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**Four Harms Meeting
Friday 16 April 2021, 10.30 - 11.30
MINUTE**

Attendance

Ken Thomson (Chair)

Gregor Smith

Matt Allan

NR

NR

Katherine Peskett

Shirley Rogers

John Paterson

Amanda Croft

Audrey MacDougall

Reuben Aitken

Gary Gillespie

NR

NR

Graeme Logan

NR

NR

Penelope Cooper

Alan Johnston

Amanda Gordon

NR

NR

NR

1. Welcome and introductions

- It was noted that easings of travel and socialising restrictions had come into force on the day of the meeting, following the First Minister's announcement on Tuesday, 14 April.
- The revised *Protective Levels Framework* tables had been published earlier in the week and advice was being drafted for a go/no-go decision re: 26 April easings.

2. Minutes of last meeting

- The minutes of the meeting of 12 April 2021 were approved.
- **Action:** minutes from the meeting 26 March 2021 were to be agreed in correspondence.

3. Governance update

- Terms of Reference for the Four Harms Group had been drafted and the aim was to finalise these by 23 April, leave permitting. In order to finalise the membership of the group, colleagues were asked to provide the names of any colleagues who should be copied into relevant papers to the Director for Outbreak Management's Executive Assistant (NR).
- A small group has been convened to consider analytical priorities. The group was considering: (i) how to test the assumptions that go into our modelling; (ii) how to further integrate modelling and analysis for harms 3 and 4; and (iii) how to prioritise demand on analytical resource.
- It was noted that there was potential for a public inquiry into the Scottish Government's COVID response to begin in this calendar year. Increasingly, the Four Harms Group would be thinking about how to prepare for an inquiry and this would require substantial resource. It was noted that work to maintain robust

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records of decision-making was ongoing and that there was a good precedent to build on from work already undertaken within the Health Directorate.

4. State of the epidemic and 26th April advice

- An update on the current state of the epidemic was provided:
 - R in Scotland was currently estimated as being between 0.8 and 1.0 (unchanged from the 7 April estimate).
 - An average of 250 cases were reported per day in the 7 days to 15 April, a 24% decrease in reported cases since 8 April.
 - There were 34 weekly cases per 100,000 in the week to 12 April, a decrease since the last week. This compared to 302 weekly cases per 100,000 on 8 January and was similar to the weekly case rate observed on 22 September 2020.
 - Case rates in all age groups had decreased, with the sharpest decline in cases in those aged 60+ in the past week. Hospital admissions were also in decline.
 - Latest modelled estimates suggested there were currently between 4 and 28 new daily infections per 100,000 people in Scotland.
 - Clackmannanshire currently had the highest weekly case rate in Scotland, reporting 81 cases per 100,000 in the last week.
 - The current UK variant of concern remained the dominant strain.
- It was noted that there were a number of variants of concern in other countries to be alert to – including in South Africa, India and South America. Of particular concern were anecdotal reports that variants in India and Brazil were impacting a younger cohort of patients.
- A small number of cases of the B1351 and B1525 variants had been identified in Scotland and four cases of the B1617 variant had also been identified. Three of the latter cases were associated with international travel (one was a contact) and had been introduced to Scotland via travel routes in England.
- Ministers remained cautious on international travel, given the potential vulnerability of introducing new variants.
- It was noted that while good progress was being made in suppressing the virus, caution was required when easing restrictions to avoid undermining this and that easing restrictions would inevitably lead to more COVID-19 cases. Recent experience in Chile and Uruguay had demonstrated the danger of opening up too much, too quickly, even where a vaccination programme was well underway.
- There was also a risk about adherence. As things opened up, there would be potential for the public to consider it less important to adhere to restrictions and a higher likelihood of calls for future easings to be brought forward. But it was important to be careful when 50% of population had not yet been vaccinated. The latest estimate for the population immunity threshold was between 4.1 and 4.4m (75% and 81% of the population), depending on the transmissibility of the new variant.
- A submission was being prepared, to issue to Ministers on Monday, with advice about proceeding with easings on 26 April, taking account of the latest data. Consideration was also being given to identifying 7 June as the indicative date for moving into Level 1. The draft advice would be circulated in correspondence with the group early on Monday afternoon.

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- There was no Cabinet meeting in that week due to the pre-election period, and as with previous weeks, the submission would be handled in correspondence.

5. Indicators paper

- There was a commitment to a further publication regarding indicators in the Strategic Framework update published in February.
- Discussions were ongoing about the how to present and explain the use of indicators in a publication. It was important to be clear that these were not hard and fast rules for deciding on the application of restrictions - a range of factors required to be balanced and taken into account.
- It was also important to be able clearly distinguish assessment of the WHO's six conditions for safe easing of restrictions and the vaccine "gateway condition".
- A draft of the paper be circulated more widely for comment shortly.

6. Capacities guidance

- Following advice to the First Minister about how to address the question of capacity limits for events and settings, draft guidance for calculating physical distancing capacity in public settings had been published. In addition, colleagues were working with local authorities on the exemptions process for large events.
- It was noted that some stakeholders (e.g. Chambers of Commerce, Federation for Small Businesses) had concerns about the approach taken and were stressing the need for continued engagement, which was ongoing.
- There was an outstanding question about the position of large events beyond Level 0 and the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy had expressed concern about the pace of taking this forward. There was a 4 Nations working group currently looking at future planning for large events and the Director for Outbreak Management would ensure that the relevant colleagues were involved in this and kept abreast of developments.

7. A.O.B.

- It was noted that in parallel with the development of advice for 26 April easings, colleagues were working LPP [REDACTED].
- Future meetings of the group had been scheduled to take place on a Friday.
- It was noted 4 Nations engagement was continuing. An update on the various 4 Nations Working Groups would be given at the next week's meeting.