

EXECUTIVE COVID CRISIS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY 25 MARCH 2020 AT 10.00AM
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS, MEMBERS' DINING ROOM

FM, dFM, JM Lyons, JM Kearney, Min Murphy, Min Hargey, Min Mallon (via dial-in)
Min Long (via dial-in)

David Sterling, Anthony Harbinson

1. Update from meeting with CMO

The update from DoH was reviewed.

It was agreed that the update on the review of commercial tests by the national virology team should be chased, and that Richard Pengelly should report to CCG on 26 March.

A perceived discrepancy between the capacity for testing and the actual number of tests being used was raised. Clarity was requested on when full capacity will be used.

It was noted that 165 prison officers are now out of work, which is having a direct impact on the prison regime. NIPS have been able to run prisons so far, with cooperation from prisoners, but are concerned about getting to a point where prisoners are locked up for 24 hours.

Police are keen to test officers as quickly as possible and there is a need to consider other frontline services for testing.

There was a request for figures on healthcare workers out sick

It was confirmed that NI's efforts in sourcing testing and PPE are in addition to the national effort.

It was noted that there is a joint working group set up with CPD/BSO to cover all the public sector.

Updates were requested on the MoU with RoI, the use of offers from sporting organisations and the inventory of critical medical supplies.

There was a discussion on the guidance for domiciliary care workers. It was noted that the CNO position was that domiciliary care workers don't need PPE until they encounter a patient displaying symptoms, at which point they should

be provided with PPE. There was a query as to who makes the assessment that a patient is displaying symptoms.

2. Actions from previous meetings

Actions from previous meetings were reviewed.

There was a discussion on action 11 in relation to business grants. LPS hold details for 9k businesses, and have asked for other businesses to submit their details. There was a discussion on whether or not to wait to release the grants until a substantial number of accounts had been received or to proceed with those details currently available. It was agreed that grants should issue to the 9k businesses for which LPS currently hold bank details.

Chris McNabb was asked to investigate an NI text service/Facebook message service.

Chris McNabb was asked to develop a mechanism for MLAs to flag questions and influence what was going on the portal.

It was noted that the Cabinet Office was sending letter to all UK citizens and a separate letter to all over 70s. The letter to vulnerable people is to issue today.

There was a discussion about a dedicated helpline for elderly people. There was concern that this could lead to confusion if there are multiple numbers for multiple different groups.

There was a query about a single point of contact/lead official on volunteering to help. It was confirmed that offers should be fed through the DOCs to be addressed in the Hub.

Chris Stewart was asked to provide an update on key retail and services. It was agreed that there was clarity on non-essential retail but not on manufacturing and construction.

It was suggested that if companies don't comply, they should be named.

There was a discussion about the potential closing of the food industry, including walkouts at Moy Park and unions being concerned about safety. There was agreement on a need to find a sensible way through to keep the food industry going.

There was a discussion on off licences. It was noted that without access to alcohol, alcoholics could suffer withdrawal symptoms or be in danger by detoxing without proper support. It was also noted that the closure of off licences could put increased pressure on supermarkets. It was noted that there was an issue with licencing laws here compared to GB.

There was a discussion about workplace canteens and builders' merchants

There was a query about whether lone workers such as dog walkers, grass cutters etc could continue to work. It was noted that such people provided a service to those who were vulnerable and as lone workers would not be contravening the social distancing directive.

It was also queried as to whether pest control could be termed as an essential business, and it was requested that there should be a discussion with councils on ensuring essential pest control while avoiding face to face contact.

It was noted that certain accommodation was essential for the homeless

It was noted that there is a need for people in the sectors to read guidance and judge what is the task and is it essential.

3. Sitrep

The majority of key issues in the sitrep had already been discussed, showing the process is working and flowing up to ECCMC.

There was a discussion on the resilience of critical national infrastructure, e.g. the electricity grid control room. It was noted that there is a backup option for the grid to be run from Dublin.

4. Proposed events for today

There was positive feedback from the Junior Ministers' background briefing for media, which will continue.

It was noted that the PHA are now producing granular info on a number of cases and clusters, including geography.

5. Dignity and respect for the deceased and bereaved

It was noted that this was challenging area that no one ever wanted to be involved in. Some thinking had already been done in pandemic flu contingency planning.

There was a specific issue for DoJ in the development of a temporary resting facility but there was a wider issue in managing potential wide ranging changes to the way societies and communities grieve.

Julie Harrison delivered the DoJ presentation.

There is a need to think about the whole process depending on where someone dies e.g. at home, in hospital, in a care home, in custody or on the street if they are homeless.

Arrangements are being put in place for where normal capacity for dealing with deaths is exceeded.

Consideration is being given to how many people will die and at what rate. This does not just include those who will die directly from COVID 19 but also those who would have died anyway and indirect deaths.

The emergency legislation included a duty to consider religious practices/last wishes in respect of burial/cremation etc. This is not a duty to comply but every effort will be made to respect community sensitivities as far as possible. There is a desire to minimise stress and anxiety at a difficult time for those who are suffering while at the same time protecting public health.

Engagement was continuing with church leaders, funeral directors and local government and it was agreed that it was important for churches to undertake conditioning activities.

A request for military assistance had been submitted to allow for the use of the base. It is important to be conscious of sensitivities around using a military base, so signage will be removed and the site will be rebranded completely as a temporary resting facility.

There was a discussion on financial support for burial/cremation. The Communities Minister agreed to review and report on what was available.

The importance of receiving the outstanding guidance for funeral directors was emphasised.

It was agreed that this would not be announced publically at this time so as to not alarm the public. DoJ will continue to manage the conversation carefully.

6. AOB

It was agreed the Junior Ministers should join the CCG meeting as observers

It was agreed that the Cabinet Office dashboard should be circulated to all Ministers.

It was agreed to trial a remote meeting using videoconferencing technology.