

INTERIM DEBRIEF REPORT – FEBRUARY 2021

Public Health Wales Gold Group response to COVID-19

**Recommendations and observations from a
structured debrief**



INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of command and control mechanisms (as detailed within the Public Health Wales Emergency Response Plan) in the response to COVID-19 on the 22 January 2020, 66 meetings of the Gold Group have taken place as of the 4 February 2021. The inaugural meeting of the Public Health Wales Gold Group took place on the 25 February 2020.

At the Public Health Wales Gold Group on the 14 January 2021, an action was agreed for a proposal to be received by the group to identify lessons to be learned.

The proposal was agreed on the 4 February 2021 as it recognised the value and need to establish organisational processes to support the systematic collection, synthesis and dissemination of learning gathered during the COVID-19 pandemic, as detailed within the Operational Plan.

The purpose of the debrief was to identify learning from the Public Health Wales Gold Group response to COVID-19, further building on lessons identified by the Interim Debrief Report '*The internal emergency response to COVID-19*' in July 2020.

The Debrief of the Gold Group took place on the 11 February 2021 and lasted for 50 minutes. It was facilitated by Andrew Jones, Interim Executive Director of Public Health Services. A list of participants is detailed in section 6.

For the purpose of this report attendees were asked to write answers to and discuss the following questions:

1. What aspects of our response to the COVID-19 have gone well?
2. What aspects of our response to COVID-19 not have gone well?

AIM OF REPORT

To make recommendations to improve the response to and preparedness for COVID-19 and other emergencies.

The report does not attempt to exhaustively detail or comprehensively summarise the Public Health Wales response to COVID-19.

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Andrew Jones,
Interim Executive Director of Public Health Services

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3. What would you predict are the problems and opportunities in our future response to COVID-19?
4. What observations or recommendations for change should be recognised or implemented, in our future response to COVID-19 or other emergencies.

The recommendations and observations of this report are based on the debrief. A summary of discussion points raised by participants are detailed in section 5.

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1. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PUBLIC HEALTH WALES GOLD GROUP

The roles and responsibilities of the Public Health Wales Gold Group are set out in the Public Health Wales *Emergency Response Plan v2.0* and the *Gold Group Terms of Reference V4.0 (approved on the 16 June 2020)*. In discharging the following responsibilities, where relevant, the Joint Emergency Service Interoperability Programme (JESIP) principles will be followed to provide strategic direction in the organisation's response to the incident.

The roles and responsibilities of the Public Health Wales Gold Group are as follows:

1. Determine and share clear strategic objectives and review them regularly
2. Set, review, communicate and update the strategic framework for the overall management of the incident
3. Identify the level of support needed to respond to the incident and allocate personnel and resources accordingly
4. Formulate and implement media and public communication plans
5. Direct planning and operations beyond the immediate response to manage the recovery process
6. Provide assurance across the organisation on the management of the emergency
7. To facilitate requests and responses for mutual aid and other strategic resources

8. Have overall responsibility within the organisation for health & safety, diversity, environmental impact, equality and human rights compliance, and ensuring that relevant impact assessments are completed
9. To monitor financial impacts
10. Identification of strategies to enable the ongoing provision of the identified 'prioritised activities' within Public Health Wales

2. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report does not attribute comments to a specific person. Its content is based on the responses to debrief questions and discussions during the debrief.

Recommendations listed below suggest ownership for ensuring lessons identified can be 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:

1. Advice and Guidance
2. Communications
3. Epidemiology
4. Governance
5. Informatics
6. Recovery
7. Resources
8. Roles and Responsibilities
9. Staff

ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

The expert authoritative voice of the organisation in the provision of advice and guidance to the public and stakeholders was commended. This has been supported by the high quality of data published by the organisation, ensuring Public Health Wales has remained a credible source of data throughout the response to COVID-19.

The following observation was stated in relation to the continual improvements for the provision of advice and guidance.

OBSERVATION 1 –Further improvements to established processes for sign-off of guidance are being implemented as part of the review of the Incident Management Team (IMT) governance arrangements.

COMMUNICATIONS

Public Health Wales staff who have represented the organisation as 'official spokespersons' as part of media interviews were commended for their clear communications to the public and 'face of calmness'. This ensured messaging was clear and coherent.

Challenges were also recognised in the continuing response to COVID-19 to ensure communications were targeted to individual groups, with further consideration required to be given to the use of multiple social-media platforms to reach identified demographics.

