

DEBRIEF REPORT

Exercise Seren City 2020

Observations and recommendations from a strategic, table-top exercise, on lockdown measures in response to COVID-19



INTRODUCTION

This report is on a strategic, multi-agency, table-top exercise. The exercise was held on 3 March 2020.

In the context of the UK response to COVID-19, the exercise was commissioned by the Chief Executive of Public Health Wales and the Chief Constable of South Wales Police.

It was jointly designed and delivered by Public Health Wales, South Wales Police and Welsh Government.

For the purpose of this report, at the end of the exercise a debrief was held. Participants were asked to write answers to and discuss the following questions:

- i. What aspects did not go so well?*
- ii. What aspects did go well or could be identified as good practice?*
- iii. What observations or recommendations should be acknowledged or implemented?*

The recommendations and observations of this report are based on the debrief.

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AIM OF REPORT

To make recommendations to inform the planning for, and response to, COVID-19.

The report does not attempt to exhaustively detail or comprehensively summarise the exercise.

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Document Control:

Version: FINAL

1. EXERCISE OVERVIEW

The aim of the exercise was:

To explore the multi-agency response to a request to put an urban setting in lockdown in response to COVID-19

Objectives included:

- To explore the multi-agency capability to investigate, contain and respond to COVID-19
- To seek areas of the response to COVID-19 where further clarification is required
- To identify learning to enhance the Wales response to COVID-19

Exercise overview

The event began with an overview of Wales and UK-level Civil Contingencies response structures.

Scenario

The scenario posed a request to a Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) to enact lockdown measures, within 12 hours, in a fictional urban location – Seren City - due to a significant increase in confirmed cases of COVID-19. For the purpose of the exercise, lockdown was understood to be preventing non-essential movement of people, cancelling crowded gatherings and events and maintaining only life-saving services within a defined cordon.

A fictional demographic overview of Seren City and a map of key resources and infrastructure was provided. Prior to the first meeting of the SCG, a briefing was given on the handover of an NHS-led response to COVID-19, to an SCG response.

SCG meeting 1

SCG members at the exercise were from the four Local Resilience Forum (LRF) areas in Wales. SCG members were asked to represent their service rather than their specific organisation or LRF area. The SCG was played live, conducted in alignment with UK doctrine¹, and observed by all attendees. The SCG identified key points for consideration in the subsequent breakout discussion.

¹ <https://www.jesip.org.uk/home>

Breakout discussion

Attendees who were not members of the SCG were grouped according to service or sector. SCG members worked within each service and sector area to propose solutions to strategic issues and identify areas where further clarity or work was needed.

SCG meeting 2

The second SCG considered and made decisions on the issues and solutions to problems proposed during the breakout session.

2. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report does not attribute comments to a specific person or agency.

Recommendations listed below suggest ownership for ensuring lessons identified can be factually demonstrated as learnt.

Observations reflect the key points of note on which there was a common consensus.

To be clear and concise, recommendations and observations are grouped under these headings:

- **Powers and legislation**
- **Essential Services**
- **Communications**
- **Staffing resources**
- **Mutual Aid**
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**
- **LRF and SCG response documents**
- **Learning lessons**
- **Future exercise and Reasonable Worst Case Scenario (RWCS)**

Powers and legislation

Clarity was consistently sought on existing, and any future, powers and legislation to enact and maintain the lockdown of a location. It was recognised that the clarity requested is a Wales-wide and UK level issue, therefore the following recommendation is made:

RECOMMENDATION 1: Welsh Government to produce a paper to inform planning by LRF agencies on the powers, policies and legal considerations that must inform a multi-agency lockdown of a location in Wales to delay the transmission of COVID-19. The paper should identify any gaps in powers and legislation that may require attention as a matter of urgency

Essential Services

In the lockdown scenario of the exercise it was recognised that many life-saving, welfare-support and essential activities would need to continue. Specific references were made to difficulties of maintaining:

- Food, medicine and utilities supply
- Access to, and delivery of, specialist medical care
- Domiciliary and vulnerable people care
- Transport infrastructure
- Waste management services
- Emergency response services and dealing with severe weather impacts

It was observed by attendees that the considerable risks and difficulties of enacting and maintaining a lockdown, mean that it should not be considered a default option and that its size and duration should be informed by scientific advice.

OBSERVATION 1: The size and duration of a lockdown should be informed by scientific advice and a clear plan of ongoing communication with those affected, including measures to maintain essential services and supplies

Communications

During the exercise the SCG highlighted the importance of communications to the public and between agencies, by making an early decision in their first meeting, to establish a multi-agency media cell.

