

Text message
20/01/2020 16:24:25

G5 panel; what about you, me, and Fiona McCandless?

20/01/2020 17:37:45

Perfect, happy with that.

Any word on dFM PS? Sue said she had proposed **NR** who's a SO currently working in DSO. I knew her in DoF and think she'd be very good.

Ignore, I'm told it's a non runner for personal reasons.

Also remember **NR** positively. Thinking about it but likely to decline - 3 kids and no car!

That's the reason. Shame.

21/01/2020 07:59:54

Chris, what's the latest re dFM PO staffing?

I'll be with Mark B from 9.00 to 10.00 at SIB. Is there anything I should press him on? D

24/01/2020 07:57:19

Already done. Ministers still pondering whether to send it.

Thanks

24/01/2020 17:31:25

Irrelevant & Sensitive

29/01/2020 09:08:03

Peter T is content to go to PFG. He has sounded out a potential successor- **I&S** in DoH. Highly thought of, so may need you to spring her from DoH.

Great thanks, great news. **I&S** is good, I'll speak to Richard when necessary.

06/02/2020 16:19:54

Excellent, well done!

What did I do? 🤔

Lots no doubt, but this is in reply to **NR**'s text about the C3 team getting a certificate at the Civil Service awards.

Ah, I didn't spot that. That is a cause for celebration.

11/02/2020 17:00:30

Chris, looks like we have to build in time for a short discussion tomorrow on the role of the Brexit sub-committee. I'll get Karen and Andrew to give us a slide or two which highlights the issue and suggest it is dealt with during FM's absence - might help to fill the vacant slot. I'll speak after the meeting. D

20/02/2020 10:49:12

Chris, I was going to drop into the Hub but time has beaten me. Apologies, David

27/02/2020 19:00:11

We have a plan for a small C3, which I will mention at PSS tomorrow. We don't need to stand up just yet, but can do so gradually over the next few weeks.

06/03/2020 18:29:01

In case you get a call from Michael...I had a call from Deborah McNeilly, reporting concerns on the part of Michael about the performance of CCPB, and one colleague in particular. I suggested to Deborah that I would be happy to speak to Michael, but that hasn't been followed up as yet.

Noted. Happy to discuss, though my key question is, is this redeemable? We can't afford a fractious relationship between ourselves and DoH.

I think it is through a combination of some more G5 capacity, and my getting in a bit deeper - but that has an opportunity cost.

07/03/2020 09:22:07

Chris, I've been tracking the emails. Can you confirm what we are asking depts to do. Are we still asking them to complete the return for CO discussed at PSS but not the additional work that was directed at DE and DSD? D

Yes, that's the position.

Thanks

07/03/2020 20:55:15

See latest email. I could reply, but the rationale for non participation is Michael's, and I think it should be for him. Grateful for a steer.

I'm out at a dinner with no access to email. Do you need a word now? D

Sorry to disturb, but my choice is between annoying CMO or annoying Cabinet Office, which is seeking a response to the exercise that he declined to participate in. DoH has not responded to CO enquiries.

If pressed now, my advice would be to annoy CO rather than CMO. And you can hold me to that.

Grand. Then I shall sit tight - he wouldn't thank me for answering for him.

08/03/2020 18:14:57

Latest email gives a sense of where we are. At the beginning of the teleconference there was a palpable irritation with the lack of response from NI to the information request.

Was CMO or anyone from DoH on the teleconference?

NR. There are action points (sending now) and a clear expectation that NI will respond by 7.30 this evening. Would you like me to pull something together, or should we leave it to DoH. Once bitten...

Belay that. DoH has just asked for our help...

09/03/2020 08:41:55

I've asked Richard about Chris. He's considering, but will probably say no.

Should I ask Karen P about Patrick Gallagher? From memory, he did good work on No Deal planning.

Not unreasonable for Richard to say no, given what they are likely to face. I had enquired about Patrick, but Karen was dubious.

Dubious about their ability to release or dubious about his quality/value?

A little of both I think, but mainly the former.

Mark McLaughlin would be ideal; **I&S** would be a possibility.

09/03/2020 17:46:10

Chris, has the interview timetable changed for tomorrow morning? D

10/03/2020 08:58:55

US trip cancelled.

I'd heard. No surprise.

The itinerary over the next ten days would have killed them.

10/03/2020 17:14:22

Chris, waiting for the Executive meeting to start. Anything I need to know from COBR this afternoon? D

Nothing major. Next Min cobra on Thursday. Minor tweaks to interventions, nothing significant. Possible officials VC with DAs and Irish next week. Separately, understand dFM pushing for NSMC meeting.

11/03/2020 18:21:27

Fire extinguished. As usual, the second telling of the story is less dramatic. There appears to have been some triangulation of the issues that we discussed with Ministers this morning (excess deaths sick pay for self employed). Various queries and info requests have been passed on to other Departments. For anything emerging from the COBRA meeting itself, I advised Bernie to wait for the official actions note. Three actions remain for the Executive meeting: a briefing on civil contingencies arrangements, which I can do, a briefing on sectoral resilience planning, on which I understand the info is beginning to improve, and a briefing on the Bill, which has been passed to Brenda.

Good, but we can't afford repeated "Corporal Dunn" behaviour. It's too exhausting if nothing else!

11/03/2020 19:39:46

I spoke to Tracy earlier. She's briefing her Minister (who has shown no interest in Covid up to now) tomorrow.

11/03/2020 22:18:38

Next text is copy of text to Carol, in response to a wee bit of wobble on mass gatherings. Nicola Sturgeon got to them a bit.

