

Recommendation 12: Cell leads to understand principle of subsidiarity in relation to decision-making and to encourage communication across cells instead of escalating through Strategic Cell.

Recommendation 13: Individual cells to draw up ToR defining purpose and membership. All ToR and contact details to be kept updated and published on the intranet.

- **EOC information boards** – these contributed to situational awareness in the room but could be shared with the wider Department. Once EOC was embedded, tendency for EOC staff to become task-focused (i.e. sending emails, producing SitReps) instead of focusing on situational awareness and communication. There was some initial confusion about roles and responsibilities but this improved over time.

Recommendation 14: Include SCS and staff from across the Department in training and exercising, including orientation in the function and interpretation of EOC information boards.

- **Emails** – email management was a problem across the Department in terms of volume; mailbox sizes; duplication; scattergun approach to sharing and replying to emails; lack of clarity about action/response expected; and users of shared mailboxes not always including their name and contact details. This improved over time with mailbox sizes increased and more discipline in management of emails applied.

Recommendation 15: email protocols to be drawn up and adhered to.

Recommendation 16: EOC staff to undertake MS Outlook training.

- **Dual roles** – many staff were expected to respond to the pandemic as well as continue with their normal duties. This placed significant pressure and strain on key staff.

Recommendation 17: staff in response roles to be fully released from normal duties with appropriate back-filling or suspension for key duties and the Department's business continuity plan should be fully activated with all non-essential work stood down.

- **Training, validating and review:** Despite training from Operation Yellowhammer during 2019, at the beginning of the response there were insufficient fully trained staff to cope with the volume of information or the

pace of the pandemic. The Department must consider how it ensures that it has the capacity and capability to respond to future health emergencies and how staff training is kept up to date. All staff who were involved in the effort are to be commended for their commitment and dedication.

Recommendation 18: EPB to arrange appropriate emergency planning training for Departmental staff to ensure skills are refreshed and structures are reviewed to take account of lessons learnt.

- **Cleaning/social distancing** – provision of hand sanitiser was slow to EOC and other parts of the building where staff were unable to work from home. Additional cleaning was arranged by the Chief of Staff in the EOC and staff brought their own hand sanitiser until this was rectified. It was difficult to fully implement social distancing in the EOC and staff were not asked to attend in person without their consent however, it was widely felt that it was not possible to operate the response properly without a physical presence. Larger meetings took place in C3.18 conference room. Entrance to the EOC was monitored to ensure social distancing measures observed. Fortunately no cases of COVID-19 were associated with working in the EOC
- **Catering** – There was significant upset among those staff who continued to work in Castle Buildings and who were not provided with food or fresh water. Both the canteen and coffee shop were closed and the canteen was locked so staff were prevented from accessing chilled, filtered water. This created particular difficulties for those who had to work long hours and who had no time to go to shops where there were often lengthy queues. Kitchen facilities were available but could only be accessed by one member of staff at a time to comply with social distancing while water in the kitchens is lukewarm and unpleasant to drink. Staff reported feeling undervalued and forgotten about particularly as staff in the NI Hub in the same building were being provided with food deliveries every day.

Recommendation 19: Early consideration of provision of food to staff working long and intense hours particularly in a protracted response

- **SCS staff** – many of the key SCS staff had to work well outside their contracted hours for a considerably protracted period without any uplift in pay or leave allowances. Some staff reported feeling undervalued and stressed.