

FROM: Anne McNally

DATE: 9 June 2020

TO: 1. Dr Michael McBride, CMO
2. Robin Swann MLA, Minister

SSUB-XXXX-2020:COVID-19 DoH Emergency Operation Centre Arrangements

SUMMARY:

ISSUE:	This submission seeks your approval to scale back the DoH Emergency Operation Centre's Covid-19 response arrangements in line with the arrangements that have been agreed for the NI Hub and the continued de-escalation across the UK
TIMING:	Routine
PRESENTATIONAL ISSUES	None likely. Cleared with Press Office 9/6/20 (NR).
FOI IMPLICATIONS	Disclosable.
EXECUTIVE REFERRAL:	Not applicable.
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:	Not applicable.
LEGISLATION IMPLICATIONS:	Not applicable.
SPECIAL ADVISOR COMMENTS:	To be completed.
RECOMMENDATION:	It is recommended that you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> agree that the EOC arrangements can be scaled back to a 'soft stand-up'; agree that the frequency of the Health Gold SitRep can reduce in line with the SitRep requirements for the NI Hub; and

- agree that the Gold-Silver structure be stood down.
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Introduction

1. In recognition that there is no longer an incident or emergency to manage, it is proposed that the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) scales back to a 'soft stand-up', i.e. that we maintain a watching brief over the Covid-19 situation but that many elements of the formal EOC are stood down.
2. The EOC would continue to provide SitReps in line with the NI Hub reporting rhythm as well as daily data reports seven days per week for the immediate future.

Background

3. Health Gold Command consists of two key elements; the Strategic Cell and the EOC:
 - the **Strategic Cell** is a strategic decision-making group which is usually chaired by the Chief Medical Officer and comprising key policy leads from across the Department; and
 - the **EOC** which is responsible for managing information flows; producing SitReps and maintaining a watching brief of the incident particularly through monitoring SitReps from Health Silver and NIFRS .
4. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the EOC fully mobilised in the Department on 27 January 2020.
5. During the peak of the response the EOC operated on site in Block C of Castle Buildings 7 days per week from 07:00 to 19:00 but has recently scaled back to 09:00 – 18:30 Monday to Friday with a virtual EOC at weekends. The EOC currently provides:
 - input to the NI SitRep produced by the NI Hub (Monday – Friday);
 - DoH Gold SitRep (Monday – Friday);
 - data to inform DHSC and Cabinet Office SitReps (daily);
 - monitoring of SitReps to identify issues to escalate (daily).

6. As management of the response to Covid-19 has become embedded across the Department, the workload in the EOC has markedly reduced. Stepping down the function further would allow many of the staff currently employed in the EOC to return to their normal business areas.

NI Hub arrangements

7. The NI Hub is the NI Operations Room responsible for collating and disseminating information, coordinating multi-departmental/agency activities and planning. The NI Hub filters and escalates issues to CCG(NI), the Executive or the UK Government as required, as well as providing any strategic support to Departments' Emergency Operations Centres (including media and communications). It also tracks and manages the wider response to monitor the cumulative effects of these impacts across NI.
8. The NI Hub has begun to scale back and now only operates Monday - Friday with further changes from this week as follows:
 - Week commencing 8 June, staff numbers will reduce but SitReps will continue Monday – Friday.
 - Week commencing 15 June, further reduction in staff and SitReps will reduce to three per week on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.
9. This pattern, and the frequency of SitReps, will be reviewed again on 22 June and it is expected that there may be a further reduction to one SitRep per week from July.

Gold-Silver arrangements

10. SitReps from Health Silver and NIFRS continue to be received Monday – Friday. However, there has been a continuing reduction in issues for escalation and Gold-Silver meetings have decreased to one per week. It is proposed that Silver and NIFRS SitReps be reduced to mirror those of the NI Hub and that meetings are stood down. Reporting or meetings outside these arrangements would be by exception.

UK arrangements

11. Across the UK there has been a similar reduction in scale of the response. While we expect to continue with daily data reporting for the immediate future, DHSC have advised that they will soon move from 7 day a week SitReps to production of their SitRep 5 days a week, Sunday – Thursday, and are considering further reductions in reporting.

Proposed EOC arrangements

12. As announced today, a new temporary management board, the 'Management Board for Rebuilding HSC Services' will be established for a period of two years (to be reviewed thereafter). This board should replace the current Strategic Cell.
13. The EOC will maintain its readiness to deal with any further wave(s) of Covid-19 which develop into a serious or catastrophic emergency and/or any concurrent civil contingency emergencies and will continue in ensuring preparedness for any necessary escalation to full operating capability. This will include work on lessons learned from the first phase of the pandemic and continued activity to build and maintain resilience.
14. The EOC will also continue in 'soft stand-up' mode to provide the daily data reports on deaths, cases, tests and hospital information. The data on the existing Covid-19 dashboard, PCR SARS-COV-2 testing updates and Care Home updates will continue to be provided through normal reports. It is proposed that Gold SitReps reduce in line with NI Hub SitReps, i.e. to three per week from 15 June and to one per week from July. Any issues which require escalation would of course be reported to the Private Office by exception.

Recommendation

15. It is recommended that you:
 - agree that the EOC arrangements can be scaled back to a 'soft stand-up';
 - agree that the frequency of the Health Gold SitRep can reduce in line with the SitRep requirements for the NI Hub; and
 - agree that the Gold-Silver structure be stood down.

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