On mass gatherings, they need to be wary of hanging CMO out to dry. Remember he has fronted this, and staked his professional reputation on the science - which he backs. The quickest way to scupper compliance would be for a Minister to undermine her CMO.

I agree on the need to support CMO, but it's also valid to consider the possible need to reduce the burden on the "blue light" services and other public agencies.

So it is legitimate for ministers to take other factors into account including eg the need to reduce the confusion caused when bodies (especially sporting bodies) call off events despite scientific advice.

But still preferable for the four nations to be as one on this (or five in our case). D

12/03/2020 08:06:28

Chris, see my email. dFM wants CCG to meet before Monday. Bonkers of course, but we need to manage carefully.

I could offer them a sit at PSS which would give them a phot op.

I need you at the 11.00 am meeting with FM and dFM. **NR** is big moment!

Agree on all points!

12/03/2020 14:35:34

Can you let me know as soon as COBR finishes. D

Sorry, I can't talk right now.

I&S

Paul Flynn from NIO with us. Ok to bring him to next meeting?

I'll check. Tricky here so. It expecting this to end soon. I'll keep you informed.

Still no agreement on schools here but they're trying to bring this to a close.

So what do I say on COBRA?

The agreed actions are now published - I'd read those out. I'll try and agree that here.

We're on our way

13/03/2020 17:52:07

Nothing back from Richard, so assume idea didn't land well.

That was my assumption. Well, we tried.

Looks like pressure for more action is building in GB. The issue may be taken out of our hands (with a bit of luck).

I see Suzanne Breen is labelling the RHI report a "damp squib". Predictable.

14/03/2020 07:36:34

And I see that Ed Curran thinks you retired at Christmas...

I wish!

Been thinking about resources overnight.

How would you feel if I was to redeploy Karen P and **NR**'s team to Covid preparations for a limited time? That would allow us to replicate the No Deal arrangements whereby Karen looked after planning with you looking after C3 delivery. I think we're going to be under pressure to stand up the Hub very soon and I'm picking up that Brexit work is reducing as the negotiation phase stalls.

This would allow us to put in place personnel and a structure which worked very well after a lot of development.

I haven't mentioned this to anyone and would be happy to discuss.

I'm also going to say to Chris McNabb that we are going to have to reprioritise the PIO network onto working (with the Hub) to help prepare daily sitreps.

That would work well, and no one would do it better than **NR**. I would hope that any enduring hurt or resentment would be assuaged by her continuing to report to Karen. I could then put the CCPB team fully into hub mode - which is what they are good at.

Just to demonstrate my complete paranoia, I see that one media question today is 'if NICS got RHI so wrong, can they be trusted with Covid'. So, other than HOCS, who is omnipresent, the one senior official common to both is...

Thanks, and for the avoidance of any possible doubt, this should in no way be seen as me having any lack of confidence in you!

I'll break it gently to Andrew later.

I hadn't seen that (I've been avoiding social media and I'm not planning to get the papers today). Very annoying and so unfair given what we've delivered in recent times.

Didn't see it that way at all **NR** and her team are proven top notch planners, and it makes sense to deploy them.

14/03/2020 13:23:03

Meeting ok. SF pushing for all Ireland identical approach. Got no support. Lots of long silences. Both CMOs, Robin and Arlene pressing line of 'same measures, different timing, SF not buying. Waiting to see what happens at Presser.

Disagreement played out at presser. Bad, but no meltdown. SF isolated, Robin and Michael secure and confident, backed by Irish.

Fascinating, it'll be interesting to see how this plays out over the next week or two. Not going to make our task any easier.

My fear is SF will feel officials are "on the FM side".

14/03/2020 16:00:42

They did steer clear of challenging Michael, and Robin was rightly very protective of him. I'm having to work quite hard to keep NIO from jumping in. So far advice is being heeded, but SoS mad keen to get involved...For now he is limiting himself to ringing Simon Coveney.

Can't see SOSNI adding much to this, he's no Julian Smith.

16/03/2020 10:25:24

What time is COBR today?

3.15

16/03/2020 22:13:03

Chris, just floating ideas.

How would you feel about sharing the C3 role with Anthony Harbinson? We probably would have needed to share this role anyway if we are to operate the Hub 12 hours a day, every day.

I haven't mentioned this to him or Peter but I think he might be released. Other ideas welcome.

No problem with that. As I am likely to be at home I can most easily cover either end of the day (when things should be quiet), if Anthony or another colleague could provide some presence in the middle part of the day.

OK, I'll explore with Peter tomorrow.

17/03/2020 08:51:34

Chris, Peter has spoken to Anthony and he is content.

I've created a PSS WhatsApp group (d always resisted this but we're in a crisis and need a means of rapid comms with the team). I don't see you on the App, can you join please). D

Thank you. I will explain the way forward to colleagues later. My reading of the advice is that I can stay above ground until the weekend.

Yes, I've asked Michael for general advice.

I'm now on WhatsApp.

Copy of my text to Bernie:

Will give bland reply on email, but we need to be very circumspect about making any written comment on political assessment - best to convey any advice verbally to David on that.

17/03/2020 19:31:08

Karen's planning paper is a tour de force, but I worry that it involves a complexity that will be hard to manage, and hard for Departments to populate without a major shift in resource and attitude -they struggled to get to the point where **NR** and Bernie handed over.

Is it the right thing to do? If so, I think depts will have to step up. In any event they will quickly find they have resource as normal activity grinds to a halt.

