

NI Hub Capability Review

6 - 10 April 2020

Executive Summary

Introduction

The NI Hub COS requested a quick capability review of the NI Hub was conducted over the period 6 to 10 April 2020 to assess its readiness at Initial Operating Capability (IOC) and its readiness to move to Full Operating Capability (FOC).

The NI Command, Control and Coordination (C3) COVID-19 (C19) Concept of Operations (ConOps) ver 0.1, dated April 2020 sets out how the NI C3 system will operate during the current C19 response period, in order to manage the impacts and civil contingencies. The ConOps describes the components that make up the NI C3 system, including the NI Hub and was used as the point of reference. IOC was delivered on 3 April 2020, with a target to achieve FOC from 10 April. Planning is also underway for a final version of FOC (FOC 2) which will be virtual, allowing the C3 structures including the Hub to be run in 'full lockdown' conditions.

The agreed definition of Hub FOC is: *A self reliant and resilient Hub that is capable of working across all 3 shifts, at 2 sites (3 suites), supported by IT and technology with information flows and processes (top to bottom, left to right) that are clearly understood and used in a consistent manner. (FOC 2: All of the above but conducted remotely).*

Due to the scale, complexity and expected duration of the impacts from C19, it is necessary for the C3 structure to operate over extended days and over weekends in order to support 24/7 working across NI and the wider UK response for a significant period of time. On 18 March 2020, when the COS took up post, the Hub was manned by a skeleton staff working normal office hours. In the subsequent 3-4 weeks a huge amount has been achieved, in very testing circumstances, to identify and mobilise sufficient, suitable volunteers to fill three shifts that are operating over extended days at 2 separate sites supported by IT and technology.

Executive Summary cont..

While conducting this review, the draft report containing the findings of the DOCs Effectiveness Review (dated 6 April 2020) was released. The conclusions and a number of the key findings have a direct link to the NI Hub; copied here for ease of reference.

Conclusions

- *A huge amount of progress has been made in a short space of time, with many of those in key leadership roles having come to C3 in only the last few weeks.*
- *The loss of corporate memory since EU Exit design has had a significant impact on the ability to deliver a fully joined up system.*
- *The C3 system is not yet functioning as a single unit; the hub and DOCs are operating as distinct entities:*
 - *The quality of information being provided to it by each of the DOCs to inform shared situational awareness, and corporate decision making, is inconsistent;*
 - *This creates difficulties in providing insight and connectivity of issues and actions between departments;*
 - *As such there is a clear and critical disconnect between two key parts of the C3 structure, which is detrimental to its own operational effectiveness.*

Key findings

- *To date there has been no feedback from the NI Hub on the quality of the DOC SitReps; in addition, all DOCs have expressed concern about a lack of communication from the Hub more generally;*
- *The critical role and responsibilities of the LOs are not fully understood across the C3 structure;*
- *Currently there is a lack of DOC to DOC communication which appears to be hindered by a lack of access to an up-to-date corporate C3 contact list;*
- *The DOCS are not currently mirroring the NI Hub shift pattern, in particular at weekends, however skeleton staff are in place for each DOC during these times.*
- *For the majority of DOCs, they are resourced by a small number of experienced staff but a larger number of inexperienced staff who require, or would benefit from training.*

Executive Summary cont..

Aim. This report aims to identify and make recommendations to remediate both the systemic issues identified across the C3 structure, as well as a series of specific issues and recommendations for the NI Hub.

Conclusions

A huge amount of progress has been made in the development of the hub in the last three weeks; at a time when it is operating, under significant pressure, in a live environment.

There are a number of capability gaps, mainly centred around training (individual and collective), operational processes and communications (internal and external). A significant number of the actions required to close these gaps, many of which are well known, are straight forward and could be completed before the end of the month.

The structure of the hub is fit for purpose and sufficient volunteers have been found for the fourth (purple) shift. The real estate meets the requirement and the IT capability and connectivity improved throughout the week and is set to further improve in the short term, as is the logistics strand of work.

Key findings

- The NI C3 COVID-19 ConOps and SOPs need to be distributed across the C3 system and their importance highlighted, and where necessary explained;
- the C3 system will be further strengthened when the Hub starts to produce a DownRep and instigates regular engagement with the DOCs. This might take the form of a regular FL and C3 leads type meeting;
- an up-to-date corporate C3 contact list would be a very useful tool and should be distributed and maintained across the C3 system;
- an additional way to strengthen C3 would be to explain the role and responsibilities of the LOs across the structure, emphasising (re-emphasising) the importance of the role needing to be filled by volunteers of a suitable grade and experience;

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Executive Summary cont..

