

**A 'point in time' review of the effectiveness of the Civil Contingencies Group (NI) (CCG(NI)) arrangements in coordination of the Covid19 response phase: Assessment, lessons and recommendations.**

**Purpose**

1. This review provides a rapid assessment of the working arrangements and effectiveness of the Civil Contingencies Group (NI) (CCG(NI)) over the seven week period in which it has been convened to respond to the initial response phase of the covid19 (C19) crisis. Commissioned by HOCS, the purpose of the review is to:

- Consider the effectiveness of the way in which CCG(NI) has operated,
- Make recommendations in relation to the operation of CCG as the crisis moves into recovery and renewal phase, and
- Consider lessons that may be learned for future civil contingency situations.

**Scope**

2. This review considered the effectiveness of CCG in terms of:

- The purpose of the group as set out in the Northern Ireland Central Crisis Management Arrangements (NICCMA) protocols,
- The operation of the group as defined within the Concept of Operations (CONOPS) documents, and
- The suitability of working arrangements in the context of the Covid19 situation.

3. It has taken into account:

- Membership and the relationship with supporting structures,
- Operation (including how it functioned remotely),
- Decision making: remit, range and effectiveness,
- Information flows: briefing, supporting materials, debriefing,
- The use of working groups, and
- Support provided by the NI Hub, departments and others

**Methodology**

4. The review is a point in time snapshot and has utilised desk review of key documents, as well as seeking the views of members, participants and other

interested parties. Responses were provided under the 'Chatham House' rule<sup>1</sup> by the majority of CCG members,

**This report is broken into a number of sections; each section sets out key findings along with recommendations for the future. A summary of key findings and recommendations can be found at the end of this report.**

### ***Introduction***

5. The Civil Contingencies Group (NI) (CCG(NI)) operates within the Northern Ireland Central Crisis Management Arrangements (NICCMA). This sets out the role of CCG(NI) as *acting as a strategic coordination group, and being responsible for setting the overarching strategy for an NI response. It directs response and commits resources across the NICS.*

6. For the purposes of the Covid19 response, the role and purpose of the CCG(NI) is set out in the Command, Control and Coordination (C3) Concept of Operations (CONOPS) to:

- *Lead the overall operational response to the crisis,*
- *Review the Situation Report, identifying emerging issues, and monitoring progress of live actions,*
- *Create, oversee and close down Working Groups as required, and*
- *Escalate issues to the Executive and (through them) UKG structures*

### ***Background***

7. As Northern Ireland moves from the initial response to the C19 crisis into a longer term recovery and renewal phase, it is prudent to review and adapt the organisational response in order to ensure it can meet an evolving set of challenges. The overall approach remains set against the enduring strategic priorities set by the Executive which are:

- *Health and wellbeing of our citizens*
- *Our economic well being*
- *Societal and community wellbeing*

8. Covid19 has been characterised as a crisis which initially had a strong health focus, but which quickly expanded to include almost every NI department and partner organisation. As the immediate health dimension reduces in severity and immediacy (notwithstanding the need to ensure that the system is prepared for a

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<sup>1</sup> Where information is provided under the **Chatham House Rule**, the recipient is free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the author, nor that of any other party, may be revealed.

potential 'second wave'), and the longer term societal and economic issues take greater precedence, **the risks and impacts facing NI become even more diffuse, long lasting and complex**. Policy options and decisions will become even more interconnected (particularly around, for example, timing and scope of release from restrictions and longer term investment options). For example, the relaxing/releasing of restrictions is more complex (in terms of timing, impact and monitoring) than entering lockdown; across the system, issues will become increasingly 'wicked' with the need for even more 'clumsy' (imperfect) solutions. Every option will have an impact not only on the intended target, but elsewhere in the system.

9. As a result, connectivity and coordination will become even more critical (between departments, between GB and NI within a four nations setting, and with the Irish Government on an Island of Ireland basis). Subsidiarity and departmental responsibility must continue to lie at the heart of decision making, but sustaining and improving coordination and collaboration are fundamental to success. These two doctrines should not be treated as mutually exclusive.

#### ***Moving to recovery and renewal - impacts on decision making***

10. This review looks back on what has happened and makes recommendations for the future. In order to do this effectively, it is important to have a shared understanding of how future phases (recovery and renewal) will be different from the initial response phase. The following section provides context to the findings and recommendations.

