

EXECUTIVE COVID CRISIS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
TUESDAY 24 MARCH 2020 AT 10.00AM
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS, MEMBERS' DINING ROOM

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

David Sterling, Anthony Harbinson

1. Health Issues

Minister Swann provided an update on health issues.

- By the end of the week there will be 1100 tests per day. Testing will cover the same profile – those with medical conditions, vulnerable groups and health staff who are self-isolating. The police will start being tested.
- Stockpiling of PPE in areas of the health service is now being managed. There have been some incidences of theft of PPE. The narrative that PPE is an issue is fuelling pressure.
- DoH are sourcing a number of ventilators and reprofiling the health service. The use of the Mater as the Covid centre is the first step.
- DoH's IT systems nearly crashed from people seeking clarity following the PM's announcement – there is a need for messaging from other departments to reduce pressure on DoH.

Minister Swann left the meeting to move legislation in the chamber. Lourda Geoghegan remained in the meeting to answer further questions.

Testing

It was noted that sporting bodies are volunteering stadia, premises and staff to assist in testing. DoH agreed to report back on engagement with sporting bodies.

DoH has had numerous offers of support and trusts are actively using support. DoH are plugged into the national discussions about other means of testing. It is believed that the PM will make an announcement in coming days of larger scale testing of healthcare workers.

The CMO is involved in the expert review of commercial tests –it was agreed that a conversation between the CMO and Ministers should happen today to get an update on health issues.

PPE

DoF are working with DoH to source PPE. The number of 1100 is what is being ramped up to currently, not a target. DoH agreed to outline the plan for testing.

It was noted that the lack of availability of PPE could lead to increased panic in society, so it is important to prepare for a public narrative on a crisis around the availability of PPE.

Different specifications are required for different emergency services, and these were being sent to Hunter Apparel. It was noted that there is a particular challenge around dentists, opticians and optometrists. There is also a need for PPE for domiciliary care workers and some educational workers.

The police are trying to source their own PPE, assisted by DoF.

DoH were also asking for assistance in securing PPE, and CPD were working with them on their specification.

DoF agreed to provide an update on timeframes and placing of orders, including communications once the order was secured.

Ventilators

NI currently has 139 with 40 on order and due in a matter of weeks. Spike 2 weeks behind London.

There was a discussion on the use of equipment that falls short of full ventilation. DoH are engaging across all options including non-invasive ventilation and agreed to provide an update.

Medicines

There was a discussion on the availability of medicines. It was noted that London may have shortage of some drugs in coming weeks, but we have no shortages at the moment. The first contingency is to use the second preferred option for each drug. It was emphasised that we should be reactive rather than proactive before we hit the peak, and should order additional drugs. The CPO is engaging on this and will provide an update on medicines and an inventory of critical medical supplies.

It was noted that health contingency plans were based on an assumed compliance of 75% with the government's restrictions. It was noted that

planning should be on the basis of a RWCS and that it would be preferable to have unused equipment and medicines rather than not enough.

There was a discussion on police enforcement powers following the PM's announcement Chris Stewart was asked to get a line to take in advance of the press conference.

It was noted that DoJ don't want people arrested and brought into custody for non-compliance with restrictions, as this would put added strain on the prison service.

It was noted that there are currently 120 prison officers out, and this will pose a problem if the number increases significantly. There is a need to test prison officers and prisoners to contain any spread.

The meeting went into Executive Committee mode in order to consider an urgent Executive decision on additional measures for social distancing

1. Executive decision on Social Distancing - Additional Measures

It was noted that advice to business on key workers is not clear, particularly in relation to construction and manufacturing.

There was a discussion on the definition of a key worker, which considered public sector broadcasters, construction and manufacturing workers, self-employed and off licences.

In relation to construction workers several issues were discussed, including social distancing in work vans and canteens, the impact on sub-contractors, the need for construction workers to continue working to make sites safe before stopping and breach in contract rules.

It was agreed that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister should seek clarity from the UK Government on financial support for the self-employed.

It was agreed that the Executive should adopt the list of non-essential retail and consider the implications for other sectors.

Minister Mallon noted that she would consider making car parks free of charge.

The meeting returned to ECCMC mode and continued with the agenda

2. Actions from previous meetings

The actions from previous meetings were reviewed.

3. Sitrep

Anthony Harbinson presented the sitrep. It was agreed that a streamlined version would be presented at the next meeting.

Chris McNabb was asked to develop a mechanism on the portal to flag and answer MLA questions.

4. Proposed events for today

DoF and DfE will discuss the difficulties involved in the 10k grant to businesses.

Chris McNabb was asked to arrange sign language interpreters for the press conferences.

5. Vulnerable people

There was a discussion on Minister Hargey's presentation on vulnerable people.