On which, Mark is kicking back against releasing Peter given the economic challenges but he has effectively offered Andy Cole or Siobhan Broderick instead with others to follow.

If Mark of all people is prepared to do this it shows how dramatic change is going to be.

Andy and Siobhan are grand folk. The team itself is on its knees - Bernie and **NR** both very tired. Only one volunteer so far. We may need to denude the PFG Division even more radically than last time. Top notch G7s there, and really good economists and statisticians who would contribute to the planning. But PFG and NDNA work would need to stop completely.

Jeez, only one volunteer! I wouldn't want to reveal that to ministers. This is going to be really difficult.

We'll need to press colleagues hard in the morning.

Not sure I understand the current generation, when I was on my way up I'd have jumped at the opportunity to join something like the Hub.

To be fair, yesterday was a busy day for all, and I'm sure that many who were approached might have asked for 24 hrs to think. But we urgently need to put a squad in.

Fair points

19/03/2020 17:08:48

I notice that almost every fire door in the Castle is wedged open. I don't think this can be reconciled to any authoritative advice on Covid 19; whereas the risk of fire (and the law on fire doors) is crystal clear.

Blame me. It's only from 9.00 to 17.00 when there will be lots of people in the building (which has a ridiculous number of doors). Every time anyone washes their hands they have to touch several handles before they get back to their desk.

20/03/2020 10:11:48

NR is going to speak to her husband. Keep 🙌

Previous tension with Carol, but she says it is a while ago, and she can work with **NR**

Need to make a quick call at 10.30 will join the meeting as soon as I can.

Not likely so start at 10.30 (no surprise!)

Need to think about how to communicate with June and what to tell her about what she will be doing now.

Yes, let's speak after this.

Word is that PM is going to put out a 12.30 today announcement plea to the nation for support

Any new announcements expected?

No detail. Making sure Chris M is on it.

20/03/2020 16:32:09

Sorry I didn't get a chance to speak before entering purdah where, if the BBC is to be believed, I may be for some time. For reasons of practicality, I have conceded the lead to Anthony. Staff can't really follow two leaders, and there is risk that my dislocation means that I will either hold things up or give a wrong steer through being not fully sighted. The challenge will be to carve out bits of this that I can do remotely.

22/03/2020 08:37:03

Chris, you'll have seen my WhatsApp message re the PPS post. **NR** **NR** is willing to help but is a self isolator so not ideal.

If this yields nothing my options would seem to be: act Carol up, move Donal Moran across (he's currently acting G5).

Another thought, not sure when Caroline leaves, but could she cover there for a few weeks? D

Another good idea has just come in: **NR** ?

I don't think it can be done from home. Unfortunately Caroline has finished **I&S** Carol and Donal are both candidates for the competition, but we may have to accept the risk of challenge.

Yes, a further thought: Stephen Rusk?

NR could do it. Hopefully the ignorance and prejudice about his being in the building has died down

In the short run perhaps...

Last text refers to Stephen.

Unless I get any better ideas, I think **NR** is the best option. He's not due to go back to China until June at the earliest.

Agreed. Tends to have a robust management style, so may need a little advice on supporting Carol and **NR**



I notice that the advice is no longer referring to 12 weeks, but 'a few weeks' and some quotes from SAGE are talking about measures being turned on and off for the better part of a year. It may be a while before we even know the timescale for when we can all work normally again.

Yes, a lot of sources now talking about a longer period.

22/03/2020 21:15:55

Chris, I've agreed in principle with S McGlade that **NR** will stand in while the PPS post remains vacant. We'll need to find work for June and make sure she doesn't feel rejected (though I'm sure she understands the position).

Andrew is running this past **NR**

Any thoughts on a possible role for June before I go to Jill?

I spoke to her on Friday and she does understand. June thrives best on policy/strategy - the big wheel that needs turning thoughtfully, rather than something ad hoc and unstructured. She would be a good successor to Caroline even in the short term, if we hadn't postponed PFG work. With her DEL skills background, Mike might have something in terms of designing the new 'jobs fund 2.0' that we might need in the recovery.

OK, can you have a word with Mike about that?

25/03/2020 08:56:28

Larmour is wrong. DSO confirmed further regs being made in England.

Do I pull him up on it?

No, just get him and others to stop f**ing interrupting me. Bloody rude.



25/03/2020 11:08:50

Chris, FM and dFM are keen to be able to say something in the afternoon press conference around key workers and essential services. I tried to play for a bit more time, explaining that updating our guidance in a way that provides clarity, rather than increasing confusion, will be difficult.

I'll give you a call when we finish. D

I just don't understand where they are coming from, unless we plan to close the manufacturing and service sectors. To what purpose would we apply such definitions?

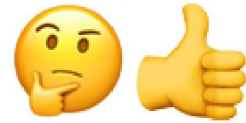
I'm fairly sure it's HMRC but I'll check and get you contact details. D

25/03/2020 19:53:45

Have you got an apology yet from Mark Larmour about the "new" regs?

Thought not!

You need to understand your mistake before you can apologise.



26/03/2020 09:08:55

No good deed will ever go unpunished.

Seems so! Hope Brenda didn't drop any poison on us

She quietly ticked me off for not involving her, but agreed that the proposed way forward was something that she could have advised positively on in two minutes. "So, Ministers, getting back to the recommendations..."

26/03/2020 11:30:16

Lots of politics and nonsense going on. Hugh and I suggest that it might be best dealt with by you plus Brenda plus Hugh convening the spads and talking them through the suggested approach. Unfortunately it is clear that it wouldn't work if I do it.

