Civil Contingency Group (COVID-19 Response) Meeting
Wednesday 8 April 2020
Block B, Level 5 Conference Room, Castle Buildings

Note of Meeting

Attendees
David Sterling (Chair)
Arlene Foster - FM
Michelle O'Neill - dFM
Gordon Lyons – JM
Declan Kearney - JM
Anthony Harbinson - TEO
Chris Stewart – TEO
Karen Pearson – TEO
Katrina Godfrey - DfI
Richard Pengelly – DoH
Mike Brennan - DfE
Denis McMahon – DAERA
Peter May - DOJ
Sue Gray - DOF
Jill Minne – NICSHR
Derek Baker - DE
Tracy Meharg – DfC
Mark Hamilton – PSNI
NR – NIFRS
NIFRS
Michael Bloomfield - NIAS
Joan McCaffrey – Local Government
Stephen Reid – Local Government
NR Food Standards Agency
Mark Larmour – NIO
Chris McNabb – EIS TEO
Hugh Widdis – DSO
NR – TEO
Lesley Hogg - NI Assembly
Donal Moran – NI Hub
NR – NI Hub – Note taker

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

2. COVID-19 - CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGNOSIS

- Richard Pengelly updated the meeting:
    - To date there were 1,255 confirmed cases in NI and 73 deaths.

- The number of tests being completed at the Balmoral DVA Centre and the SSE continue to increase.

- The modelling group is continuing to work on the update with a paper to be presented to the Executive no later than Friday.

Action: Richard Pengelly (DoH) to ensure the Revised Modelling Paper is submitted in advance of the Executive Meeting on Friday 10 April 2020.

- The death rate across the UK is doubling at just under every 3 days. NI death rate is currently doubling every 4.9 days.

- The current case definition data in UK was based on deaths in hospital. The Chief Statistician in England is considering the inclusion of community deaths in the statistics. DoH is monitoring the situation in England.

JM Kearney raised concerns around complacency of the public around the Easter weekend given that figures being issued seem to show a flattening of the curve. Richard Pengelly advised that it would be important to get the balance right when presenting these figures as the new modelling figures were likely to show no increase in numbers and potentially a reduction.

JM Kearny said he noted anecdotally an increase in the volume of traffic coming into and exiting Belfast over the last couple of days. DCC Hamilton advised that they had noted an increase in traffic over the weekend (13% Saturday and 41% Sunday) particularly cross border traffic. PSNI will be having discussions with An Garda Síochána about this issue.

Katrina Godfrey advised that Monday's traffic numbers matched the previous Monday and that data on Tuesday's volumes would be available later today. Katrina further advised that mobile cameras will be deployed to tourist hot spots over the Easter weekend to monitor the traffic.

dFM considered that a message should be included in future communications about the importance of people not driving to locations for exercise.

Action: Departments with traffic data to submit for inclusion in SitRep this evening (8 April 2020).

- David Sterling advised that the three week review on restrictions is due to take place on Monday 13 April. He advised that there is no anticipation of any restrictions being lifted at this time. All the DA's were in agreement on this.

3. ACTIONS REVIEW

David Sterling progressed through the actions from the meeting of 7 April 2020.

PPE supply lines for non-HSC staff

- Sue Gray advised that discussions had taken place with PSNI and this issue had been resolved. DCC Hamilton confirmed that the PPE risks had been downgraded for the PSNI.

Critical Freight Task Force

- Mark Larmour advised that following a meetings yesterday, UKG was confident that critical routes had been secured and protected and this will be confirmed today. An updated paper will be presented to the Executive today.

Consumption of PPE

- Sue Gray advised that PPE stock was a fast moving issue making it impractical to provide a daily tally. Work was ongoing to develop a meaningful and accurate means to track the issue. She and David Sterling agreed that some work around governance was important and will discuss offline.

Action: David Sterling (HOCS), Sue Gray (DoF) and Richard Pengelly (DoH) to consider governance of PPE consumption, orders made and expected deliveries. To be considered offline after today's meeting (8 April 2020).

dFM identified the confidence-building potential of highlighting the orders placed for PPE to show progress is being made in this area and particularly the role of local companies.