It was further highlighted that despite good internal communications with staff, consideration should be given to communicating the breadth of work and roles of our staff in response to COVID-19. The adoption of remote working by the organisation has presented challenges in the organisation. There was wide recognition of the important work being under taken by Public Health Wales staff.

To address this, and to support the work of the communication team to stay aligned with key decisions and strategic priorities and improve communications with Public Health Wales staff, public and stakeholders, the following recommendation is made:

RECOMMENDATION 1 – Emergency Planning & Business Continuity team and the Board Business Unit are to review the *Gold Group Standing Agenda and Terms of Reference* to ensure Communication colleagues are core members of the Gold Group.

EPIDEMIOLOGY

It was stated that due to time limitations resulting from the need to provide rapid analysis, interpretation and publication of data, there is often little scope to also provide epidemiology of added value e.g. analytic epidemiology. Data is often published and interpreted by those without an epidemiology/public health perspective.

The following observation is made in relation to the future challenges of the organisation's response to COVID-19:

OBSERVATION 2 – New systems may need to be developed to improve the analysis and interpretation of data whilst further embedding research into operational surveillance. Models may need to be developed to evaluate the effectiveness of vaccines should these be required to change frequently.

GOVERNANCE

The exemplary leadership and technical expertise of our internal teams was praised by multiple participants.

It was stated that further clarity on decision making and operational management is required. An example cited was the operation of the Guidance Cell and Prevention Cell, which is sitting independent of established command and control groups. The following observation was therefore stated:

OBSERVATION 3 – Arrangements for the operational management of response groups are currently being reviewed to give greater clarity on the interoperability of internal response structures within Public Health Wales, in the response to COVID-19.

The slow implementation of revised governance arrangements was stated as leading to difficulties in bringing response groups together to work collaboratively. Operational response groups are seemingly operating to different organisational priorities and therefore clarity on response priorities would be beneficial.

To support the implementation of revised governance arrangements the following recommendation is therefore made:

RECOMMENDATION 2 – The Gold Group is to reiterate the strategic direction of the organisation in the response to COVID-19 and ensure this is clearly communicated to and understood by the Incident Management Team and response groups.

The unpredicted scale and type of response required by the organisation to COVID-19, has led to the establishment of some groups and roles not contained in the *Public Health Wales Emergency Response Plan v.2.0*. Examples include the role of the Incident Management Team and Incident Director.

The following observation is therefore made:

OBSERVATION 4 – The Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Work Plan for 2021 has identified the requirement to review the *Public Health Wales Emergency Response Plan v2.0*. The review of the plan will seek to embed identified learning from the organisation’s response to COVID-19.

INFORMATICS

The implementation of systems to support remote working were highly praised by participants. The following observation is therefore made:

OBSERVATION 5 – The rapid implementation of Microsoft Teams and SharePoint has improved internal communications and sharing of information. The implementation of these systems has further assisted the establishment of remote working across the organisation.

The commitment and expertise of the Informatics Division was highly commended by participants.

RECOVERY

To support the organisations response to COVID-19 it was recognised that a number of services had been paused, or activity reduced significantly. Decisions taken sought to ensure the public health response was suitably staffed and resourced in line with organisational priorities.

The challenges in the reactivation of services, aligning the future management of COVID-19 (including vaccination) and balancing the requirements of Health Protection and the wider work of Public Health Wales were noted.

The need for consideration of indirect harms as a result of the pandemic e.g. mental health and missed cancer diagnosis and how the organisation continues to monitor wider population impact, was also acknowledged.

RESOURCES

Whilst the exceptional response of staff to COVID-19 was recognised, the need to ensure Public Health Wales staff and response groups are resourced appropriately was also acknowledged. Challenges in the identification and deployment of

resource to support the response were noted, specifically regarding the identification of staff to support the organisations enabling functions.

Furthermore, reference was drawn to incident levels of partner organisations, which seek to provide clarity of the roles and responsibilities of staff in response to an emergency. It was suggested that a procedure is developed, and staff appropriately trained, to ensure staff are aware of their responsibilities during an escalating/de-escalating emergency.

The following recommendation is therefore made:

RECOMMENDATION 3 - Public Health Wales are to develop an organisational procedure for the mobilisation of staff in the response to an emergency. The procedure must give due consideration to organisational policy and be applied consistently across services.

