

**Civil Contingency Group (COVID-19 Response) Meeting
Thursday 16 April 2020**

I&S

Note of Meeting

Attendees

David Sterling (Chair)
Arlene Foster - FM
Michelle O'Neill - dFM
Declan Kearney - JM
Gordon Lyons – 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
Aidan Jennings – NIFRS
Michael Graham - NIFRS
Michael Bloomfield - NIAS
Stephen Reid – Local Government
Joan McCaffrey – Local Government
Maria Jennings – Food Standards Agency
Lindy Cameron – NIO
Chris McNabb – EIS TEO
Hugh Widdis – DSO
NR TEO
Lesley Hogg - NI Assembly
NR NI Hub
Jane Holmes – NI Hub
NR NI Hub

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

2. COVID-19 - CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGNOSIS

Richard Pengelly (DoH) updated the meeting:

- To date there had been 2,088 confirmed cases in NI and 140 deaths.
- The Health Minister provided an update to the Executive yesterday on revised modelling figures, reflecting the lower than forecast numbers, which could be a sign of the positive impact of social distancing.

- However, concerns were raised on the effect this may have on any potential second surge of cases.
- Department of Health is working with Public Health England on the possible implementation in NI of the UK Health Minister's decision yesterday on allowing family members to attend relatives in care homes in relation to end of life. DoH will put proposals to NI Ministers once more information is available.

Action DoH: An update is to be provided to CCG on the application of the UK announcement in NI to allow relatives to spend time with family members in care homes who are close to end of life.

- Guidance to Funeral Directors on attendance of mourners at funerals has been agreed and will issue today.

3. ACTIONS REVIEW

David Sterling asked for updates on outstanding CCG actions:

- **CCG1504/01** - guidance for Funeral Directors issuing today.
- **CCG1401/01** – Peter May provided an update on PPE for funeral directors. He advised that DoH are unable to help and initial offers from DAERA had been deemed unsuitable. He had received further offers from DAERA which are under consideration. The fall-back position would be to open the temporary resting place at Kinnegar as a last resort.
- **CCG0804/06** - Sue Gray advised that DoF received the HMT letter with details of match funding proposals in relation to the airports. She said that DfT, DfE and DoF were finalising details including working through any state aid issues and hope to implement by the end of this week.
- **CCG/056** - Katrina Godfrey advised HMT have sent back more questions on this issue which DfI/DfE were working through as quick as possible.
- **CCG 1304/01** - Jill Minne advised that guidance to departments concerning Health and Safety requirements had issued.

David Sterling asked the meeting to note that the Executive has agreed to have a more in depth look at a number of Covid-19 issues. At tomorrow's Executive meeting, they will be considering both the current shielding arrangements and food security. The Monday Executive meeting will consider both the impact on the economy and the effect on care homes.

David went on to say that next week strategic discussions would begin on the next phase, to begin to plan for the relaxation of the lock down and the longer term recovery.

4. SIT-REP UPDATE

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

- Current infection and death figures are less severe than anticipated.
- Detailed charts added showing the monthly impact on the economy, likely to be more severe in April.
- Education Minister to make statement today on Examinations.
- In response to the reported increase in domestic violence and abuse, DoJ are reissuing their "See the Signs" campaign.
- Cases and deaths in care homes remains a very live issue.
- Limited reopening of some live stock markets.
- Testing for residents and workers in care homes.
- Chief Nursing Officer will be issuing guidance in response to media reports of nurses certifying deaths.

Syrian Refugees

- Junior Minister Kearney raised a query about Syrian refugees and the fact that since they have no access to bank accounts, 166 families in receipt of free school meals could not access these.
- Derek Baker advised that DE was aware of the issue and had been liaising directly with Home Office. It affects 166 children in 89 families and Home Office has agreed that DE could top up the Aspin cards the refugees have been issued with to include the full amount allocated for free school meals. DE are also working with DfC to get food delivered to such vulnerable families.

New NI Hub Portal

- David Sterling said that more data was collected each day than was identified in the Sitrep. A new portal will be set up to provide CCG members to access all data collated in response to the pandemic.

Action NI Hub: A portal is to be established to provide access to all data collated in response to the pandemic, including that not reported in the SitRep.

5. LEGISLATION UPDATE

- Chris Stewart advised that the Executive had completed its first review of the regulations and decided to continue them for a further three weeks.
- At the Executive meeting tomorrow, Ministers would only be asked to approve some minor amendments to the Regulations.
- The next formal review is due on 9 May and is expected to be a broader review to cover not just the immediate health issues but also the impact on the wider economy, including the agri-food sector.

Live Stock Markets

- Chris Stewart advised that the proposed limited reopening technically fell within the auction houses restriction under the regulations. Chris asked PSNI to be mindful of non-enforcement until the regulations had been amended to separate live stock markets from auction houses.

Recycling Centres

- Denis McMahon advised that DAERA has been engaging with councils on the issue of reopening of household recycling centres. The outcome of the meeting was that the majority of councils wished to keep the centres closed at this time to maintain social distancing, but would continue with kerbside collection.
- Minister Lyons said this issue will be debated at the Executive meeting tomorrow. He asked if the regulations at present would allow for members of the public to use recycling centres under accessing critical services, once they are allowed to reopen. Chris Stewart said that the current regulations are not broad enough to permit this, they would need to be amended to add all services provided by local councils.
- Stephen Reid said that when the issue was being considered it must involve the totality of the issue. Contractors and specialised transport needs to be available to remove the waste from the recycling centres once they are reopened or the centres would quickly see a large scale build-up of waste.

6. MEMBER UPDATES

- PSNI said that reported cases of domestic abuse have increased and are significantly higher than the normal weekly average. They are considering the issue.
- Maria Jennings updated the meeting that FSA will be asking the Health Minister today for a relaxation of district council health inspection guidance till the end of May, since most establishments are closed at present.
- Stephen Reid said that he was asked by the SOLACE meeting held yesterday to raise an issue directly with CCG. Councils are concerned about the loss of income from the closure of facilities and had raised this with the relevant departments but now wished to highlight this to CCG. The loss of income is in the region of £11million per month and that this was threatening the cash flow situation for some councils. SOLACE asked to have this issue prioritised. DfC and DoF advised they have been working on this issue.

Action DfC, DoF and Local Government: There are concerns regarding loss of income to councils due to the closure of facilities. Detailed costs to be assessed.

Action DfC and DoF: The issue of furlough arrangements not applying to the public sector is to be raised with HMT to help address loss of income for councils.

- Derek Baker asked the meeting to note that the Education Minister would be speaking to the Health Committee today concerning the awarding of grades to A'Level and GCSE students who should have sat exams this summer.
- Denis McMahon informed the meeting that DAERA is working with DFC on securing supermarkets slots for the vulnerable and those shielding.

7. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

- Chris McNabb (EIS) advised that the daily Press Conference today would be led by the Health Minister, Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Officer.

8. AOB AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- David Sterling advised the meeting that there would be no CCG meetings held on Saturday 18 April or Sunday 19 April. In addition no Sitrep would be prepared on Saturday 18 April. A Sitrep would be prepared as normal on Sunday 19 April.

Date of next meeting

- 08:30, 17 April 2020

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