

COVID 19 – Core Group meeting:- Tuesday 14th July 2020 (08:30)
Caerdydd 1 & 2 / Skype VMR meeting

Present -

Ministers: First Minister; Rebecca Evans; Vaughan Gething; NR Julie James; Lesley Griffiths; Ken Skates; Eluned Morgan; Jeremy Miles; Jane Hutt; Hannah Blythyn; Julie Morgan; Lee Waters; and Dafydd Elis Thomas.

WCVA: NR

Opposition party leaders: Paul Davies MS.

Officials: Permanent Secretary; Andrew Goodall; Frank Atherton; Reg Kilpatrick; Albert Heaney; Jonathan Price; Carys Evans; Toby Mason; NR; Chrishan Kamalan; Will Whiteley; Jo Trott; Christopher Morgan; NR Jonathan Scourfield.

Special Advisers: Jane Runeckles; Ian Butler; Sara Faye; Clare Jenkins; Gareth Williams; Tom Woodward.

Apologies: Cllr. Andrew Morgan – Chair WLGA, Adam Price MS.

Public Health and NHS update

1. The CMO reported that the situation continued to improve, with some days without any COVID-19 related deaths. A small number of people each day were being identified as positive through TTP and over the weekend, 7,000 tests had resulted in 20 positive cases, reflecting a 0.25% positivity rate.
2. There had been a great deal of coverage in the media about the use of face coverings, but behavioural, management and environmental measures remained the most effective mitigations, while PPE should also be used when necessary as a final barrier.
3. The recent outbreaks in North Wales and the incident in Merthyr Tydfil were now broadly under control, but further flare ups were expected and some thought was being given to how a local lockdown would be managed.
4. There was some concern about the spread of the virus in close settings, but hospital transmission was now 90% lower than at the peak of the epidemic. There was no evidence, yet, of a spike in cases following the events where there had been a high concentration of people, such as VE Day celebrations, Black Lives Matters demonstrations and the unruly behaviour at Ogmores by Sea and in Cardiff Bay. But the aftermath of these events was being monitored.
5. The Welsh Government was developing a constructive relationship with the Joint Biosecurity Centre.
6. It was noted that the shielding of vulnerable people was due to end on the 16th August and it would be important to ensure these people were supported as they returned to society. It was now recognised that a number of children did not need to be a part of this vulnerable group, and the relevant parents were being informed. It would be important to ensure that each child had a face-to-face clinical review.

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7. It was suggested the CMO should meet with the Equality Forum on the lifting of shielding and some thought should be given to procuring transparent face coverings for those that supported the deaf community.
8. The Chief Executive of the NHS reported the majority of Health Boards were continuing to report Green / level 1 as an indicator of capacity and response. One hospital was reporting level three and eight were reporting level two, but those were expected to return to level 1 within the next 24 hours.
9. There were around 500 COVID-19 related patients in hospital beds, of which 94 were confirmed cases and 244 were occupied by people recovering from the virus. Approximately 1300 acute hospital beds were currently unoccupied and available.
10. Hospitals were returning to more normal levels of activity, especially in relation to cancer and cardiac care.
11. The Health Boards' plans for the Winter were being considered with a particular emphasis on contingency planning, vaccine programmes and environmental changes to establish COVID free areas. It would be important to clarify the number of beds that would be available to respond to any further outbreaks.
12. A recent report by the Academy of Medical Sciences had concluded that intense preparation was required in the UK throughout the rest of July and into August to ensure that the Health Service was not overwhelmed in the Winter. The number of cases of the virus was expected to exceed the peaks of April and May.
13. It was noted that around 200m items of PPE had already been distributed due to the pandemic, with 80m items being directed to the care sector. This was against between 8m and 9m items being used in a normal year. A further 400m items of PPE were on order. There was a significant cost implication associated with the increase in PPE use, with spend of between £8 – 10m per annum in normal times, but current estimates were now between £113 – 140m.

Local Government Update

14. The Minister for Housing and Local Government reported there were no significant issues and Authorities were preparing for more services being made available for the public and planning for further recovery. There was, however, still a great deal of concern about the financial situation.

Contingencies / Resilience update

15. The Director of Local Government informed the Group that there was continuing concern about the speed in providing Local Authorities with COVID test results, which would need to be addressed. Some thought would need to be given to securing longer term accommodation for the homeless now that the temporary solutions were being removed.

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16. It was reported that the Police were considering how to continue to enforce social distancing as the hospitality sector began to open up. In terms of wider contingencies issues, work was underway to prepare local containment measures to combat further outbreaks of the virus.
17. The First Minister informed the Group that there would be further meetings during the Summer recess on 4th and 25th August.

CABINET SECRETARIAT
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