It was stated that further consideration was required as to how Public Health Wales can better use it's resource in the future response to COVID-19. Examples of how the organisation can better utilise the skills of its staff and the consolidation of resource at the national and regional level were cited. The following observation is therefore made:

OBSERVATION 6 – Software available across the organisation (notably PowerBI) to systemise processes would be of value to identify workforce requirements. This could help subsequently prevent manual interventions, duplication of workforce queries and improved data quality.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Multiple participants stated that in the response to COVID-19, Public Health Wales adopted many roles and responsibilities which were not within the remit of the organisation. Inference was drawn specifically to the role of the organisation in the establishment of the Mass Testing Centre at Cardiff City Stadium as well as the development of the web-front-end booking system for testing.

The role of the organisation in Test, Trace, and Protect has provided further challenges as Public Health Wales became fully integrated into some regions, as opposed to providing a national specialist role supporting regional activity.

STAFF

The redeployment of staff throughout the duration of the organisations response to COVID-19 has led to staff developing skills, knowledge and experience in other areas of Public Health. To ensure staff do not lose the skills they have learned over the duration of the response, the following recommendation is made:

RECOMMENDATION 4 – Public Health Wales need to put in place processes to ensure staff maintain competencies in acquired skills obtained during the response to COVID-19, to support the needs of the organisation in future emergencies.

All participants stated that Public Health Wales staff have been an asset in the response to COVID-19. Challenges were recognised in staff being required to care for family members and home schooling children. However, staff have worked tirelessly, often required to work flexibly, above contractual hours and been required to adapt to new ways of working (e.g. remote and 24 hour working).

Further recognised was the breaking down of working silos across the organisation. Staff are now working across organisational boundaries in a manner in which has not previously been observed and have been supporting one another throughout the duration of the response.

The following observation is therefore made:

OBSERVATION 7 – All Public Health Wales staff have been an asset to the organisation in the response to COVID-19 and the sincere thanks and gratitude of the Public Health Wales Gold Group is expressed.

3. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Emergency Planning & Business Continuity team and the Board Business Unit are to review the <i>Gold Group Standing Agenda and Terms of Reference</i> to ensure Communication colleagues are core members of the Gold Group. |
| 2 | The Gold Group is to reiterate the strategic direction of the organisation in the response to COVID-19 and ensure this is clearly communicated to and understood by the Incident Management Team and response groups. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 3 | Public Health Wales are to develop an organisational procedure for the redeployment of staff in the response to an emergency. The procedure must give due consideration to organisational policy and be applied consistently across services. |
| 4 | Public Health Wales need to put in place processes to ensure staff maintain competencies in acquired skills obtained during the response to COVID-19, to support the needs of the organisation in future emergencies |

4. SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Further improvements to established processes for sign-off of guidance are being implemented as part of the review of the Incident Management Team (IMT) governance arrangements. |
| 2 | New systems may need to be developed to improve the analysis and interpretation of data whilst further embedding research into operational surveillance. Models may need to be developed to evaluate the effectiveness of vaccines should these be required to change frequently |
| 3 | Arrangements for the operational management of response groups are currently being reviewed to give greater clarity on the interoperability of internal response structures within Public Health Wales, in the response to COVID-19. |
| 4 | The Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Work Plan for 2021 has identified the requirement to review the <i>Public Health Wales Emergency Response Plan v2.0</i> . The review of the plan will seek to embed identified learning from the organisation's response to COVID-19. |
| 5 | The rapid implementation of Microsoft Teams and SharePoint has improved internal communications and sharing of information. The implementation of these systems has further assisted the establishment of remote working across the organisation |
| 6 | Software available across the organisation (notably PowerBI) to systemise processes would be of value to identify workforce requirements. This could help subsequently prevent manual interventions, duplication of workforce queries and improved data quality. |
| 7 | All Public Health Wales staff have been an asset to the organisation in the response to COVID-19 and the sincere thanks and gratitude of the Public Health Wales Gold Group is expressed. |

