

Message

From: Pearson, Karen [Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gsi.gov.uk]
Sent: 27/03/2020 08:23:00
To: Widdis, Hugh [Hugh.Widdis@finance-ni.gsi.gov.uk]; TEO HOCS (DS) [HOCS@executiveoffice-ni.gsi.gov.uk]; 'Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gsi.gov.uk' [Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gsi.gov.uk]
CC: Anthony.harbinson@justice-ni.x.gsi.gov.uk; 'Chris Stewart' [chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gsi.gov.uk]; 'TEO HOCS (DS)' [HOCS@executiveoffice-ni.gsi.gov.uk]; [NR]@executiveoffice-ni.gsi.gov.uk
Subject: DAVID TO SEE: RE: FM / dFM role and corporate responsibility

Could we do a dial in on this issue this morning? Just us.

We have some things in place:

- six priorities
- a draft framework for collective NICS responsibilities

What's not working?

- Ministers are just back
- a new ministerial team
- a real crisis which they can not control and it is scaring them
- some depts doing things which take them by surprise
- haven't moved to delivery confidence mode yet
- focusing on specific issues, not seeing the overall picture
- falling back on party ways of doing things

Whatever solutions we offer need to address these issues.

Karen

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From: Widdis, Hugh <Hugh.Widdis@finance-ni.gsi.gov.uk>
Date: Thursday, 26 Mar 2020, 11:06 pm
To: TEO HOCS (DS) <HOCS@executiveoffice-ni.gsi.gov.uk>, 'Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gsi.gov.uk' <Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gsi.gov.uk>, Hugh.Widdis@finance-ni.gsi.gov.uk <Hugh.Widdis@finance-ni.gsi.gov.uk>
Cc: Anthony.harbinson@justice-ni.x.gsi.gov.uk <Anthony.harbinson@justice-ni.x.gsi.gov.uk>, 'Chris Stewart' <chris.stewart@executiveoffice-ni.gsi.gov.uk>, 'TEO HOCS (DS)' <HOCS@executiveoffice-ni.gsi.gov.uk>, [NR]@executiveoffice-ni.gsi.gov.uk
Subject: RE: FM / dFM role and corporate responsibility

David

Not easy. I'm happy to discuss in the morning.

I can only imagine that worldwide all parties who happen to be in government fear that they will be held responsible if they get this wrong. No one remembers Chamberlain for anything other than Munich.

In principle the St Andrews changes were intended to limit individual departmental freedom to act so there would be ways to take more control into the centre (I will say nothing tonight as to whether that will improve the quality of decisions).

Some options might be:

An all-Exec overarching covid Strategy which FMdFM can lead and own? DoH would then have to abide by and operate within that strategy.

An emergency PfG which is just covid-focussed. Again, DoH should then operate within it.

Calling more decisions into the Executive as significant or controversial? This might slow down decisionmaking.

A proper subcommittee on the Public Health aspects of covid, with just FM dFM and MoH, perhaps meeting weekly in before full Exec meetings where its decisions could be ratified.

There would be more radical options but I presume that they aren't palatable eg:

asking Robin to take a different portfolio for the duration (they would have to make a tempting offer) and putting a SF or DUP minister in?

Or causing dHondt to be run again (eg by changing the number of departments) of so that they can take DoH?

Hugh

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From: TEO HOCS (DS) <HOCS@executiveoffice-ni.gsi.gov.uk>

Date: Thursday, 26 Mar 2020, 9:01 pm

To: 'Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gsi.gov.uk' <Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gsi.gov.uk>, Hugh.Widdis@finance-ni.gsi.gov.uk <Hugh.Widdis@finance-ni.gsi.gov.uk>

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Subject: FM / dFM role and corporate responsibility

Karen/Hugh

I had a revealing chat at the end of the day with FM and dFM.

dFM wants to move to a three Executive meetings a week rhythm (Mon, Weds, Fri). When asked why she said "we need to be driving this crisis, we need to be in control". She is clearly frustrated with being a first minister but actually having little power or influence over the Health Service. FM is more circumspect, recognising the "operational independence" of the health minister. Though she too is frustrated at the lack of information coming out of DoH coupled with frequent surprises eg today's announcement that hospital visits are to end.

dFM also revealed what has been increasingly clear with SF ministers in recent days is a growing fear of being held corporately responsible, or liable, if things go badly wrong (they floated the idea of verbatim records of all Executive meetings - rejected on the other side). We need to find a way to get them off this hook. If it becomes clear that their main priority is to lay out an audit trail and avoid any future blame then everyone else will do the same thing. And we'll be paralysed.

On the management challenge, I said we needed urgently to get to a position where Executive ministers were comfortable with the DoH plan for at least the next 6-12 weeks so that we can focus on the other areas where there is major risk. I've spoken to Richard and said he needs to turn out his top team on Monday and produce a compelling plan.

But I struggled to answer Michelle's simple question: "how can we get control of this"?

Need to sleep on these two challenges.

David

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