Action: Sue Gray (DoF) to consider some PR around PPE supply as a public confidence building measure and to highlight at Finance Committee today.

Fly Tipping

- Denis McMahon advised, following meetings with Local Councils, that there was no significant issue with large-scale fly tipping. Councils had noticed some dumping at HRC's but this was being managed with removal being delayed by 72 hours as per COVID guidance.
- The issue was now being raised on all council websites and they have moved to strengthen their communications campaign. Councils are continuing to collect data on these types of incidents.

Action: Denis McMahon (DAERA) to feed fly-tipping data through the SitRep returns today, after the Waste Management Group Meeting.

Review of Legislation

- Chris Stewart to provide an update under Agenda Item 5 (Legislation Update) below.

Media Activity and Engagement

- All Departments to ensure that all media activity and engagement with partners in consistent in terms of messaging – ongoing.

Other – Airport connectivity

- The FM sought an update on potential support to enable the three NI airports to remain open. Mike Brennan confirmed this issue was being pursued with DoT and that a business case had been submitted to HMT. Treasury had come back with further questions which were being addressed. These were mainly around why three airports were needed.
- Sue Gray advised of her own recent contacts on the matter and emphasised the importance of a timely solution given contracts which Belfast City Airport managers are hoping to sign next month to replace the flights lost when Flybe went into administration.

Action: Sue Gray (DoF) to liaise with Mike Brennan (DfI) today (8 April 2020) to ensure consistent messaging to Treasury regarding the importance of keeping the three airports open in Northern Ireland.

4. SIT-REP UPDATE

Anthony Harbinson took the meeting through the main issues arising from yesterday's Sit-Rep which were as follows:

- Excellent response rate to call for volunteers to assist with Easter school openings;

- Significant increase in fishing activity, with biggest prawn processing factory opening after Easter;
- 2,500 food parcels delivered on 7 April;
- Translink faces liquidity issues in the next month affecting organisation's ongoing viability;
- Increase in the number of flu-like illness confirmed in care homes in NI, 22 of which have been confirmed as COVID 19.
- PSNI Paramilitary Crime Task Force has warned of the risk of those looking to exploit communities during the global health emergency;
- Statistics on road traffic volumes are currently 48 hours behind;
- NI involvement in clinical trials in conjunction with QUB;
- Launch of the UK wide worker exchanges scheme commenced on 7 April;
- Possible announcement of pharmacy deliveries and domiciliary care guidance;
- DoH considering additional support needed for recipients of Direct Payments to ensure resilience and continuity of service provision;
- Revised guidance for care homes to issue this week;
- Economy Ministers views sought on structure of COVID-19 Tourism Response Group;
- Storage for circa 1,400 bodies is due to be in place by 17 April. Additional storage will be provided by 20 April if necessary.

5. LEGISLATION UPDATE

- Chris Stewart provided an update on the current position with the emergency legislative provision to support the COVID-19 response.
- The key issues under consideration are:
  - The regulations were being compared with those in the Republic of Ireland for consistency.
  - Changes to English regulations have been delayed so a review can be completed.
  - Clarification of whether driving to exercise is permissible.

Action: Chris Stewart (TEO) to submit a Policy Issues Paper to the Executive before the Executive Meeting on 10 April 2020.

6. MEMBER UPDATES

No members reported any issues requiring escalation to CCG.

In addition:

- Mark Walmsley advised that there had been a 49% increase in the number of house fires due to more people staying at home.

7. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

- Chris McNabb advised that new radio advertisements are being produced emphasising the importance of staying at home over Easter and the Bank Holiday. These are being produced today for transmission from Thursday 9 April.

Action: Chris McNabb (TEO) to develop a messaging strategy to avoid panic buying should supply chains and freight issues begin to develop traction.

8. AOB AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Date of next meeting

- 08:30, 9 April 2020, 5th Floor Conference Room, Block B, Castle Buildings.

Action: David Sterling (HOCS) to confirm the CCG rhythm for the Easter Bank Holiday weekend for tomorrow 11 April 2020.