

**FROM:** Name Redacted

**DATE:** 11 November 2021

**TO:** Liz Redmond

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH: EMERGENCY PLANNING BRANCH REPORT; A  
REVIEW OF HEALTH GOLD COMMAND RESPONSE TO SARS-COV-2/COVID-19**

**SUMMARY:**

<b>Issue:</b>	The purpose of this submission is to provide you with an update on lessons learnt from the first wave of the COVID 19 pandemic and recommendations for your consideration.
<b>Timescale</b>	The scope of the findings in the Lessons Learnt Reports range from 27 January 2020 – 30 July 2020
<b>FOI</b>	Elements of this submission may be exempt under S.35 (provision of advice / formulation of policy), subject to a public interest test.
<b>Financial Implications</b>	N/A
<b>Executive Referral</b>	N/A
<b>Recommendation:</b>	<p>That you note the background to this submission and consider the reports attached at:</p> <p><b>Annex A:</b> COVID-19 Lessons Learned – summary and recommendations, and <b>Annex B:</b> Update on progress</p>

**Introduction**

1. The DoH Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) was activated on 27 January 2020 in response to the emerging threat of what came to be known as the COVID-19 pandemic. The EOC formally stood down on 12 August 2020. The following lessons are in relation to the operation of the EOC, not the wider Departmental or HSC response. These lessons will be used to inform the next

## What didn't go so well?

- **Release of PIPP stock** – there was a sense of panic across the HSC and Independent Sector in relation to PPE and an expectation that DoH would release its entire emergency stockpile (PIPP) to BSO without appropriate justification, including items already in good stock across Trusts. There was delay in setting up a PPE cell and then confusion about the role of the PPE cell. The process improved following recommendations arising from the PPE audit conducted by Internal Audit in April 2020. There is now a template for BSO to complete for release of PIPP which has streamlined the process.  
*Recommendation 2: Roles and responsibilities for managing PPE during a pandemic, including when and how the emergency stockpile (PIPP) is used, need to be established and embedded in emergency plans*
- **Helpline** – there was an agreed process between DoH and NI Direct to establish a helpline. However, this did not work well initially with delays over set-up and staff employed through NI Direct giving incorrect information to callers. There was confusion about responsibility for producing scripts (DoH or PHA) and challenges with keeping scripts updated as advice and guidance changed frequently. The helpline then moved to NHS 111 under the Digital Cell command but it required significant resource to run and ensure appropriate public health input.  
*Recommendation 3: EPB to liaise with NI Direct re processes for standing up Helpline. CDIO Group to liaise with PHA to draw up process and agree responsibilities*
- **Resources for initial response** – at the beginning of the response, there was significant pressure on a small team of staff in the Emergency Operations Centre, Health Protection Branch, Press Office and senior medics. This team had to cover all aspects of the response including SitReps, briefing, meetings and weekend cover. There was a delay in setting up the Strategic Cell and policy cells and in providing adequate resources from across the Department.  
*As with Recommendation 1: set up Strategic Cell, Briefing Cell and relevant policy cells from the outset.*