

Northern Ireland Office

Covid 19

Situation Report **24**

New information in **RED**

Contact: Covid-19@nio.gov.uk

All emails relating to Covid-19 should be copied to this address.

17:30 on **13 April 2020**

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KEY ISSUES

Issue	Owner
<p>Transport: Discussions are ongoing between the NIE and UKG on how best to support and protect NI's three main airports. Critical Belfast-London Heathrow routes remain open and will be operated by Aer Lingus. Support for ferry operators is at an advanced stage with constructive official level NICS/DfT discussions underway. Support for Hauliers to be worked on alongside ferries. Work continues between DfT and HMT on financial support for ferry operators. As yet, we have no clarity from HMT on when any announcements will be. Translink is an ongoing issue. It is also possible that DfT will want to circulate draft Q&As if a Tuesday announcement is likely.</p>	<p><u>Economy</u></p>
<p>Social Distancing: Input required into scripts for calls CDL is having with each of the DAs tomorrow on reviewing social distancing measures, ahead of a planned COBR(M) on Thurs. SoSNI will join call. Script to be updated by Monday afternoon. DAs to join HODS meeting on this tomorrow.</p>	<p><u>Preparedness</u></p>
<p>Testing - DoJ leading on Prioritisation of Key Workers. They have recommended testing kits be made available by UKG on a per capita basis and DHSC seem to be on board with this. Await FM and dFM clearance. No significant disparity with the approach being taken by UKG. Healthcare MIG agreed that capacity delivered through mass commercial swab testing to UK nations to be on the basis of population demographics. Priority will be given to the most critical of the key worker populations that need to be returned to work to support the response and essential services.</p>	<p><u>Preparedness</u></p>
<p>UK/Irish divergence and Exec stability: In considering any changes to social distancing rules (or other significant aspects of covid management), it will be important to try to take a similar approach to the Irish Government where possible. Where that isn't practical, it will be important to properly communicate the reasons for the differing approach, and support the NI Exec in reaching an appropriate policy position for NI, which may not always mirror the GB/ England approach.</p> <p>Monitoring of Robin Swann's request for assistance from the Army to help deal with the pandemic - publicly criticised by Michelle O'Neill - she has "raised the sensitivities of British military intervention directly with SOSNI". SDLP and Alliance Party leaders have publicly backed RS's request</p>	<p><u>International</u></p>
<p>Agri: Growing concerns from NI farmers about the economic impact of Covid-19 on their businesses, noting the reduction in demand for some products (for example less consumer demand for milk; greater demand for mince beef but not steaks) and the impact on labour across the production line. Preparedness team working with Economy team on advice for SoSNI ahead of (i) SoS business roundtable on Weds 15/4 and (ii) separate GPSMIG update on labour support Weds 15/4.</p>	<p><u>Preparedness</u></p>
<p>UKG: letter for MPs and MLAs on the government response to Covid-19. Cabinet Office unsure of the format they would like these letters, therefore issuing delayed.</p>	<p><u>Covid-Central</u></p>

Overview

NI Update

UK Position

Case Numbers - as of 13 April

England 69329 (58,817)
Wales 5610 (4591)
Scotland 6,067 (5275)
Northern Ireland 1,882 (1589)
TOTAL 88621 (70,272)

Deaths (NI) 124 (92)
Deaths (UK) 11,329 (8958)

Republic of Ireland cases: 9,655 (6574)

Government Announcements:

The Northern Ireland Executive will receive an extra £80m - a total of £340m - as a result of a boost to the Coronavirus Emergency Response Fund, announced today (Monday 13 April 2020) by the Chancellor Rishi Sunak.

MHCLG: Chris Townsend appointment

MHCLG will announce the appointment of Chris Townsend OBE as the Chief Executive Officer overseeing the Shielding Programme. He has volunteered three months of his time.