26/03/2020 15:03:38

Can you remind me where we are on off licenses? Just been asked. D

Recommend leave open. With Ministers.

Is there a sub with them?

Yes

27/03/2020 10:12:44

Need a wee word soon. Trouble brewing on 'essential workers'

Yes, there's a live discussion about this at ECCMC and it's dividing along green/orange lines.

A call from dFM to get definitive guidance out on this by early afternoon. I presume that will not be possible not least because policy is unclear?

Yes. See latest email if you can - I have suggested a compromise

I'll run that up the flag pole. Wish me luck.

Stephen M rang me. I think this will work if you can get them through the meeting.

27/03/2020 13:32:57

Compromise worked out writing it up now.

You're a star, with apologies again for giving you another hospital pass. I owe you one!

27/03/2020 18:23:09

It's all gone quiet since dFM asked to see the list of businesses that will close. I have a bad feeling.

My 5.00pm call with them lasted less than five minutes. I was expecting at least 20.

Arlene went off on a rant about the economy and was clearly furious.

More re-building needed. And you're right to have a bad feeling. The worrying thing is that I don't think we can rely on Stephen McG to get things he's agreed with Philip over the line.

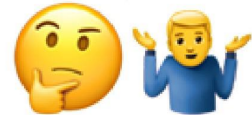
DoH on standby to get Robin in to sign and deal. I'm planning to put regs to all 3 simultaneously. If they delay, Robin will explode, or could go ahead without them.

*sign and seal

"Sigh and squeal" is how I feel

27/03/2020 20:06:13

Peace restored. Compromise agreed. Sub to follow in an hour or so. Need to prioritise the regs - now looking like Monday before operational, but mins not concerned by that.



It's like a teenage romance. Up down, on off, up down, on off. Rinse and repeat.

It's exhausting, but they seem to thrive on it. Different people.

28/03/2020 15:23:39

Chris, please NB my email. Ministers now want this to go Urgent Procedure. POs are to confirm. Give me a call when free.

28/03/2020 19:50:42

So, DfM wants dad's army and David Gordon back? That will need very sensitive handling with Chris M.

They've been on about a Dir Comms for a while. Chris knows about it, but putting it in writing escalates it. I'll have to tell him, but not tonight.

In fairness, they have always said it's not a criticism, they just think Chris has too much of his plate. And they have a point.

The DUP need to kill the Dad's Army thing. Bonkers.

Mark L?

Chris McN would kill me. And it would be a slow and painful death 🧟

29/03/2020 16:23:25

George is absolutely right on SCG

Yes, I agree. Though I'm told it's Tim Mairs who has been keen on DoH leading SCG (I would rarely question Tim's judgement). I'll wait to hear what's said in the morning.

At one of last week's meetings I heard something that I had never heard before - senior PSNI openly disagreeing with each other. There seems to be some tension between Tim and Mark. Tim is better informed on SCG and normally more orthodox. Candidly, I don't know who in Health would lead it. It would probably need someone like Jackie Johnston.

I'll have a quiet word with Richard.

01/04/2020 08:50:27

Occasional noisy typing in the background.

05/04/2020 10:37:59

I assume that you have given Peter the overarching role that you were contemplating?

Chris, yes. I told Perm Secs on Thursday that I've asked a Peter to provide assistance to Anthony and Karen where needed. So I haven't appointed him as a full 2 i/c, more an extra resource to be deployed on critical issues.

Not quite text book, but I think it should work. It shouldn't affect your work, but apologies for not mentioning this. D

05/04/2020 12:19:40

Not a problem, and a good idea. There will be some legislation work that should keep me busy this week, and I have **NR** and **NR** running a sort of correspondence and enquiries cell. After this week, however (depending on broader events, of course), I may be at something of a loose end.

I'm sure we'll find you something to do!

06/04/2020 08:59:51

Hope he had a lawful excuse for driving...



09/04/2020 09:23:36

Give me a call re CCG when you get a chance.

13/04/2020 08:53:46

That issue was resolved. Denis, Gordon and Stephen have reopened it on the basis of constituency anecdote. We had a clear view from Solace and PSNI...

Challenge will be to close it again! Need to rely on Solace holding the line.

Mind you, I've done so much tidying I could do with a trip to the dump!

I won't bore you with the details, but there may be a way to keep options open in the legislation, and put this back down to the operational level where it belongs.

Good. Just so you know, I got a slightly cryptic txt from Denis which leaves me thinking he's in the same space as JM Lyons.

Well, it is for others to decide the policy, but I find it difficult to understand how something that is described as 'not a problem' requires a solution that may create a risk.

15/04/2020 13:26:26

Chris, sorry to report that FM is making a strong plea at Executive to reopen recycling centres. MAERA saying that he thinks this is a "management" issue for the councils rather than a H&S issue.

But both accept that SOLACE needs to express a clear view.

Solace has a clear view. Copying to you now.

Reopening garden centres is the current big thing.

And graveyards

I'll be able to tell the grandchildren that I lived through the day...

DoH undecided on garden centres. Prevailing mood nationally is to open them. We are recommending opening graveyards.

By the way, why are they talking about the paper they haven't received yet, rather than the one they have?

It's doing my head in. I've just added a txt message to the Zoom call reminding them that all these issues are in your paper

Could it be ready for discussion on Friday?

Yes, almost done.

16/04/2020 20:19:42

What's behind Michelle's twitchiness?

Don't know, other than that SF are clearly pitching themselves as the party that is putting lives first and the economy second.

