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MEMORANDUM E (20) 34

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FROM: FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

DATE: 16 MARCH 2020

TO: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

FINAL EXECUTIVE PAPER: EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Introduction

1. The Minister for Health, Robin Swann MLA, supported by the Chief Medical Officer, has been briefing the Executive from the beginning of the outbreak of COVID-19 to date.
2. The spread of the disease continues to escalate globally to the extent that the World Health Organisation (WHO) on the 11 March assessed that the COVID-19 outbreak had the characteristics of a pandemic. Given this, and on the basis of the scientific and clinical advice the UK has moved from the 'containment' phase, where for the most part daily life was 'business as usual', into the 'delay' phase where a number of measures aimed at slowing the spread of the virus will be implemented over coming days and which are likely to result in noticeable disruption to daily life.
3. The purpose of this paper is to facilitate Executive consideration of the wider non-health response to COVID-19 and in particular the phased activation of the strategic emergency co-ordination arrangements within government namely the Northern Ireland Central Crisis Management Arrangements (NICCMA).

Northern Ireland Central Crisis Management Arrangements

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4. Northern Ireland has long established, tried and tested civil contingencies response arrangements in place. These arrangements are known as the NI Central Crisis Management Arrangements (NICCMA) and are led by the Civil Contingencies Group reporting to the Executive. The capabilities and capacities around these arrangements were strengthened during EU Exit preparations. Most notably a central operations room to co-ordinate the cross cutting response, the NI Hub, was put in place along with a suite of individual Departmental Operations Centres (DOCs) to facilitate the effective delivery of individual departmental contributions to the response. A large cadre of staff was identified and trained across departments to work in the NI Hub and DOCs and all elements were tested both locally and on a Four Nations basis to ensure the arrangements and linkages were fit for purpose.
5. These arrangements and associated infrastructure and systems are able to be utilised to deliver the cross organisational response to the COVID-19 emergency. The Executive Office Civil Contingencies Team has been working in support to the Department of Health, the lead government department for infectious disease outbreaks such as COVID-19, to co-ordinate the wider non-health preparations. A mobilisation plan for the NI Hub has been prepared on the basis of the reasonable worst case scenario and its level of activation is fully scalable in accordance with need. A schematic of these arrangements is at **ANNEX A**.

Timing

6. Given the current scientific advice and the move to the 'delay' phase it is now appropriate that the Executive puts the necessary arrangements, suitably staffed, in place to protect the citizen, businesses and wider society during this challenging period. In line with this, a Ministerial level meeting of the Civil Contingencies Group was held on Thursday 12 March and a further more detailed meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 18 March. It is anticipated that the CCG will meet regularly throughout the COVID-19 response period.

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Non Health Impacts of COVID-19

7. The non-health impacts of COVID-19 which need to be managed are far-ranging affecting critical services primarily as a result of staff shortages from absenteeism due to illness or caring responsibilities; loss of supplies; loss of customers and markets; and significant and protracted changes in public behaviour. A table setting out the impacts and associated mitigations is at **Annex B**. This will continue to be further developed by TEO in conjunction with departments over coming days and weeks.

Discussion

8. Colleagues are invited to discuss:
 - a. the activation of the strategic response arrangements (NICCMA) to provide co-ordination and direction to deal with the developing wider non health impacts of COVID-19;
 - b. the leadership of NICCMA by the Civil Contingencies Group chaired by First Minister and deputy First Minister or the Head of the Civil Service (HOCS), with a membership comprising Ministers, Permanent Secretaries and senior representatives from the emergency services and local government;
 - c. the phased stand up of the NI Hub; the main operations centre under NICCMA supporting CCG and the Executive coupled with the stand-up of the Departmental Operations Centres (DOCS) across all departments to deliver mitigations in line with their departmental and sectoral responsibilities; and
 - d. the strategic decision making function of the Executive in respect of issues referred from the Civil Contingencies Group.

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Recommendation/Executive Decision Sought

9. The Executive is asked to:

- agree the phased activation of the NICCMA arrangements to deal with the impacts of COVID-19;
- note the wide ranging and protracted non health sectoral impacts and associated mitigations arising from COVID-19; and
- agree to monitor these impacts and associated mitigations to ensure the cumulative risks arising are managed.

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