- training should be rolled out across the DOCs as soon as practicable;
- the processes associated with producing the SitRep must continue to be improved;
- Ops Coord should continue to focus on improving their knowledge and skills of the processes they are required to use and manage;
- the collaborative knowledge wall should start to be used in the Hub and across the wider C3 system ASP;
- the Hub BCP should be circulated, explained and exercised at the earliest opportunity; and
- the Hub would be further strengthened by having a dedicated 'communication cell'.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the NI Hub COS and Functional Leads should **note** the conclusion and key findings of this review. and **agree to**:

- action the key findings;
- the need to identify and train a suitable replacement to fill the COS role should that become necessary at any point throughout the response period;
- start the process of discussing how the Hub will interact with those officials responsible for recovery planning;
- start to plan how to maintain readiness of the C3 structure post this response period; legacy NI C3.

and **agree in principle** that external surge support may still be required during this response period.

Next Steps. It is proposed that Mark Byers and Dave Hall attend next week's FLT meetings to offer further advice and guidance if required and then at a convenient point during w/c 20 April, join the Hub leadership team to conduct a stocktake of the C3 system.

Gaps

The following table(s) allocate a RAG rating against each strand of work and set out the gaps identified to achieve FOC.

Rating	Definition
Red	C3 level is not functioning effectively with significant issues pending and urgent support is required
Amber	C3 level is functioning at risk with issues that need resolving as a priority
Green	C3 level is functioning at acceptable levels with some minor issues that are manageable

RAG Overview by Strand of Work:	
1. Staffing (personnel)	A
2. Structures	A
3. Training	R/A
4. Operational Processes	R
5. ICT/Connectivity	A
6. Real Estate and Security	G
7. Logistics	A
8. Communications (internal and external)	R
9. Maintaining Readiness; legacy NI C3	Not yet started

Gaps cont..

	RAG	Narrative and Actions
1. Staffing (personnel)		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The NICS HR COVID-19 Hub is:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• aware of the Hub staffing requirement and is in the process of identifying suitable individuals; and• managing the welfare policies associated with NICS staff involved in the C19 response.• Two further shifts (purple and pink) of volunteers need to be identified, allocated to an appropriate role and trained.• There are a significant number of new volunteers that are learning on the job.• There is lack of visibility regarding which named individual is on which shift. A document detailing which volunteer, by role is on which shift would be a useful tool for the leadership team.• A second COS should be identified and trained.• Do C3 volunteers need to be identified as a priority for testing?

Gaps cont..

	RAG	Narrative and Actions
2. Structures		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Hub structure needs to be amended to include the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional Leads (FL) – these 7 posts are 1:1 and not 5:1; • outcome of the decision relating to the proposal to create a Communications Cell (Media currently shown as 2 posts); • secretariat staff that are allocated to support the Executive (ECCMC) – these 2 posts are 1:1; • PMO posts. It should also be made clear if these posts are 1:1 ratio and 'lived' for a period during the response; • Support services posts have increased to 4 on a 1:1 ratio (with someone on call over the weekend); • COS PA post, 1:1 ratio. • Currently the Hub is utilising consultancy support to provide analytical support to the SitRep. There is an aspiration to replace this external support with NISRA personnel, however it is not yet clear if it will be practicable for NISRA statisticians to be trained and build up a comparable network of contacts to takeover the analytical roles. Early thinking suggests the SitRep cell may need to be increased by 4 posts. • The recovery phase is starting to be thought about and officials are being identified to fill 'Recovery planning' roles. How will these staff interact with the Hub; will they provide a LO to the Hub or does the Hub need to provide a LO to that team etc?

Gaps cont..

	RAG	Narrative and Actions
3. Training		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The FL volunteers have recently been assigned to a role and need to complete training. Some of the FL have no previous experience of the NI C3 structure.• 21 of the LOs have been trained and a further 9 are scheduled to attend training next week.• Some volunteers are interpreting roles differently.• The EY training team have started the process of validating training and some of the FLs have been involved in this activity.• Volunteers will need some training or at least some time to become familiar with the differences between the applications in Microsoft Office and the GSuite.• Once the purple shift has been mobilised and trained there will be scope to complete additional collective training for the blue, red and yellow shifts.• Re FOC 2: Working from Home (WfH) is likely to require some additional training. Trials have commenced and are due to commence next week.

Gaps cont..

	RAG	Narrative and Actions
4. Operational Processes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rhythm of CO meetings (COBR and MIGs) has not yet settled. This has a tendency to cause confusion. <p>CCG(NI)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is blurring of lines of accountability between CCG and the Executive, with FM, dFM and their junior Mins attending the CCG(NI). It is not clear how their presence is impacting on operational decision making. <p>SitRep:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The DOCS use the same template (Word) but it is different from the NI SitRep (Power Point). The CONOPs only includes an example of the NI SitRep. The SitRep template is very difficult to use at speed. Quality, consistency and timeliness of the SitRep is a real issue due to the volume of information coming from the DOCs and the challenge function tends to fall off, due to time pressure, towards the end of the day. Live issues are proving difficult to report and there is a good deal of scope for interpreting issues, priority decisions and recent actions etc Is the SitRep the strategic tool 'we' think it is and is it helping to inform decision making? Has the Hub confirmed it meets the needs of HOCS, CCG and the Executive? The SitRep should remains under constant review (as is currently the case).