Executive will be interesting (to say the least)

Robin will be livid.

Oh, and Tracy Meharg has just told me that **NR** is planning to open her HRCs tomorrow. Has she the power to do that without your change to the regs?

The lawyers say that an argument could be made to do so, on the basis that the current list of essential services is not exhaustive. Equally I have seen plenty of advice down the years to the effect that providing a list of things rules out anything not on the list

One for a court to decide. The real damage is to the coherence of policy and messaging. And how will we get citizens to comply if councils don't.

Tracy is going to speak to Denis about this tonight and she told me that **NR** is aware (but was blindsided).

I'm expecting Denis will raise this at CCG. So I may turn to you and Alan Todd for a legal view (or would you rather I just went to Alan)?

The only thing either of us could say would be that formal legal advice would be required. I suspect that PSNI would also say that they ought not to have to police the public sector, and that we ought to sort out our policy! I was relaxed about this when it was merely **NR** running ahead of a decision likely to be taken tomorrow. Now that the paper is stalled, it will make us look clueless.

I wonder if an argument could be made to Michelle that if the Executive doesn't lead this, unplanned change will happen anyway.

Garden centres and recycling centres are marginal changes in any case. I wondered whether the Gove focus on such minor matters was a smokescreen.

17/04/2020 08:29:07

NR on call - probable push back on burial grounds. I can deal with it if raised.

OK

17/04/2020 14:05:20

So, priest issues FPN. In English or Latin?

Latin please, been waiting for over 40 years to use my O level.

Reckon I could be waiting another 40 years before this meeting's over.

Imagine the discussion when the time comes to open the pubs.

Much citing of professional advice - Michael cleared the paper.

I hope Robin makes that point, but I doubt he will.

It's going to be really hard to get this Executive to address the relaxation challenge.

Indeed. Relaxation implies an acceptable incidence and acceptable mortality. Can't see that being accepted easily.

I thought this was the easy one...

Yes, me too.

I'm away to lie down.

Dark room, towel over head, a good stiff malt.

Rinse and repeat, ideally over the weekend.

That was something else....

They're now trying to give money to people who haven't even asked for it....

18/04/2020 08:59:25

Executive decision yesterday was for TEO to contact Mid and East Antrim council. Reported comments today from DUP (including FM) and SoS have made that well nigh impossible and meaningless.

What has SOS said?

"I'm not going to criticise them for that as long as they're doing it for the right reasons and following the guidelines". Sammy W praises the Council for leadership in opening a vital service. FM excuses it by describing fly-tipping and waste issues as a serious concern. We have no coherent political leadership.

I wasn't planning to speak to the Council until Monday. I feel under less pressure to do so after seeing that.

Can't argue with your last sentence.

Gordon L is winding up the Regs debate on Tuesday. His response on the predictable question will be interesting.

20/04/2020 12:05:19

Alan Todd tells me Naomi will press hard for clarification on the AG point, and perhaps recycling centres. PSNI feel they are being asked to police a policy lacuna.

Is the line that a letter of response to the CC is nearing completion? Not sure we want to get into debate about the issue?

Yes, but Naomi likely to push for public statement on enforcement policy.

Must be awful broadband in Fermanagh

Step 1. Burial grounds...

21/04/2020 07:37:07

Chris, before CCG can you remind me where things stand with the CC's letter. D

Draft being prepared for Robin. Same line as Executive paper - reassuring AG that there is no blanket ban - PSNI applying reasonableness test.

Thanks, let's hope. CC doesn't make a big deal of this.

Alan Todd indicated tough line yesterday - if Executive fails to make coherent policy, PSNI will back off on enforcement.

21/04/2020 12:15:22

Jim Allister nailing Gordon on burial grounds.

So Jim's on the same side as Declan?

Thought I'd seen it all when oil hit -\$40 a barrel!

Not exactly. Gordon dutifully gave the Executive line 'we're looking at this.' Jim retorted with 'why is it lawful to visit an off-licence, but not to visit a grave?'

Fair point too.

21/04/2020 19:15:10

You're about to get a call from Carol Morrow following an FM dFM discussion with the Chief Con about the AG and his guidances. You may be asked about the feasibility of a quick amend of the regs to tighten up the travel for exercise provision.

I advised taking 10 steps back! Hugh and I remain confident that the gap if any between AG and PSNI is small. If not, then it would be for Robin to ask by urgent procedure for agreement to take the decision to amend.

👍 so I may not get down to the Mournes this weekend after all 🙄

See emails. AG says yes you can, if your name is Ciara.

Just read his guidance. I'm lost for words. All that effort on such a minor point 🙄

Indeed, but it can be fixed quickly.

22/04/2020 09:48:33

Are we in yet? The meeting is showing as scheduled for yesterday.

I'm getting in touch with Mags

22/04/2020 12:46:17

I think we've steered our way through the difficult areas of the Executive agenda without any reference to the AG/travel for exercise issue. 🙌

22/04/2020 15:21:19

See latest email. It's 1 1 at half time with the AG. Difficult away game with FM/dFM in the next round!

Just reading it.

I have you as the redoubtable holding midfielder who's played a blinder in defence and who might in the last minute summon up his last reserves of energy to storm up the pitch and score an unlikely winner against the run of play (taking out their hanky ball player Larkin at the knees on the way)

Actually I'm an oval ball man - tuggish prop forward in the minor divisions in my day.

Funny, but I can see that!

22/04/2020 17:02:52

Got a call from Arlene, she thinks SF will move on cemeteries on Friday. She asked could the regs be amended to deal with that and also the AG amend (ie adding a reasonableness test in the way you've suggested) and have them made by Friday evening?