Handling: Gov.uk story and Press notice to Chris Smyth, Whitehall Editor at the Times and brief Politico Playbook to share in their daily news bulletins

MOD: Ambulance support

MOD will brief a story about personnel working to bolster ambulance services across the country.

Handling: TBC

Update from NICS: Robin Swann is making two MACA requests to the Army to help deal with the pandemic - this has been criticised by Sinn Fein however all of the other NI parties have been supportive. The focus over the weekend for the Executive was reinforcing the message that the public need to maintain social distancing throughout the Bank Holiday weekend. PSNI moved into the enforcement phase and stepped up checks on the road. 107 fixed penalty notices were issued, however mobile cameras suggested the vast majority of the public adhered to social distancing measures. A paper on the review of legislation will be tabled for discussion at Wednesday's Executive meeting - Pending the outcome of this discussion, a further paper will issue to provide analyse on any possible changes within the legislation. The Fire Brigades Union has highlighted that 7.5% of NI's fire service workforce is in self-isolation which is higher than the UK average of 5%. Additional testing has been provided to non-healthcare staff on the frontline including the blue light services and each group has signalled this will have a positive impact on resourcing levels

Update from Irish: The Taoiseach has confirmed that social distancing and business closure regulation will remain in force until at least 5 May. ICU admissions are growing at a steady pace of 30 a day. While capacity exists nationwide, Dublin is under pressure given the concentration of the cases (55%) in the capital region. The Gardaí have been given new powers to enforce Covid-19-related restrictions for the four days of Easter.

UKG: We understand that the CCS has established a new unit (the Operational Analysis Centre) which will pick up a number of issues which are not being addressed by various MIGs. This will be data-driven with a layer of policy work. Potential policy areas the OAC will pick up include: situation reporting over Easter weekend and impact on decision-making; hate and cyber crime; supply chains for recycling plants; mental health and loneliness data; security of medium-term CO2 supply.

NI Economy: The Chancellor has warned that UK GDP could fall by 30% in the second quarter of 2020, with this likely to be worse in NI where GDP already lags (23%) behind the rest of the UK.

Policy Challenges

International -Executive tensions remain manageable and were helped by a successful quad which included both NI and IE Health ministers. Recent MACA developments have caused some division which is being carefully monitored.

Preparedness - Current priorities looking to the week ahead are agri and social distancing. On agri, focus is on support for NI farmers responding to the impact of Covid-19 on their market. On social distancing, the immediate focus will be on reviewing the effectiveness of the measures over the Easter weekend but looking longer term, assessing the impact of various scenarios as the UK and Ireland reduce measures in Northern Ireland to inform approach.

Health: - The first supply forum took place last week. Following the delivery of around 5.5m items of PPE to NI this week, NI are now focused on how to replenish their supplies of PPE for the post surge period and expected second surge. UK PPE strategy to be announced this evening which aims to make sure key workers know which PPE to wear and how to get it and the general public are aware of the ongoing national effort to keep key workers protected. Work ongoing on a four nation approach to testing with agreement to allocate tests based on a per-capita basis following lobbying by NI Executive, supported by the NIO, at the end of last week. Focus this week/fortnight on a review of social distancing measures to assess their effectiveness. This weekend, a testing programme for non-health critical workers began in NI - 200 of these workers will have been tested by Easter Monday.

Comms- The Cabinet Office is compiling a bid for comms campaign funding relating to CV-19, and the NIO will input a top-line bid tomorrow, including for research and insight. DHSC is planning another phase of "Stay at Home" ads across the UK, which have been run past NICS. The NIO has started to highlight businesses who are doing good work in supporting the effort against CV-19 and remaining operational.. This will continue on a daily basis in the weeks ahead. The Health Sec announced the UK-wide PPE strategy at the daily press conference, with a press release to follow from DHSC. We will follow up with a supportive quote from SoSNI at that stage. He has also issued a video message this morning on social distancing over Easter, following up his NI and GB BBC TV appearances last night.