11. CCG must adapt and flex in order to meet the different needs of the relatively steady and predictable 'Preparedness' phase, the intensity and pace of the 'Response phase', and the longer lasting, slower time 'Recovery' phase. As NI moves forward into recovery and renewal, decision making **timescales will become longer** and **priorities (and policy approaches) run the risk of divergence**. The requirement for timely and accurate information will become even more important. **The focus will shift from retrospective analysis to forward projection** - a different dataset (and analytical skill set) will be required. The response phase has been dominated by what can be counted (admissions, ICU capacity, tests, deaths), but the recovery and renewal phases will require deeper insight, modelling and qualitative analysis.

12. Alongside information and analysis, communications, both internal and external, come even more to the fore, especially as the **public messaging becomes more complex and nuanced**.

13. On a day to day level, **information may change at a slower rate** - meaning a less frequent situation reporting rhythm will be required and the **urgency of key decisions may reduce**. However, **decisions will become even more complex**,

***interlinked and longer lasting***. Behaviour of departments and the system over the coming weeks will set the tone for the longer term approach; it will be important that the collaborative intent of the response phases is carried through into recovery.

14. As NI moves into a response phase, it is ***even more important that the approach becomes collaborative by default***. This will test the usual ways of working, but without a collective approach to policy development and decision making, ***there is a risk that decisions taken by one department will be inconsistent with, or even have a negative impact on, other parts of the NI system***, And of course, the recovery phase will require significant funding which will require DoF colleagues to have a full overview of proposals.

### ***Key findings and recommendations***

15. The C3 arrangements for C19 saw the setup of the NI Hub on 18 March 2020. CCG met in preparedness mode on 12 March, and then again as it moved to response mode on 18 March. CCG began to meet on its (almost) daily rhythm on 23 March. This continued until 1 May, at which point the frequency was reduced to three meetings per week.

16. The purpose of CCG is to coordinate the response to the immediate and longer term impact of the C19 crisis in Northern Ireland. CCG is a tried and tested part of the NI civil contingencies C3 architecture. It was invoked swiftly, and on this occasion used as a baseline the model designed for EU Exit. The two scenarios share some common factors (particularly around cumulative impacts across a wide range of sectors) but also some fundamental differences, particularly in that one department was most immediately in the forefront of response.

17. CCG was not envisaged to operate in this type of environment, and therefore did not operate as per the traditional model. However, ***it delivered effective situational awareness, information sharing, progression of key issues, and critically it sustained senior level engagement across all key partners***. It did so with a structure and regularity that worked well, and provided a useful focal point for the daily response rhythm. However, it was not always clear how issues were being prioritised for discussion, with a sense that issues were being discussed as they arose rather than CCG taking a proactive view on which issues required the greatest attention in the coming days.

18. ***CCG (and the wider C3 system) stood up rapidly to face a challenge of unprecedented scale and complexity***. A huge amount of progress was made in a short space of time. CCG met in response mode for the first time on 18 March, three days after the first UK deaths were reported. This meant that the response was already well underway prior to the first meeting; there is an opportunity to ensure the system now gets and stays ahead of both recovery and any future waves; whilst

timing and frequency can be altered, it is recommended that **some form of C3 arrangements should stay in place throughout the recovery and renewal phases (recommendation 1)**.

19. **Terms of reference were taken from NICCMA and the CONOPS, and were followed as closely as the situation allowed.** However, providing specific ToRs for CCG in this specific situation would have given greater clarity to all members. In future, **it would be beneficial to (re)state the specific ToR and purpose of CCG to a given situation (recommendation 2)**, without of course altering the fundamental purpose of the group.

20. **The principle of subsidiarity was sustained throughout**, with decisions being taken within departments where possible. There was however a strong sense throughout the review that **CCG performed a vital information sharing and coordinating function** during the response phase, and that such a function will be required going forward to ensure ongoing coordination.

21. Many of the respondents reported CCG being asked to take relatively few key decisions in the response phase. Given the nature of the crisis (with the focus of initial response around health issues) CCG was not called on to perform its full decision making function as regularly as envisaged within NICCMA. This does not in any way diminish the role that CCG played, rather it shows the flexibility of the Group in providing leadership to an unprecedented set of circumstances.

22. Subsidiarity and coordination are not mutually exclusive (and all policy options will need to consider funding implications). Decisions should always be taken at the lowest level, but increasingly they will have an impact on one another. Arrangements must be developed in which departments are able to progress policy proposals for consideration, set against both departmental priorities and also the Executive's wider recovery plan. These plans will require coordination and deconfliction; a role that will require a successor to CCG.