Yes, subject to agreement with AG.

Great, I'd plan accordingly.

I'd be inclined just to do those 2 things, and perhaps churches. Anything else we could leave for a week.

Arlene doesn't think SF are ready to move on churches, but they are meeting some church leaders tomorrow. So it's still possible.

23/04/2020 08:53:16

How have you managed to instill such discipline in Ministers this week?

Charm obviously 🙄

Being serious, all I can put it down to is Anthony and I had a useful conversation with FM, dFM and George Hamilton about CCG etc. He made the point that ministerial attendance did risk festering debate.

Both said they valued the info they get from CCG so this may just be a bit of self-discipline.

Long may it last.

Nolan is saying that, in accordance with the Regs, Robin now must remove the restrictions on access to cemeteries because of comments he made in the Assembly yesterday to the effect that he now saw no need for that particular restriction.

Nolan is right.

Yes, on my limited knowledge, I thought so. Do you think Robin knew what he was doing?

He keeps forgetting that it is DoH legislation. At best, the regs must compel him to bring it to the Executive to approve his decision. A sensible discussion last week would have avoided all of this. Robin was far too neutral on his own paper.

Yep 👍

23/04/2020 11:31:08

I'm having intermittent broadband problems today - supplier rather than NICS related. There may be a risk to the interviews.

OK, we'll manage. Can you check with Mags whether I could cover your questions if you had to drop out?

Or could you simply dial in, or switch video off to reduce bandwidth?

We can discuss at 12.15

Back up would be to use mobile phone as data hotspot. Bandwidth might be an issue, but I could go voice only.

24/04/2020 12:01:28

SOLACE sanguine about what is likely to happen on cemeteries. Perhaps important for the messaging to encourage responsible behaviour, and indicate that some councils may need some time to prepare to open. We don't want queues at gates tomorrow morning.

Can't see that happening.

Looks like Naomi may be in a minority of one on this issue now.

Are you joining the meeting? It would be good to have you available in case questions arise about cemeteries or the travel restrictions.

Yes, on edge of my seat already.



So this is the pre-meeting row...

Doesn't bode well.....

There's a row about the City Deals paper. Told it may go to a vote.

Do we have bouncy Castle numbers in the sitrep?

Anthony's working on it. Saw him heading off on his bike with a pair of step ladders on his back

Michael and Ian are playing a blinder.

Yes, really good.

Nichola, jumping to a big assumption there....

A lot of ministers clearly disappointed to get good news

If they end up agreeing more than we thought, we may need to take a day or two longer to draft the regs.

Yes, though not sure Michelle is in that space.

Not sure I've ever seen a bunch of ministers who are so risk-averse.

I pointed out to Arlene that the recycling centre issue has moved on.

Did I just hear Michelle say we should be moving towards advising people to wear face covers?

Yes, Nicola Sturgeon was mad for that yesterday, and Arlene and Michelle agreed.

This must be what locked-in syndrome feels like....

28/04/2020 08:12:24

Is it OK if I go to you first at CCG for a progress report on the analysis of the traffic etc data?

Nothing to report yet still mining for useful data.

OK, I'll note that and see if anyone wants to come in.

We could ask if anyone has any data that could be cross mapped eg numbers using facilities or amenities.



28/04/2020 10:44:16

Some days I wonder why you bother. I think I'll retire in August as well.

Thanks, much appreciated.

Every day that goes by leaves me more convinced it's time to go!

29/04/2020 17:04:41

NR tells me there may be a meeting on Friday pm with SoS FM and DFM. He was also hinting that pressure for relaxation is growing.

30/04/2020 12:46:12

Our two biggest risks at present are called John and Edwin.

Yep 👍

Hard to mitigate too

01/05/2020 08:37:04

Getting a clear signal from DoH that they will lead.

01/05/2020 14:03:14

AG will be watching like a hawk. Or actually, like a dove.

04/05/2020 10:19:12

Ministers apparently suggesting not interviewing all 8 candidates. Deeply unfair and very vulnerable to challenge I would think.

That's very, very risky.

04/05/2020 13:32:40

Have we any discretion on the 3 weekly review cycle?

Yes. It's at least every 3 weeks. Nothing to prevent more frequent reviews.

But we can't leave it any longer.

Correct. A lot of the strategy will be outside regulations in any case, unless we make more regulations eg on masks, distancing.

Thanks

If decision making was DoH led, recycling centres would still be closed...

Regs also require a restriction to be ended immediately if it is no longer needed.

Yes, which means ministers need to be careful about what they say.

Absolutely, especially with litigious North Down journalists about.

05/05/2020 16:51:23

Chris, DA engagement is going to be discussed at my 5.00pm CO meeting. Any feedback on the review of SD measures engagement at official level?
D

Only the enduring issue that we only get to see things at the last minute. I find it difficult to believe that there aren't some draft plans in Cabinet Office.

Cheers thanks

Chris, nothing new here. Cabinet to meet on Thursday, COBR likely to follow but no time suggested.

05/05/2020 19:09:32

Nothing new here either.

In not sure they've got anything up their sleeves 🤖

But you can't fault their confidence. Every meeting I dial in to you'd think you were listening to the best performing team in Europe, not the team that now has the worst death stats.

Empty sleeves. The only idea mentioned was that of being allowed to exercise more than once per day.

07/05/2020 11:27:58

You're right about Naomi's concern.

I'm waiting to see if anyone challenges the DoH control which is explicit in this paper.

