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TO: ALL NICS AND NIO COLLEAGUES IN C3

CORONAVIRUS EMERGENCY: NORTHERN IRELAND CIVIL SERVICE & NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE COLLABORATION

1. We thought it important to write to everyone involved in the Command, Control and Co-ordination (C3) arrangements to thank you for your important work, and to set out some guidance on the parameters of the task, and the arrangements for close collaboration between the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and Northern Ireland Office (NIO).
2. The Coronavirus pandemic is an unprecedented emergency. No-one who was involved last year in the development and testing of the C3 arrangements could have envisaged the situation that we find ourselves in today. Some of you are working in C3 as part of your normal role, whilst many others have volunteered. We are enormously grateful to all of you. Your hard work last year, and your willingness to bring your experience and knowledge to bear now, mean that we have been able to mount an effective C3 response to the crisis.
3. The work is challenging. Whilst some of it can be done remotely, some tasks, for the time being at least, require colleagues to work in the C3 Hub, or in a Departmental Operations Centre (DOC). Some NIO colleagues are also working in key liaison roles in Whitehall. Wherever you are working, we want to assure you that your health, safety and wellbeing is our priority. As we go forward, we will maximise the amount of work that can be done remotely, and we will ensure that anyone working in the Hub or in a DOC can do so safely. Shift patterns and other working arrangements will be managed to ensure the resilience of the C3 operation, and of the people working there.

The C3 arrangements

4. The C3 arrangements are based on well-established civil contingencies principles and practice, centring on delegated decision making to lowest appropriate level, with escalation where needed.
5. The organogram at Annex A sets out the key components, reporting relationships, and information flows. They have been tailored to match the current emergency.
6. The Executive is now meeting three times per week, and the Civil Contingencies Group (CCG) is meeting each weekday morning. The Executive has adopted an overarching cross-departmental strategy to respond to the outbreak. Karen Pearson and [Name Redacted] (TEO) are leading the strategy, planning and risk assessment team, and also support Executive Ministers when they participate in meetings of COBR or its sub-groups.
7. The HUB and DOCS have been up and running for some time now, under the leadership of Anthony Harbinson, as Chief of Staff of the overall C3 arrangements.
8. Chris Stewart is co-ordinating work on Covid-19 related legislation.
9. Contact details for the respective teams are at Annex B.
10. The Strategic Co-Ordination Group (SCG) will stand up in the coming days as we approach the likely peak of the outbreak, under the leadership of PSNI.

Priorities for C3

11. The priorities for the C3 arrangements reflect its two key functions; the management of information flows, and the co-ordination of decision-making.

Information flows

12. The daily rhythm is now well-established, beginning with the dissemination each morning of the National dashboard; and culminating each evening in the production of the Northern Ireland Situation Report (Sitrep) which feeds into the national cycle. These will continue to be developed and refined as the outbreak progresses. Other key information products will include agreed actions from:

- meetings of COBR (or its sub-groups);
- Executive meetings; and
- CCG meetings.

13. We appreciate the volume of work involved in this process, and we cannot over-emphasise its importance. Along with the epidemiological modelling by the Department of Health, the Sitrep is the key source of information on which Ministers will base important decisions – decisions on matters of life and death for citizens, and the future of our economy and public services. Please continue to make it your top priority. From time to time it may be necessary for the HUB to ask for additional information on a particular topic, or to initiate an additional information gathering exercise. These will be kept to a minimum to reduce the impact on Departments. **Any such additional request for Coronavirus related information must be routed through and approved by the HUB.**
14. It is also important to ensure that media announcements and public communications are co-ordinated by the Executive Information Service (EIS), working through the HUB.