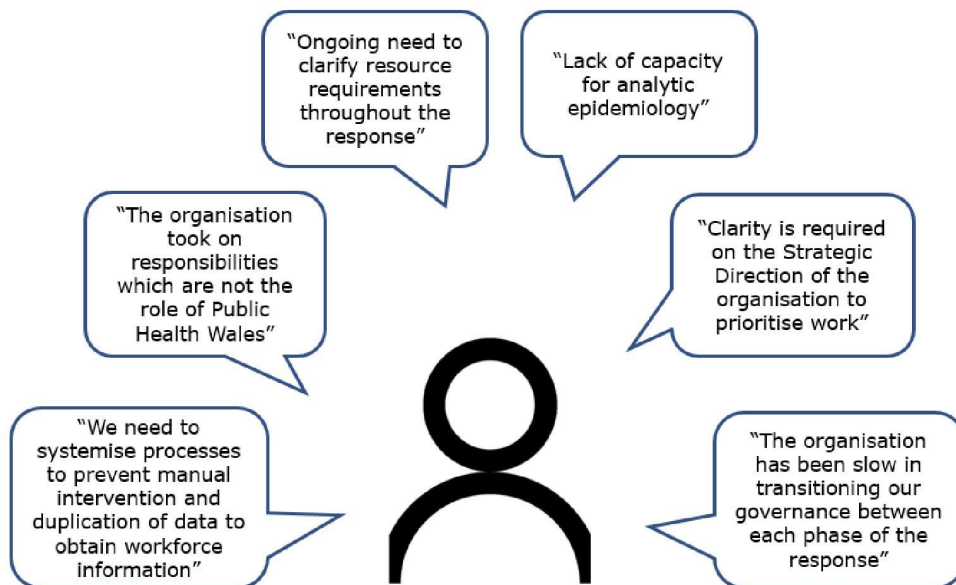
5. RESPONSE SUMMARY

The diagrams below provide an extract of key discussion points raised by debrief participants.

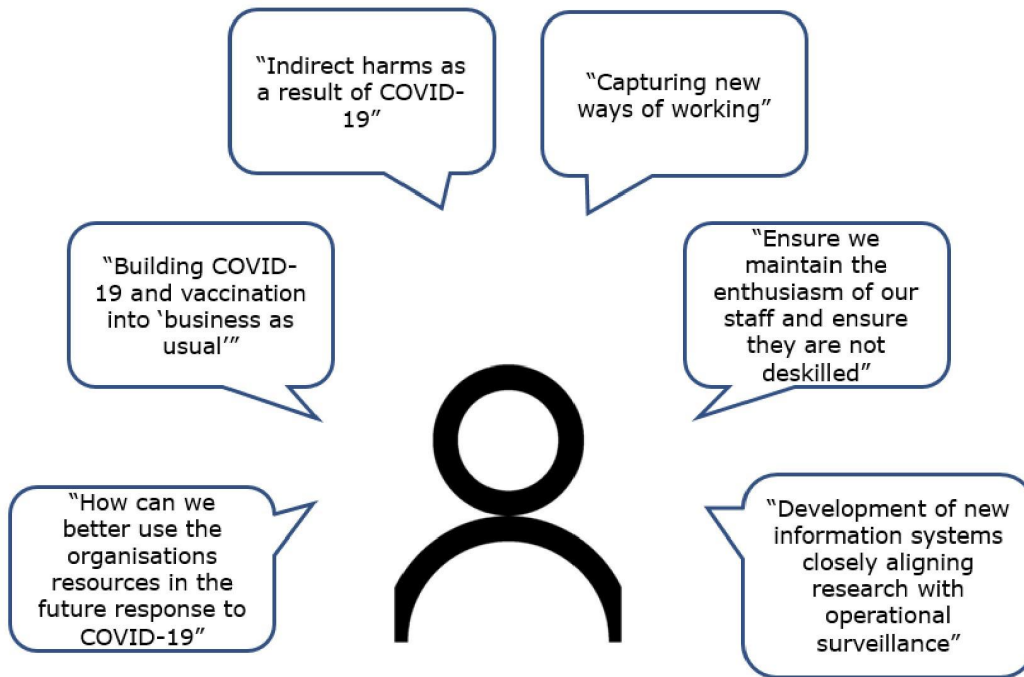
1. What aspects of our response to the COVID-19 have gone well?