Indeed. If Robin wants control then he can no longer use the line of 'I'm doing this on behalf of the Executive.'

Indeed. I don't really understand the DoH culture.

If I was there I'd be wanting Executive endorsement of all major decisions.

All lining up to shoot Peter's fox.

Can't really see the added value of the proposed TEO role.

Indeed

07/05/2020 13:46:15

I&S

12/05/2020 13:35:45

I'm doing **NR**'s end of year review meeting this afternoon. Does she know the outcome of the PPS competition yet?

Yes, I told her off the record. She wasn't surprised, indeed she said getting the interview was, for her as a DP, very encouraging.

She's not entered the G7 competition. She doesn't really want another spell on PO at that level.

14/05/2020 08:09:02

Some interesting late papers for Executive today. A cynic might think that some people are preparing for a public inquiry.

Indeed

14/05/2020 10:52:02

dFM side seriously spooked by the DoH paper on relaxations. They clearly weren't expecting RS to want to move so far or so fast. Expecting a lively debate.

He might then have difficulty in adopting his usual line of 'I'm only doing this for TEO.'

Exactly. He "took back control" and will have to live with the consequences of that.

It's not actually much different from what I would have recommended, but it doesn't deal with 'delivery', that is, the cumulative impact on enforcement. You heard PSNI views this morning. Enforcement is all but over, so we now rely almost exclusively on clear messaging and civic responsibility.

Yes, and Chris McNabb has already picked up that he could quickly become the new "fall guy"!

SD compliance was always going to rely on community consent.

14/05/2020 12:30:29

!

!!

What do you reckon, deferred decision until Monday? A vote on the package? A vote on each individual measure?

And of course, if they do oppose presumably they'll be open to legal challenge given that the advice is the restrictions are no longer needed.

That last point is key if Robin remembers it. They could just agree but have the regs become operative in one week's time - deals with 'indecent haste' and 'time to plan'.

So, Archishop, Domestos or Vim?

I think as Exec Secretary, you should have 3 Time Outs per meeting.

Can I throw a flag down?

Two, surely.



Compromise suggestion - decide and announce today, but not implement for one week to allow for preparation of cleaning regimes etc.

The paper suggests they'll need to do that for some measures anyway.

14/05/2020 16:05:42

I&S which basically said that the Executive has no choice other than to accept the MoH advice on restrictions.

The DUP/SF deal must have been "terms endorsed" as there was no mention of the AG letter.

Indeed. They could have done all that in 10 minutes.

Sad but true.

You OK? I'm still waiting.

14/05/2020 17:29:48

I'm ok thanks. It is taking a bit out of me, but I have a good barrister on the job and we are drafting furiously.

15/05/2020 10:55:57

Are the PPS appointments confirmed yet? Deirdre and Carol have advised me of their respective results.

18/05/2020 14:20:46

Chris, I've seen your note re the PS competition. Being fair to all concerned (including yourself) it may be worth considering bringing in a replacement chair. Would you be content if I discreetly explored with Jill whether we might quickly find a replacement? D

Yes, I think that is probably best.

OK. I'll get in touch with Jill and get back to you.

19/05/2020 11:17:33

Chris, Mark Browne has agreed to take over the PS panel. Can you get in touch with him to sort out the transfer. D

That's very good of him. I'll have a word.

19/05/2020 17:55:03

Today's debate on the Regs was unedifying. Plenty of squabbling between DUP and SF, and a concerted SF attack on Robin about care homes and testing - quite nasty at times.

We sometimes forget what we're dealing with.
I saw Stalford's performance...👎

I&S

I&S

Chris, are you free for a chat? D

Yes, certainly.

08/06/2020 13:06:17

Difficult. But at least they've agreed that you will sort it all out for Thursday.

Can't wait 😊

Logical options: none of them remotely enforceable, so the rationale and the guidance will need to be crystal clear - especially 'why can I do x and not y?'

The Sterling plan...

Haha!

The way things are going we could be in full relaxation, with 1 metre distancing, by the end of July.

SOLACE will be alarmed if retail opens as soon as Friday.

Is that because they will have the enforcement responsibility?

Yes, under H and S legislation.

08/06/2020 19:32:49

Chris, I saw your note to Liz about attendance on the Zoom tomorrow morning. I'm relaxed about perm secs bringing a subject matter expert, they'll be the ones doing the work! D

09/06/2020 11:20:20

I&S

I&S

09/06/2020 15:31:36

I&S

11/06/2020 10:22:16

Good start. Should go through on the nod now.

11/06/2020 11:59:32

Can I have a word this afternoon about our ongoing role on this work?

Certainly.

I see that the parades issue has surfaced on Twitter.

Yes, only a matter of time.

11/06/2020 18:06:34

I'll call back in 10 mins if that's OK

Grand.

21/06/2020 11:12:04

Difficult matter has arisen in dFM Private Office.

I&S

I&S

I&S

I had long chat with him this morning, and he is minded to give up the PPS role, as he thinks it is not compatible. I put it to him that we could be flexible or even explore some sort of temporary arrangement to see how things go. He was grateful for that, but doesn't think that continuing is feasible. I said I would speak to you, and suggested that he take a day or two before making any final decision.

21/06/2020 18:27:54

Sorry to hear that Chris. I'd be keen to see if we could make it work. If we can't I think **NR** would have to revert to the lower grade given he won't have completed the probation period.

Let's have a word tomorrow about options. At least, from dFM's perspective, there's plenty of good people on the list.

