

Executive Covid-19 Taskforce

Minutes of the meeting on 11th January 2022 at 8.00am via zoom

Attending: Jayne Brady

**Peter May
Mike Brennan
Tracy Meharg
Colum Boyle
Denis McMahon
Richard Pengelly
Mark Browne
Karen Pearson
Peter Luney
Jane Holmes
Doreen McClintock**

NR

Apologies: Chris McNabb

Agenda

1. Minutes from 4th January

Minutes were agreed.

2. Protect

Richard discussed the focus on hospital numbers which are still climbing.

Richard also noted the change to rules for self-isolating following a positive lateral flow test and capacity for PCR testing. Anticipation that this will be a short-live period of pressure.

- UKG proposed consultation on further reducing self-isolation period

Peter Luney advised that DAs have not been directly engaged with UK on this issue but sense is that none of the devolved regions are minded to follow but recognised that there may be pressure to. Will be guided by the science/data but await UK decision.

- Update in relation to engagement with SOLACE

Karen updated on recent meeting with SOLACE following which it was agreed that comms would be refreshed. Enforcement was discussed

and weekly local government engagement will continue. Jayne noted recent engagement with the NI Engagement forum.

Peter Luney discussed current restrictions on hospitality and how this reads across to seated events – noted the rules pertaining to remaining seated/table service and the differing rules for licenced and non-licenced. Feedback indicates difficulty around operating the licensed model. This will require clarity to aid economic viability but will need to be balanced with health considerations. Options will be set out in advice to the Executive around licensed/unlicensed operating models.

Removal of restrictions – Peter also spoke on the anticipated short tenure of the current Omicron wave and the need to plan for a suitable exit strategy which may include baseline measures.

DfE

Mike Brennan discussed feedback from various sectors and impact on each - there are mixed reports. Reports on staff absences do not point to any significant issues at this stage. **[Action: link in on future Engagement Forum/Labour Relations Agency]**

DoF

Column Boyle advised on the delay to distributing support funding and work on the definition of a nightclub. Colum also advised on some lobbying for support from the hotel sector.

DfC

Tracy Meharg advised that events support schemes have just been launched; absenteeism will be monitored. Notable increase in applications (from 30 – 300 daily) for the self-isolation grant with DfC staff repurposed to respond. A further update on schemes as they roll out.

Mike Brennan left the meeting

3. Adherence

Peter Luney updated on progress and plans around the use of face coverings and the difficulties around proving exemption via the GP model. Advice/options will be provided to the Executive this week to provide clarity in

relation to strengthening the use of face coverings. There was discussion around models in other jurisdictions and an update on engagement with the disability sector to inform options for the Executive this week.

Peter May reported that the adherence position remains steady; good compliance with the Covid cert; indications that there is better use of face coverings but more data will follow. Discussion is taking place around what more can be done around communications for the longer term. A further meeting on ventilation will take place this week.

4. Communications (Chris McNabb)

There was no update in Chris's absence.

5. AOB

- **Update on Assembly debate on school COVID pressures**

Mark provided an update on the recent debate on air filters in schools and staffing pressures. The DE Minister has set out all measures which have been taken which are in keeping with the public health advice, including advice on ventilation and flexibility around uniform policy. Mark advised that advice from SAGE does not currently support the use of air filters but this will remain under review.

On staffing pressures, Mark advised that the DE Minister has put a range of mitigations including a call for retired teachers to help support absences.

Jayne Brady suggested that it would be helpful to include school attendance for staff and students in this week's ECT update.

- **Update in relation to civil contingencies**

Karen and Doreen indicated that working from home and changes to self-isolation have not led to any significant issues and provided an overview across a number of sectors. Most sectors are managing without activating business continuity plans. Possible cumulative impact across a range of areas is also under active consideration.

In terms on the longer term planning, Karen discussed outline plans for managing current pressures and the plan for living with Covid.