OBSERVATION 2: A multi-agency media cell should be established at the start of an SCG response to COVID-19

Queries were raised on the number of media-trained staff and spokespersons within LRF agencies.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Wales Warning and Informing group members to assess whether there are sufficient media-trained personnel and spokespersons within LRF agencies in Wales. Media training to be offered where necessary

Staffing resources

The personnel required to respond in a lockdown scenario, for a prolonged period of weeks and perhaps months, would stretch the staffing capability of all LRF agencies.

OBSERVATION 3: A lockdown response will require all agencies to examine the sustainability and resilience of their staffing structures. Agencies may need to train more personnel to be able to perform key roles in the emergency structures established in response to COVID-19

Mutual Aid

Linked to the staffing considerations above, requests for Mutual Aid amongst Local Authorities, and requests for the support of the military and voluntary sector were judged as necessary. The preparedness and resilience of the private sector was queried.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Local Resilience Forums in Wales should assess the suitability and resilience of the Mutual Aid agreements amongst Category 1 and 2 responders and the military, voluntary and private sector to respond to COVID-19

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Clarity was requested on the PPE necessary for front line responders and personnel that will have face-to-face contact with people infected with COVID-19 (including suspected cases). It was acknowledged that whilst the type of PPE used may differ amongst agencies, consistency in the level of protection provided is necessary.

OBSERVATION 4: Guidance on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is led by Public Health England with input from Public Health Wales. Guidance is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-wn-cov-infection-prevention-and-control-guidance>

LRF and SCG response documents

The use of existing LRF plans, the *Wales Framework for Managing Major Infectious Disease Emergencies* and the *Wales Pandemic Preparedness and Response Guidance* was advocated. The use of LRF templates and national guidance such as the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) was also supported.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and LRF Coordinators to collate a suite of standard documents for use by LRF agencies and SCGs in response to COVID-19

Learning lessons

It was consistently suggested that lessons identified in the lockdown of regions in other parts of the world should be shared.

Specific reference was made to identifying:

- Trigger points for lockdown measures
- Good practice and lessons on the practicalities of communicating, enacting and maintaining a lockdown
- Trigger points for de-escalation

The specific learning identified in the lockdown response in northern Italy was frequently highlighted as being of specific relevance to Wales.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Welsh Government to produce a paper on the key lessons identified in the lockdown of regions in response to COVID-19

Future exercise and Reasonable Worst Case Scenario (RWCS)

It was recognised that Exercise Seren City 2020 examined a lockdown scenario that may be considered as part of the national *Coronavirus action plan*².

A further all-Wales LRF exercise was requested that includes the impacts forecast by a Reasonable Worst Case Scenario (RWCS).

RECOMMENDATION 6: Welsh Government to lead on developing and delivering a follow-up exercise to Seren City 2020 that includes the impacts forecast by a Reasonable Worst Case Scenario (RWCS) for COVID-19

3. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Welsh Government to produce a paper to inform planning by LRF agencies on the powers, policies and legal considerations that must inform a multi-agency lockdown of a location in Wales to delay the transmission of COVID-19. The paper should identify any gaps in powers and legislation that may require attention as a matter of urgency
2	Wales Warning and Informing group members to assess whether there are sufficient media-trained personnel and spokespersons within LRF agencies in Wales. Media training to be offered where necessary
3	Local Resilience Forums in Wales should assess the suitability and resilience of the Mutual Aid agreements amongst Category 1 and 2 responders and the military, voluntary and private sector to respond to COVID-19
4	Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and LRF Coordinators to collate a suite of standard documents for use by LRF agencies and SCGs in response to COVID-19

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan>

5	Welsh Government to produce a paper on the key lessons identified in the lockdown of regions in response to COVID-19
6	Welsh Government to lead on developing and delivering a follow-up exercise to Seren City 2020 that includes the impacts forecast by a Reasonable Worst Case Scenario (RWCS) for COVID-19

4. SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

1	The size and duration of a lockdown should to be informed by scientific advice and a clear plan of ongoing communication with those affected, including measures to maintain essential services and supplies
2	A multi-agency media cell should be established at the start of an SCG response to COVID-19
3	A lockdown response will require all agencies to examine the sustainability and resilience of their staffing structures. Agencies may need to train more personnel to be able to perform key roles in the emergency structures established in response to COVID-19
4	Guidance on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is led by Public Health England with input from Public Health Wales. Guidance is available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-wn-cov-infection-prevention-and-control-guidance

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All participants are thanked for their valuable contributions to this report.

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