

Feedback note of COBR Meeting – 16 April 2020 at 15.30hrs

In attendance via Zoom from NICS:

- FM and dFM
- Minister for Health NI
- JM Kearney
- CoS
- Perm Sec DoH (NI)
- CMO
- | |
|----|
| NR |
|----|
- Bernie Rooney

Joined meeting at 15.35hrs due to connection delays.

It was noted that the trend line of the curve demonstrated that the peak seemed to be flattening of the outbreak of Covid -19 within the community. The number of patients in hospital had, as anticipated in the projections peaked since lock down.

There was evidence that the public are, by enlarge, complying with social distancing measures across the 4 nations. It was acknowledged that the public are making significant personal sacrifices to support the NHS.

Sir Patrick Vallance reported that the latest data shows the peak has been reached and there is now a plateau. R is less than 1 which means epidemic is spreading at a slow place. The estimate is of between 0.5 and 1 and highlighted this is a working estimate. It was noted out that in some regions the R rate may be above 1, for example: care homes and certain hospitals across the geographical spread. It was noted that deaths for COVID 19 and demand for ICU bed are peaking, as anticipated.

Current SAGE advice is that there should be no change to social distancing measure and that they should remain in place. Work remains ongoing in relation to on design factors over a number of area including ventilation, testing and monitoring however, it was highlighted that time factors are involved. Overall, sage reported that the situation is as good as could be expected and stressed the need to avoid a second peak.

First Minister (AF) – agreed that based on clear advice from SAGE she agreed that there is a need to continue with social distancing measures and there should be no change to requirements at this point. She noted that any change may result in an increase the significant risk of a second peak. FM said that she was clear that it was necessary to avoid any risk of pushing the rate of growth up. She highlighted her

concerns about the NI economy and commented that any second outbreak would have a further negative economic impact. The recommendation was for no change welcomed and FM agreed that it was important not to undo the considerable progress made to date or to waste the sacrifices of the public. FM stated that there is a need to build infrastructure for testing, tracking and monitoring to ramp up and increase Health service capacity.

Ministers noted that there will be further pressure from the media on relaxing and lifting measures. It was re-iterated that careful handling was essential to ensure transparency and clear accurate information is communicated to the public. It was agreed that there is a need to be clear on communications.

SofS Health -Matt Hancock – agreed with all of the points made and confirmed that the advice of the scientists had been followed throughout the epidemic. Evidence showed there were economic impact risks if lock down was lifted too early and there is a need to get testing and tracing in place to help manage the situation. It was agreed that overall the health and wellbeing of the nation is important and the government had managed to get a clear message to the public who are complying.

Chancellor - fully supported the position and stated that this is the only way to get the virus under control. He reiterated that it is important for Ministers to remain united with a single message.

FM Scotland - agreed with the analysis and advice from SAGE which had been consistent and reinforced by the medical team in Scotland. It was also reinforced that there is a need to align as much as possible to develop a clear framework. There should be processes to set out how measures impact on NHS capacity, testing capacity and measuring capacity. It was noted that individuals needed to collectively share as much data as possible to help manage the pandemic and that all 4 nations should share the same.

FM Wales – agreed with the line so far but queried how best to make use of the extended 3 week period to develop a 4 nations recovery plan. He mentioned that the tele-conf meeting with the CDL the previous day had been very useful and that a weekly CDL meeting would be helpful way of taking this work forward. He reinforced the need for the 4 nations to work closely together and align communications in so far as possible.

FM NI – thanked the CDL for the very useful tele-call and agreed that it was helpful. She acknowledged that the information was fed into the Cabinet Office and appreciated the opportunity to share information. FM confirmed her support for the SAGE advice and also that the UK position should continue to be based on SAGE

advice and evidence based. She also said that there was a need to be cognisant of the impact on the economy and of the need to consider the recovery of the economy.

dFM NI – welcomed that the messaging is working and felt there was a need to reinforce the need to have a very clear plan on testing and tracing going forward.

FS assured DfM that was the case and that considerable work was ongoing in these areas and thanked all Ministers and civil servants for working collaboratively. He stated that there was a need to set out collective criteria, including a roadmap to help the way forward.

Mayor of London - felt there was a need to agree criteria, as soon as possible, that would inform the position in relation to lifting measures in relation to lockdown. It was noted that planning is also necessary to ensure that supply chains are in place across sectors.

Mayor of London also proposed that consideration should also be given to wearing of face coverings in public places, where necessary, for example: individuals using public transport.

Mayor of London also called for a national approach which was 'optional and recommended' rather than a 'mandatory approach' to show public that there is 'light at the end of the tunnel' a positive future. He acknowledged that there had been good progress but it was acknowledged that it was not yet clear the level of risk of another outbreak.

Sir Patrick Valence advised that the issue of face coverings is actively under consideration and that advice will be available in due course.

CMO - advised that there had been some debate around the benefits of face masks and advised that it is important to avoid competition between health requirement and wider needs. He said that he did not wish to comment further until wider considerations are concluded.

The Home Secretary reiterated that the main points agreed were:

- 100 percent agreement that it is positive that the R rate appears to be less than 1;
- agreed that social distancing measures will remain in place until the end of the month;
- reiterate Government guidance to public;
- advised be strong with media and to push back on being drawn on relaxing measures in place – continue to provide accurate information and articulate

key messages in a consistent manner to help provide information to the public;

- clear point to make to the public that Government are not prepared to sacrifice the positive progress made to date; and
- the need to monitor the compliance rates in so far as possible.

The FS thanked police for how well they have discharged their responsibilities to date.

It was noted that there were lessons to learn from the COVID-19 experience. It was noted as an example that Germany has taken a view on community level transmission but it was pointed out that nobody really knows and asked that issues are discussed.

LPP

The FMS came back in on the point that she intended to talk about the lockdown being for 'another three weeks' based on SAGE advice and that of her advisers. She pointed out that she wanted to be clear that there isn't a difference in substance.

UKG advised that they are going to refer to SAGE advice and use the terminology in the Press Conference later that day as 'end of the month'.

FS thanked CDL and Cabinet Office for all of their work to date.

CDL thanked civil servants and employees at City Hall who have been working extremely hard. He also reiterated the importance of the common key messaging and collaborative working. He thanked Matt Hancock and all health officials across the NHS for the approach to date.

FS confirmed that communications and guidance needs to be clear to maintain the momentum.

The FS Summarised the actions:

- Agreed 4 Nations approach to keep measures in place.
- PDHD and Sage should work together to come to an agreed position.

The meeting was closed.

Bernie Rooney

17 April 2020

Cc

FM and dFM

HoCS

COS

Karen Pearson

Chris Stewart

NR

Chris McNabb

Neill Jackson

Deirdre Griffith

Carol Morrow