

Members of the Consell de Formentera gathered today for local government's August plenary, an encounter that brought cross-party support for a proposal on expanding furlough packages and targeted aid for tourism sector businesses and employees. Alejandra Ferrer defended the proposal "in light of the unfolding pandemic, ongoing flare-ups and associated restrictive measures"—measures which the president affirmed constitute "serious obstacles for business owners and job holders on our island, particularly given Formentera's summer-centred economy".

Assembly members voted to urge Madrid to fund a doubling of furlough packages for companies for whom new outbreaks and decisions taken by leaders at the local and international level have meant forced closures or lost revenue due to cancelled bookings or reduced activity. They called on the central government to put in place targeted assistance for companies and workers in the tourism sector—a sector which, as President Ferrer pointed out, "is particularly reliant on summertime tourism, and even more so in the Balearics".

Plan for seniors

Assembly members gave united backing to the Consell de Formentera's pledge to activate an Integrated Plan for Formentera Seniors (*Pla Integral de Gent Gran a Formentera*) to "continue working with central and regional government administrations to tackle loneliness among the elderly".

Vice-president and seniors' department consellera Ana Juan spoke about care received by Formentera's old people during the pandemic as well as the wider relevance of local seniors. "The public health crisis has intensified the problem of unwanted solitude here in the Balearics and across the country", she said, calling on "engagement at every level of government in order to rout it". Juan insisted that building awareness around the issue was a top priority, and highlighted the importance of "enlisting science and statistics to take specific steps to address the issue and prevent it".

Scheduling for 2021 bank holidays was adopted as well. Given the feast days of Sant Jaume (25 July) and Sant Ferran (30 May) fall on Sundays, assembly members voted to observe the island's festival days on the feast days of Santa Maria (5 August) and Sant Francesc (3

December).

OAC service in La Mola and Sant Ferran

Sa Unió party members proposed opening satellite Citizen's Information Offices (OAC) to tend to islanders in La Mola and Sant Ferran—a measure that won the support of both the GxF-PSOE governing team as well as the opposition. Economy, tax office and general services chief Bartomeu Escandell offered that as soon as the Covid-19 crisis and budget allocations permit it, the expanded OAC service will "improve and facilitate the way islanders in the two neighbourhoods engage with local government".

Cross-party backing additionally came for a Sa Unió motion to convene the Supervisory Board of the Formentera Audiovisual Administration. Culture chief Susana Labrador indicated the most recently scheduled session of the board had been suspended amid emergency orders and highlighted plans for a new meeting in September.

Report by Bartomeu Escandell

Bartomeu Escandell, who heads the local departments of economy, taxes and general services, stood before assembly members to take stock of the efforts in his remit, noting "every single aspect of these departments' work has been affected by the severe public health and economic crisis we are facing". On the subject of finances and taxes, Escandell said "the Consell's books are in order and we're on footing that's sufficiently strong so we can cope with the challenges of these new times of crisis". "If our administration's financial solvency has any real value, it's that it can help us diminish the sting of the pandemic and aid our people in tough times like these."

As the government office that is closest to the people, Escandell emphasised the importance of "having our own resources so we can act efficiently to help people tackle problems. As we face the worst crisis of our time, our challenge at the economic level is to stay in a position where we can be providing the entirety of our services, and remain by the side of those who need us most."

Escandell also indicated that during the months of strict lockdown, remote working proved viable across the distinct departments of the Consell, including those under the conseller's responsibility: accounting, the clerk's office, hiring and the OAC (Citizen Information Office). "The challenge was to dialogue with islanders across the OAC", said Escandell, pointing to sharp increases in the number of islanders using the OAC's online portal, the OVAC. "We saw a great deal of commitment to quality service on the part of staff", he added, "who, as soon as the

easing out of lockdown measures began, resumed providing services by appointment”.

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