Decision making

15. Decision-making is based on the principle of '*delegation to the lowest appropriate level,*' that most of you will be very familiar with. Most operational issues will be dealt with at the front line, co-ordinated by the 3 Tactical Co-ordination Groups (TCGs) and SCG (when established). Issues that cannot be resolved locally or within DOCS can be escalated to the HUB, CCG, Executive, or nationally, as required.
16. It is important to remember that role of the HUB and CCG is strategic decision-making, not operational delivery. Therefore, issues that are escalated may, following decision, lead to tasks or requests being allocated to Departments or groups of Departments through working groups. The role of Departmental liaison officers in this aspect of the work is crucial, providing short, direct lines of communication to facilitate agile responses.

The NIO role

17. Collaboration between NIO and NICS, already strong, is now more essential than ever. Working within the devolution settlement, the NIO seeks to support NICS by facilitating engagement with the rest of the UK Government and flagging the devolved administration's interests at meetings where it is not represented.
18. To do this most effectively, ensuring smooth data and information flows is essential, as is addressing at pace any instances where that process is not working or where those arrangements can be improved. To that end, NIO colleagues are based in the HUB, and will have full access to HUB information.

19. NIO has created a central COVID-19 team to manage the response, led by Holly Clark and Colin Perry. When engaging with the central team please copy the email covid-19@nio.gov.uk. This will enable the central team to track the work coming through NIO and flag urgent issues.
20. The team will be operational between 7am-10pm on weekdays and will be available on call at the weekend. This team's objective is to coordinate the NIO's inputs into the COVID-19 response, ensuring Northern Ireland's interests are well understood.
21. The NIO has teams working across the following 5 strands. We encourage NICS colleagues to go directly to these teams (during normal working hours) but please always copy to the NI HUB and the NIO central team too.
- International - international@nio.gov.uk
 - Economy - covid-economy@nio.gov.uk
 - Preparedness - covid-preparedness@nio.gov.uk
 - Health - covid-healthcare@nio.gov.uk
 - Communications - Communications@nio.gov.uk
22. If NICS Departments wish to escalate an issue, please use the NIO Hub Liaison Officer as the first point of escalation; NIOhubLO@nio.gov.uk.
23. The NICS is submitting a regular flow of data through the NI Hub to CCS/Cabinet Office to ensure UKG has an up to date picture of the impact of Covid 19, and the effectiveness of governmental responses, across the UK. The NICS will copy this data to the NIO. The NIO will avoid duplicating any UKG information requests, and will, with immediate effect, channel any additional information/data/policy requests through the NI Hub making clear the purpose of any such requests. Strand teams will continue their broader engagement with NICS Departments on bilateral issues, ensuring that the NI Hub and the NIO central team are sighted on significant developments. The NIO LO will monitor traffic, liaise with the NI Hub and avoid duplication where possible, as well as escalating as necessary. The Hub directory has been circulated to all NIO staff for this purpose.
24. We will monitor the flow of requests from the strands and work with NI Hub liaison officers and Hub leads to manage the process as necessary. Once a Hub staffing structure is in place, we will share a rota to manage any weekend/out of hours contact points.

Cabinet Office DAs Liaison Officer

25. A new Devolved Administration liaison unit has been established as part of the COVID-19 Secretariat in the Cabinet Office. The role of the unit is to ensure that:

- (i) the DAs are invited to relevant ministerial meetings;
- (ii) the DAs are informed of agenda items as early as possible; and,
- (iii) where UKG departments are commissioned to produce papers for ministerial meetings they approach the DAs for information where necessary.

26. There will be a daily call between the liaison unit and co-ordinators in the DAs to discuss any practical issues.

27. There are three NIO staff embedded in the unit alongside Cabinet Office staff. Collectively, the unit can be reached at [redacted] **I&S** [redacted] If you have any queries relating to a specific Ministerial Implementation Group please contact the following:

- Healthcare MIG – simeon.hanfing@nio.gov.uk
- International MIG or Economy & MIG - [redacted] **NR** [redacted]@nio.gov.uk
- General Public Sector MIG or COBR - [redacted] **NR** [redacted]@nio.gov.uk

28. These arrangements will be subject to regular review.

Thank you again for all you are doing.

Stay safe.

[redacted]
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