

Message

From: TEO HOCS (DS) [/O=NIGOV/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=286B5F4D742442098CBED44F7B75FAAC-TEO HOCS (DS) TEO-]
Sent: 31/03/2020 15:03:48
To: May, Peter [peter.may@justice-ni.x.gsi.gov.uk]
CC: TEO HOCS (DS) [hocs@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk]
Subject: RE: David to see - Soundings

Peter

These comments reflect some conversations I've had, though my focus has been very inward over the past two weeks and I haven't spoken to the range of opinion-formers that you have. I hope to break out of this in the next week or so.

My key takes are:

- The pace and novelty of the pandemic has been such that the gravity and enormity of what we are facing hasn't sunk in;
- The impact of isolation and distancing will increasingly have a psychological impact that we cannot predict at the individual, family and societal level, especially as the reality dawns that this may extend over the summer into the autumn – I'm not sure we've even begun to think about what government may, or can, do about this;
- Our ministers have not shown strong leadership and have been too quick to retreat into campaigning or community activist-mode – they've got away with this partly because UKG has thrown so much money at mitigation that they haven't had to take many difficult decisions. Yet when they have (eg school closure and defining "essential" businesses) they have been found wanting. The irritation of the minor parties is likely to increase.
- The NICS has stepped up well but the effort is not well-balanced with almost a third of staff at home and able to work, but not yet doing so. I think we will see strain after Easter.
- There has been a huge desire across the community to "help" which is uplifting and positive: our challenge is to make sure we can capitalise on this. I fear we will be criticised soon by people saying "we offered, but no one called".
- We haven't yet started to think about recovery, but we will need to do so soon. We were already lagging the rest of the UK in recovering from 2008/09 and this will compound matters as we struggle with the triple whammy of local structural difficulties, Brexit and the aftermath of Covid. And I can't even begin to imagine how our local politics will play out when this ends.

I don't have great answers to all this, but I'm hoping we get into a rhythm soon where we can take a bit of time to plan how we deal with all this.

David

From: May, Peter [mailto:Peter.May@justice-ni.x.gsi.gov.uk]
Sent: 30 March 2020 15:02
To: TEO HOCS (DS) <HOCS@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>
Subject: David to see - Soundings

David

On Friday's call I suggested each PermSec talk to some people to hear their views. It was more to understand how what was going on was impacting people than to develop new ideas.

I have spent a bit of time talking to some people whose opinion I respect and who would have a variety of contacts and connections across sectors to see where people think things are working well and where less so. Rather than laboriously

reporting each conversation I've gone for a synthesis and tried to reflect areas where there was a consensus. There was a range of more personal reflections in terms of what it was meaning for individuals which I have largely not included.

- Everyone recognised the scale of the challenge, the fast moving nature of the issues faced, their unprecedented scale and the work done by public servants to respond. There was very little criticism;
- Political leadership was a key in many of the conversations. Most recognised how hard FM/DFM were working to keep united and welcomed where that was successful. The schooling issue was seen as a low (given the political perception of the problem) and some concern re where we are on essential businesses;
- A number of people recognised that some of the adaptations made to deal with the crisis provided opportunities not to revert (eg a single cancer centre for NI);
- The information was now getting out there – one or two said the way it had been drip fed meant that panic had been avoided; one or two thought we needed more re future projections to condition future expectations. People needed honest engagement and to see the big picture so they felt informed.
- Some people noted that communities were energised by the thought of being able to help but it was less easy to harness that – was there enough organisation at that end of things was asked. Could the local resilience networks not be used more?;
- One person thought Derry had shut down a week earlier and might therefore be better placed to ride the storm out;
- The speed of response esp to the needs of business came up – generally welcoming of willingness of DfE officials to move things on (less positive re Diane Dodds);
- A couple of people commented on the strong health organisation but the lack of join to the community response. A few mentioned they were not clear how everything would join up.;
- The psychological impact of the crisis plus that on those grieving was drawn out – the risk of a second spike undermining confidence was a risk;
- One person mentioned the need to focus on recovery not least to give hope during uncertain times;

People I spoke to were NR NR NR NR NR and NR All were pleased to have been asked – pointing to the opportunity that can come from doing more of this.

Peter

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