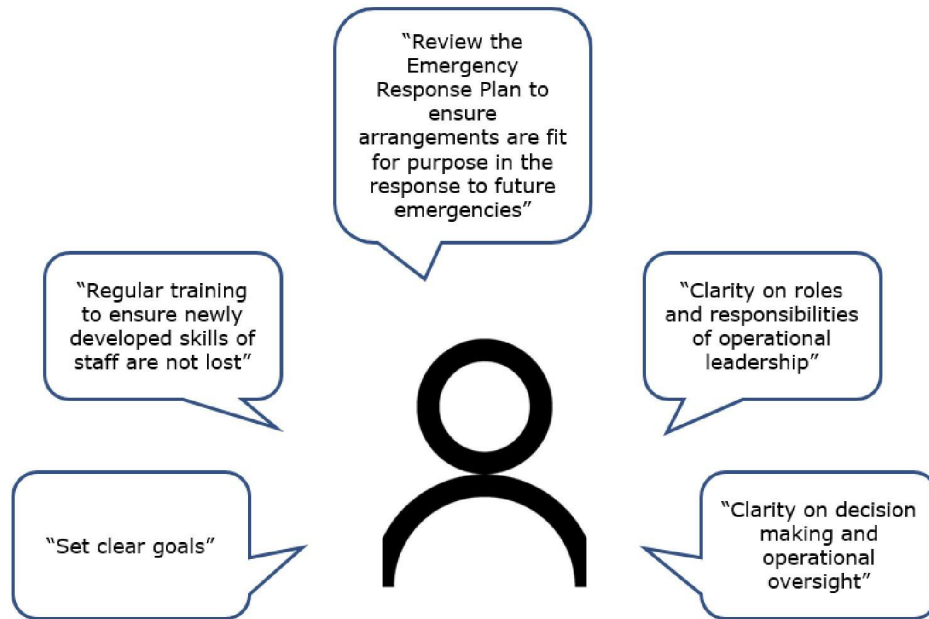
2. What aspects of our response to COVID-19 have not have gone well?



3. What would you predict are the problems and opportunities in our future response to COVID-19?



4. What observations or recommendations for change should be recognised or implemented, in our future response to COVID-19 or other emergencies?




6. PARTICIPANTS

| Name | Job Title |
|---------------|--|
| Andrew Jones | Interim Executive Director of Public Health Service (Debrief Facilitator) |
| Name Redacted | Consultant Epidemiologist and COVID-19 Incident Director |
| Name Redacted | Interim Emergency Planning & Business Continuity Manager (Debrief Author and note taker) |
| NR | Head of HCAI & AMR Programme, Interim Medical Director |
| Name Redacted | Professional Lead for Health Protection |
| NR | Board Secretary & Head of Board Business Unit |
| Huw George | Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Operations & Finance |

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Name Redacted | Director for NHS Quality Improvement and Patient Safety |
| Name Redacted | Director of Health and Wellbeing |
| Name Redacted | Head of Communications |
| Name Redacted | Programme Manager |
| Name Redacted | Acting Director of People and OD |
| Name Redacted | Executive Director Quality, Nursing & AHPs, |
| Name Redacted | Transition Director - Knowledge Directorate |
| Name Redacted | Interim Deputy Director of Public Health Services |
| Tracey Cooper | Chief Executive |
| Zoe Wallace | Director Primary Care |

APPENDIX

Proposed Format of 'Lesson Learn/ Debrief' Session (for 11 February 2021)

| | | |
|---|--|---|
|  Iechyd Cyhoeddus Cymru Public Health Wales | | Name of Meeting Gold Meeting Date of Meeting 04/02/2021 Agenda item: <i>Group Secretariat to insert</i> |
| Proposed Format of 'Lesson Learn/ Debrief' Session (for 11 February 2021) | | |
| Executive lead: | Andrew Jones Acting Executive Director of Public Health Services <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">NR</div> Transition Director, Knowledge Directorate | |
| Author: | Robin Howe Interim Director of Integrated Health Protection and Incident Director | |
| Approval for submission: | <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">NR</div> Transition Director, Knowledge Directorate | |
| Scrutiny Route | N/A | |
| Attachments | | |
| Is this paper confidential? | No | |
| Reasons for Confidentiality | N/A | |
| Timescale for information | N/A | |
| Recommendation: | | |
| DECISION <input type="checkbox"/> | CONSIDER/DISCUSS <input type="checkbox"/> | RECOMMEND <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Our current Operational Plan recognises the value and need to establish organisational processes to support the systematic collection, synthesis and dissemination of learning gathered during the COVID-19 pandemic. A year into the pandemic, it is appropriate that the GOLD Group sets aside time to review Lessons Learnt/ debrief on the past year. GOLD is asked to: | | |

| Summary impact analysis | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Risk and Assurance | Considering 'Lessons Learnt' is a key component of the organisation's response to COVID-19. This is a risk identified within the organisation's Strategic Risk Register. |
| Financial implications | There are no direct financial implications identified, however it may be that during the ensuing session (scheduled for 11 February 2021) that learning may be identified that has some associated financial implications. |
| People implications | Lessons Learnt may affect staff currently working in the response, or staff involved in any future emergency response. |

1. Purpose / situation

This paper sets out the proposed approach to a GOLD Lessons Learnt/ Debrief session on the organisation's approach to COVID-19, scheduled for the GOLD meeting on 11 February 2021.

