

Healthcare MIG | 24 March 2020

Purpose

- The focus of this meeting will be on healthcare supplies as well as a further discussion on shielding measures implemented last week in England.
- Cathy Harrison, the NI Chief Pharmaceutical Officer (CPO) and Dr Michael McBride, the NI Chief Medical Officer will be dialling into the meeting. They are prepared to speak to the items in relation to healthcare supplies.
- Chris Matthews, NI DoH Healthcare policy, will be covering off the aspect of Shielding.

Overall Steer

- We propose that you allow the NI DoH officials to provide detail on the NI update.
- However NI is experiencing particular shortages of PPE in healthcare and the wider public sector. **As such, it will be important to raise how DHSC is collecting information on PPE requirements for all 4 nations of the UK and how healthcare supplies will be procured and shared out among the 4 nations** (This question has been raised by the Head of the NI Civil Service).

BACKGROUND

- As of 2pm on Monday 23 March, 2692 tests have been completed with 148 confirmed cases in Northern Ireland. **There have been currently been 3 coronavirus-related deaths.**
- The NI Health Service is in a much more precarious position with healthcare workers recently writing to NI politicians stating that *"NI is in the worst shape of any part of the NHS going into this"*. A surge in coronavirus is likely to create particular challenges for an already stretched service.
- We are working closely with the NI Executive to get a better understanding of the pressures and concerns, however, at this stage we do not have as joined up approach as we would like. The establishment of an NI Hub will allow us to improve data and allow you to set out that position much clearer.
- It will be important to be an active voice for Northern Ireland and highlight the particular challenges facing the health service for the Secretary of State for

Health and Social Care and others. This will enable proposals to consider the NI perspective and demonstrate the UKG commitment to supporting the NI Executive in managing the response in Northern Ireland.

ITEM 2: Healthcare supplies

- Cathy Harrison, the NI Chief Pharmaceutical Officer (CPO) and Dr Michael McBride, the NI Chief Medical Officer will provide an update on the current situation in NI.
- Covid-19 has resulted in a surge in demand for all items of PPE in NI, but most notably certain types of facemasks and hand sanitisers. Provision of PPE for frontline staff and other key workers is the primary policy issue facing the Executive this week.
- It will be important to highlight the importance of NI being considered and involved in the procurement and distribution of healthcare supplies.

BACKGROUND

- In NI, packs of PPE have been delivered to GPs and Community Pharmacies and the Department of Health will procure PPE for their own purposes with the Department of Finance coordinating provision of PPE for wider public services with a Hub established yesterday to take this forward. .
- Local suppliers are also being approached as well as discussions with Irish Government to increase supply. Innovative approach has been taken in NI with a sports company (O'Neill's) contracted to manufacture scrubs and masks for NI Health and Social Care Trusts.
- DoH expect to be able to conduct 1,100 tests a day from next week. There has been an issue raised by DoH in the importance of testing kits being validated and fit for purpose when looking at new suppliers (Public Health England have a role in managing the procurement and use of testing kits across the whole of the UK). In NI, four local companies are producing testing kits for global export and engagement ongoing to consider whether supply could be diverted for local use first.
- To address concerns over the shortage of ventilators, forty additional mechanical ventilators have been ordered, bringing the total available in Northern Ireland to 179 by the end of March. DoH and InvestNI have also reached out to NI manufacturers to help produce more ventilators.
- In general, the medicine supply chain in NI is flowing, however, demand from the public has been tremendous with the volume of prescription orders in Northern Ireland quadrupled in some pharmacies amid the coronavirus crisis. This pressure is short term which has been caused by this spike in demand

and therefore messaging on the avoidance of stockpiling medications will continue to be pushed.

2C: Governance

All Ministerial Implementation Groups (MIGs) have an interest in health care supplies in addition to the C-19 procurement group chaired by Lord Agnew. A paper has been tabled in relation to provide clarity on scope of each of the MIGs in terms of health care supplies to minimise duplication and to aid decision making.

- **We propose that you support the proposal that each MIG should focus on the healthcare supply issues as outlined in the paper (the Healthcare MIG focusing on supplies for healthcare) and the proposal that Lord Agnew (lead Minister for HMG procurement) be invited to discussions on supply at all MIGS to build a strategic overview across the C-19 coordination effort.**
- You may wish to query how healthcare supplies will be allocated and prioritised across the different users e.g. health care workers and wider public services.
- You may wish to suggest it would be useful to receive updates from the Economic and Business Response MIG on appeals and engagement for support to businesses to create new supply chains for health.

ITEM 3: Shielding

- These proposals provide more detail on shielding approaches by MHCLG in England.
- Chris Matthews from the DoH will provide an update on the planned NI approach.

BACKGROUND:

- Shielding is a measure to protect people who are clinically extremely vulnerable by minimising all interaction between those who are extremely vulnerable and others:
 - Through GPs, the NI health service will write to 40,000 people in Northern Ireland this week warning them they are particularly vulnerable because of their underlying health issues and to shield themselves from the virus. This will follow the text of the NHS letter as closely as they can to take in account of NI specific issues. GPs will also be asked to consider writing to additional people on their patient lists that they judge to be at higher risk.
 - DoH NI is also working with community pharmacies to support delivery of medication where a family member, a friend or a neighbour is unable to collect prescriptions. This service will be preserved for those most in need. Arrangements are also being put in place for collection or delivery of any specialist medicines that may be prescribed for you by hospital care teams.
 - The NI Executive are developing arrangements across government to support vulnerable and isolated people. This includes a dedicated helpline, deliveries of food and medicine, and access to mental health support.
 - Consideration is also ongoing in relation to the provision of food for vulnerable and isolated people using large scale mobilisation of the voluntary and community sector and the establishment of a dedicated helpline.