directorate for e-health, the Norwegian Institute for Public Health (NIPH) and the Norwegian Directorate of Health, and eventually also municipalities and health regions - where working together with suppliers' proposals has been useful. Some improvements and broadening of solutions have happened very quickly.

An important measure has been the establishment of a digital tool for infection tracing as a shared service for the municipalities (voluntary use) in collaboration with NIPH.

Within the municipalities' acute handling of the digital school day, KS has contributed to the establishment of a joint arena between KS, the Ministry of Education and Research, and the Directorate of Education to discuss issues that have arisen, especially related to the supplier market and handling of issues related to privacy. And in the wake of this, a collaborative project – "Skolesec" - has now been set up by KS, the municipalities and national authorities as a continuation of this.

KS has also had a mobilizing and coordinating role in the implementation of a major procurement in welfare technology together with the supplier development program.

In the research field, KS has played a coordinating role and contributed to the National Institute of Public Health's research map ("evidence and gap-map") on covid-19 (delivered at the end of March). KS' contribution has been to obtain knowledge needs from individual members, who recorded acute topics such as infection control, possible reuse of disposable protective equipment, crisis communication, knowledge of how the virus is transmitted etc.