GOLD is asked to consider this approach and receive the recommendation that this is adopted for the GOLD session on 11 February 2021.

2. Background

Public Health Wales has mounted an unprecedented health protection response to the Coronavirus Pandemic. This has been our highest priority since early 2020 and has involved the mobilisation of the majority of the organisation's resources.

During the pandemic we have introduced new services and roles and changed our work practices. Some of our programmes and services have been paused and will need to be reactivated using new ways of working. The magnitude of the change means that many different opportunities for learning arise and it is important that we capture this knowledge and use it as the demands and requirements on us change. Alongside this, it will be important to be able to demonstrate a coherent narrative on our role and actions in the pandemic evidenced by our decisions, performance and management of the issues. This will be particularly important for supporting any public inquiries and research that will follow.

Our current Operational Plan recognises the value and need to establish organisational processes to support the systematic collection, synthesis and dissemination of learning gathered during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is proposed that a Lessons Learnt/ De-Brief session is held with the GOLD group on 11 February 2021, building on lessons identified by the IMT in July 2020. The output of this session would then be presented at the Business Executive Team.

3. Description/Assessment

It is proposed that the session is led by the Acting Director of Public Health Services, the Interim Director of Integrated Health Protection and the Interim Emergency Planning & Business Continuity Manager.

The format of the session, which will last approximately 50 minutes, will be based on the Public Health Wales debrief protocol (Appendix A), although this will be adapted as the pandemic is ongoing.

The session will be held as a plenary and will focus on four questions:

| | | |
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1. What aspects of our response to the COVID-19 have gone well?
2. What aspects of our response to COVID-19 have not have gone well?
3. What would you predict are the problems and opportunities in our future response to COVID-19?
4. What observations or recommendations for change should be recognised or implemented, in our future response to COVID-19 or other emergencies?

The key points from the discussions will be captured and collated into a short report that will be presented to the Business Executive Team. Any lessons identified/ actions will be collated into a wider 'Organisational Learning report' that will be presented to GOLD at the end of Quarter 4 setting out monitoring arrangements for actions/ update on implementing lessons.

In addition, the report will be added to the COVID-19 repository as a record of GOLD Lessons Learnt. A proposed agenda for the 50 minute session can be found at Appendix B.

5. Recommendation

GOLD is asked to:

- **Consider** the approach set out with in the paper and **receive the recommendation** that this approach is adopted for the GOLD session to be held on 11 February 2021.

Appendix A: Public Health Wales Debrief Protocol

Debrief Protocol

A process to ensure lessons identified are learnt

EMERGENCY PLANNING AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY

Aim

To outline a process to ensure lessons identified in incident and exercise debriefs are documented, owned and completed.

Before the debrief

Debrief facilitators should read the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity workplan to ensure they are familiar with previous lessons and themes identified.

At the debrief

Participants should clearly detail 'SMART' recommendations that are owned by either colleagues or divisions within Public Health Wales.

SMART recommendations are:

Specific – target a specific area for improvement

Measurable – quantify an indicator of progress

Assignable – specify who will do it.

Realistic – state what results can realistically be achieved

Time-related – specify when the results can be achieved

After the debrief

The recommendations of the debrief, once ownership is ratified by Emergency Planning and Business Continuity group members, will be included as actions in the workplan.

The Emergency Planning and Business Continuity database will be used to report on the status of the recommendations of the debrief.



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**Appendix B: Proposed Agenda for Lessons Learnt Session/ Debrief
11 February 2021**

| Agenda (As part of GOLD) Lessons Learnt Session/ Debrief 11 February 2021 | |
|---|---------------|
| Item | Timing |
| Background <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback from IMT Debrief in July 2020 Organisational Priority | 5 minutes |
| Question 1: What aspects of our response to the COVID-19 have gone well? | 10 minutes |
| Question 2: What aspects of our response to COVID-19 have not have gone well? | 10 minutes |
| Question 3: What would you predict are the problems and opportunities in our future response to COVID-19? | 10 minutes |
| Question 4: What observations or recommendations for change should be recognised or implemented, in our future response to COVID-19 or other emergencies? | 10 minutes |
| Consolidation/ Key points | 5 minutes |