Gaps cont..

	RAG	Narrative and Actions
4. Operational Processes cont..		<p>DownRep:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Hub is not producing a DownRep. This is frustrating for the DOCs. <p>Data for CO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The provision of data requested by CO is working well. (Each morning, via the LO, DOCs are sent a blank SitRep template, the previous NI SitRep, actions from CCG(NI) and a spreadsheet of the data required by CO). There is a distinct lack of understanding of the NI C3 CONOPS and SOPs. Information flows are not being followed. These are key documents and need to be shared across the full C3 system. A corporate C3 directory has not been produced and issued across the C3 structure. File plan is being developed for G-suite. A 'carbon copy' should be created in HPRM ready to receive a data cut. Circulation and distribution lists need to be shared across the Hub and wider C3. Ops Coord should consider conducted a short stand up a couple of times a day with the LOs. 3 Ops Coord teams have been operating in different ways, using two different versions of the actions Log. WfH SOPs will need to be produced. Ops Coord own the SOPs and may need some short notice surge capacity to ensure SOPs are being produced and managed efficiently. There is a challenge for all involved in C3 to use the SOPs and consciously make a change, when required so that consistency is maintained as much as possible. Coordination of WGs needs to be further improved.

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Gaps cont..

	RAG	Narrative and Actions
5. ICT/Connectivity		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting the Hub using collaboration tools is critical. (expanding out to the DOCS as soon as practicable). • IT skills, knowledge and confidence levels are very mixed. • The knowledge wall is not being used and shared with DOCS. Comment: this is set to change next week. • Use of the collaborative knowledge wall will take some time to bed in.
	RAG	Narrative and Actions
6. Real estate and security		<p>Real Estate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good wood House and Clare House are in the process of being scoped as alternative sites for the yellow and blue shift to 'manage out' some connectivity issues associated with the Danske Bank site not having the same IT architecture used across the NICS estate <p>Security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health security: There are some personnel that cut across shifts.
	RAG	Narrative and Actions
7. Logistics		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hub support services staff have started to arrive in post and from w/c 13 Apr will start to take over the HR work from PWC. • The first draft of the Hub BCP is being developed and will need to be shared and exercised at the earliest opportunity.

Gaps cont..

	RAG	Narrative and Actions
8. Communications (internal and external)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a clear gap in the communications strand of work. Comms is not represented in the FLT as EIS does not have the capacity to provide. A draft discussion document has been produced by PWC that recommends the creation of Communications Cell (CC) within the Hub; to operate in many respects, under the same approach as the other LOs. • The CC would be responsible for focusing on three key tasks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining close links with EIS to provide support where the Media Ops team require it and 'heads-up' to emerging issues. • Providing communication focussed horizon scanning and thematic analysis of issues emerging from external stakeholders. • Support efficiency and consistency of internal communication with NICS staff via the HR Hub and LOs. • The importance of maintaining timely internal communications cannot be overstated; this is a key piece of work, requiring close coordination with HR to ensure C3 volunteers engage and remain within the C3 structure. • Jean Wylie (SIB), seconded to work with Head EIS, has suggested she could act as a conduit between EIS and the Hub. Comment: <i>While writing the report it has been agreed that Jean will be invited to join the FLT.</i>

Gaps cont..

	RAG	Narrative and Actions
9. Maintaining Readiness; Legacy NIC3		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Looking forward it would further strengthen NICS' preparedness for a future civil contingency response if the work to plan how to maintain C3 readiness could be started while there is a sizeable group of volunteers with 'live C3 knowledge'.Identifying the lessons from this response period will be a key part of this work and should start to be captured now.The loss of corporate memory since the C3 system designed for the EU Exit response stood down has had a significant impact on the ability to deliver a fully joined up NI C3 system at pace.

Background

Methodology

1. To inform the review discussions to identify what gaps currently exist within the Hub against each main strand of work took place with:

- ~ the Hub COS and his Strategic Adviser;
- ~ all members of the FL team;
- ~ the LOs located in CB;
- ~ the EY analytical team and training team located in CB;
- ~ a number of the PWC personnel located in CB;
- ~ and Jean Wylie, an SIB official seconded to work with Head EIS.

2. Information gathered from these discussions, plus observations made by the author throughout the week were collated for the purpose of applying a RAG status to each strand of work.

3. Issue of draft report.