Economy - HMT are looking at doubling the amount **medium-sized companies** can borrow to £50m under its proposed emergency coronavirus loan scheme following concerns that many larger businesses would be left without adequate state support. We will need to work with HMT to ensure that the definition of 'medium-sized' takes into account scaling differences between NI and GB.

NIO

Resource	Critical Business
<p>NIO Figures for 9 April (last full day)</p> <p>Working in the office / travelling 7(6) Working at home 171(166) Self Isolating - symptoms - still working 0(0) Family Isolating - no symptoms - still working 4(5) Self Isolating - confirmed - still working 0(1) Sick - Covid 0(0) Sick- other 0(1) Special Leave 0(2) Other leave / NWD 13(10)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tuesday is Normal working day in London, Public Holiday in Belfast• Both sites remain open, although at minimal level (e.g. no catering)• Those working in office continue to be significantly reduced, and limited to NIWU and Hub staff.• Easter leave cover arrangements worked well• Revised new starter arrangements are now in place• Vetting process is being restricted to business critical staff; staff are able to have existing clearance extended 1 year. Essential cases are being progressed - please engage early with security colleagues	<p>Human Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business Impact Assessment completed and prioritisation underway.• Process to move staff into priority areas is continuing,• All DDs have completed an assessment of critical business, along with those tasks where office requirement remains• Keyworker guidance issued in NI, and process underway• Covid Hub for Comms launched w/c 30/3 for HR guidance, Wellbeing news, Remote working guidance and NICS updates• First Wellbeing newsletter issued w/c 6/4 - to be sent regularly• Home working L&D Hub to be launched after Easter <p>IT/Networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Network capacity will continue to be monitored with IT Assist to ensure business continuity; network capacity has increased fivefold to 5Gbps• IT kit being gradually delivered to households this week• Guidance is being prepared for use of Zoom/Hangouts; advice remains to use Hangouts as default <p>Emergency Response Team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ERT full will continue to meet weekly alongside two BDG-specific sub meetings <p>Estates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• HG is closing one entrance; guidance on building access now on intranet

Forward Look

COBR

- COBR meeting scheduled for Thursday to discuss social distancing with the DAs in attendance although with no commitment to any public announcements following that COBR.

PM C-19 Strategy

- The CabSec (O) and all four MIGs will resume meetings on Tuesday 14 April.

C-19 Strategy (O) - CabSec chaired

- Cabsec meetings resume on 14 April

International MIG:

- Three meetings planned for **this** week: **Tuesday:** Vulnerable countries [DFID], vaccines [DFID], supply chains [TBC]; **Wednesday:** Assistance to British Nationals [FCO], EU budget Covid Measures - EU instruments (including Civil Protection) and EU Procurement [TBC]; and **Friday:** International Partnerships [TBC],

Economic MIG:

- This week's MIG has been moved to Wednesday. The agenda is likely to include: i) Regulatory easements (BEIS), ii) Planning and Development Reform (MHCLG), and iii) Foreign Investment Risks and Mitigations (BEIS). Draft papers of ii and iii were discussed at today's Officials meeting.

Healthcare MIG:

- Meetings expected on Tuesday (although may be moved to Wednesday) and Thursday. DHSC today convened a forum bringing together UK government departments, the devolved administrations and crown dependencies to work together to address supply issues in response to Covid-19. The meeting covered medicines, ventilators/oxygen, PPE, NCGS and testing. The group sits alongside existing forums, with the aim of discussing cross-cutting issues across supply and other areas.

Public Services MIG:

- Meeting on Tuesday: Update on effectiveness of social distancing over the Easter weekend; update on business support/procurement; Wednesday: TBC Update on package of support to incentivise labour to the agriculture sector - our interest in agri is less the farm labour and more protection of production line and food supply / Courts / Testing for Public Sector workers; Thursday: TBC Update on guidance to local authorities on how to manage excess deaths; Friday: TBC Mitigation actions for HE sector and students

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