21/06/2020 19:43:55

I wondered whether we could rely on the fact that this is purely due to **I&S** rather than anything arising directly from the post? If so, and assuming that Anthony has spoken to you about CCCB, could **NR** fill in behind Andy Cole?

22/06/2020 08:22:43

Could you have a word with Jill just to test the propriety of that and then we should discuss.

23/06/2020 09:56:17

Decision made and letter to issue today - 'no further action'.

Excellent, I'm just going in to Tackling Paramilitaries Board. I'll call afterwards.

23/06/2020 14:13:56

Chris, would you mind calling Declan in NIO re the G5 position? D

Certainly, surname McGeown?



23/06/2020 17:08:17

Spoke to Declan - hadn't realised he is **I&S** Strong preference to stay where he is. I sent him the details of the post, but I don't think he will change his mind.

Thanks, that will disappoint **I&S** who has his heart set on the YJA post. Awkward.

I'll have a word with Peter May.

25/06/2020 16:46:02

Chris, give me a call when you get a chance about our link with DoH. I had a good chat with Richard P this afternoon. D

29/06/2020 14:29:18

A minor change today, followed by major re-engineering on Thursday will be difficult to communicate.

Agreed, I'm struggling to keep up so I'm not surprised there's confusion amongst the populace. Not helped by the four nations (and Ireland) all doing slightly different things.

Judging by behaviour I witnessed over the weekend, people are making it up.

I have three doctors living within about 100 yards of me and they are the worst offenders.

Why are they surprised? Did they miss the BMAP JR?

Exactly. **NR** seemed to be suggesting that I can override FM and just stick something on the agenda. 🙄

01/07/2020 16:59:25

Recent email refers. Password is **I&S**. The wording strikes me as a little careless. Given the conclusion that there was 'no evidence to support an allegation', an angry man might question the propriety of having made it. Good job I have such a reputation for placidness.

Interesting, I'll give you a call tomorrow.

Pleased with the outcome, delighted for you.

02/07/2020 09:49:33

Sent the following to Stephen McG.

"I will probably draft the answers to Tom Buchanan's AQs (unless you feel that SPADs and Ministers should do so). Four of them are straightforward, but a word on 5371 before drafting may be useful."

Noted thanks

03/07/2020 13:02:16

Compliance will turn on R 5 (2)g, and may not be clear cut - that regulation is out of kilter with the spirit of R6. My non-lawyer's view is that a breach would be difficult to prove, but the defence would be awkward - it would be that she had some reasonable excuse other than the funeral itself for being away from home, ie exercise of a party representative function.

Yes, my guess is FM doesn't want a breach proved. Peter May's view is that PSNI are unlikely to detect anything other than a marginal breach, with PPS unlikely to take a harsher view.

Just need to get a decision along those lines quickly otherwise this risks getting out of control.

09/07/2020 11:15:19

Chris, I was hoping we wouldn't have to proceed with this leak inquiry, however this latest leak kills that hope.

Would you be happy to take the lead on this?

It would mean working with Iggy O'Doherty in DoF and possibly some engagement with Sue Gray, though I've already agreed with her in principle that we may need to work with them.

Happy to discuss when this meeting's over. David

Certainly. To run it to ground, every perm sec will need to provide access within their departments to email accounts and trim meta data, and possibly data from networked printers...

Agreed and thanks, I'll email Sue now and suggest that Iggy or a member of his team get in touch with you directly.

20/07/2020 20:39:58

Hi Chris, Andrew suggested I should have a word. Can I give you a call in the morning? D

21/07/2020 12:08:13

Recent email refers. Document password is **I&S**

23/07/2020 11:50:17

A DoF security team...the media will have endless fun with that. I don't envy whoever gets the role of Dzerzhinsky.

Funny, but something about Sue always reminds me of Beria....

29/07/2020 19:43:56

Chris, I've got a letter from Michael Cooke too. I'll give you a call tomorrow. D

Ironically, I might want to argue for providing more information...

Yes, I thought that and would agree if I was in your position (as I hope to be).

In my current position though I've this growing sense of paranoia that someone is out to get me.

06/08/2020 14:12:11

Chris, can I call on you on the off chance anyone asks about progress with the leak enquiry?

Not sure where this currently stands. D

Yes certainly. I put a note to FM and dFM reflecting earlier conversations. No response yet.

Thanks.

06/08/2020 16:19:02

Interesting that the 'send them in' message is being delivered from...

Something's definitely eating Edwin today!

Would you be happy to take on the task he set re departmental responsibility for taxis, haulage and coach operators? Bit of a fool's errand, but felt I had to say we'd look at it.

Certainly. Needs a straightforward question to Depts: "what powers do you have to provide financial or other assistance, or to otherwise intervene, to support businesses in the following sectors...."

Exactly, thanks.

20/08/2020 12:54:16

I sent Katrina a text, but asked her not to do anything yet.

Thanks Chris.

Can't believe they'd just announce it out of the blue - no way to do business.

20/08/2020 15:04:06

Mfl being a little disingenuous there? We were told she was looking for an update.

No, Katrina got her to hold back.

Ah, OK. I take it back.

27/08/2020 12:25:57

Chris, I think the main purpose of the Task Force discussion will be to agree how we prepare draft ToRs for the assignment. I was going to suggest that you would coordinate this with the group but that we might ask Mark O'Donnell to come up with a first draft given the work they've previously done in this area. I also think we need some form of literature search to identify relevant research. David

Happy with that - easier to get buy in from Depts if we can draw on the work they have already done.

28/08/2020 10:59:45

I&S