### **Future role of CCG**

23. It is clear from responses to this review that **CCG will no longer need to meet in the current format or frequency to manage recovery**, but a coordinating body is still required. As well as recovery, there will be ongoing contingency issues to manage, especially in monitoring the impact of relaxation and the potential for a second wave. Therefore, **traditional CCG arrangements will need to stand ready to deal with residual c19 response issues (including a move into a secondary response phase), as well as concurrent contingency events (recommendation 3)**. In support of this, CCPB should ensure the risk register is up to date, with plans in place to continue to run a c19 C3 response whilst planning for contingencies such as poor weather, widespread industrial action, and the impacts of the end of the

transition period. There is a risk that a continued focus on c19 diverts the attention of limited CCPB resources away from longer term planning, and it is recommended that **CCPB should refresh its horizon scanning (recommendation 4)**, ensuring that CCG remains fully aware of the prospect of (and readiness for) concurrent events.

24. In respect of c19 recovery, there was agreement amongst many members that a version of **CCG should be reconfigured and refocused as response moves into recovery (recommendation 5)**. Any successor to CCG will have an increasingly critical function in the coordination of interconnected but sometimes competing demands, supporting the Executive, driving forward the collective decision making of NICS, and managing public expectations, comms and messaging at a time of significant crisis. This review makes recommendations for the development of a Strategic Recovery Group, supported by a range of cross cutting working groups. More detail can be found at paragraph 60.

### ***Role, purpose and decision making***

25. CCG is designed to respond to fast moving contingency situations where rapid decision making is required across a range of sectors or departments. As set out above, due to the nature of the situation and in some cases parallel departmental arrangements, members have reported that it wasn't generally called on to act in this way. Notes of meetings and reflections of members report that **many of the discussions around the CCG table related to wider policy approach rather than immediate operational decision making**. Whilst this was reportedly useful, it did run the risk of blurring the purpose and operation of the group. There is an opportunity to be even clearer about the role, purpose and remit of any successor to CCG in the recovery phase. **In setting up future arrangements, time should be taken to restate the respective decision making roles of the Executive, [CCG], and individual departments (recommendation 6)**.

26. With the health dimension of the response phase being led by Health Gold, several members also reported being unclear on the respective decision making roles of the CCG and DoH structures. Whilst the JESIP<sup>2</sup> principle of a 'lead responder' works well for tightly defined immediate crisis management, it is not appropriate for the progression of longer term cross cutting issues. There is an opportunity to reset the balance as this moves to a recovery phase in which multiple issues have shared importance. The approach to recovery would work well if built around the Executive Recovery Strategy coordinated by TEO, and could be supported through a slimmed down (hub) coordinating structure providing situational awareness, information, insight & data, secretariat support and coordination of cross cutting working groups.

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<sup>2</sup> Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles

27. ***Some concern was expressed around the visibility of decision making in departments, with a sense that CCG was not always fully aware of the most up to date picture.*** Whilst decisions are to be taken at the lowest level, where there are wider implications, considerations or impacts, greater awareness would have been welcomed (members accepted of course that some decisions required swift intervention). Future arrangements should clearly state the role, decision making remit and expectations on information sharing or every part of the C3 system.

### ***Membership and participation***

28. Attendance at CCG(NI) was strong, with organisations represented at an appropriate level throughout.

29. Participation of all members was good, with senior colleagues from all organisations attending on a regular basis. Meetings were brisk and businesslike, with all partners having the opportunity to input. Members reported feeling included, despite the remote nature of discussions, and effective chairing was evident. Given the initially narrow focus of the issues being discussed, some members reported 'self withdrawal' - listening but not really having much to add. That said, even when that was the case, they reportedly found attendance useful. Some members felt that more attention could have been given to exploring the interconnectivity of issues early on; this would have helped bring in more partners to some discussions, and allowed for earlier consideration of wider recovery issues.

30. Linked to the issues around ToR and remit, many respondents commented on the mixed attendance of officials and political leaders. This is also an issue raised by Sir George Hamilton (the strategic adviser brought in to support C3 arrangements), and discussed with FMdFM. NICCMA provides for CCG to be chaired at either ministerial or official level; in this case it was decided that HOCS should chair. Ministers have been very clear; they valued direct involvement with the group, particularly as it allowed them to hear directly from front line responders, and could understand better the current situation 'on the ground'. FMdFM were both clear that they valued being able to listen to updates and discussions, and expressed the view that this was a forum by which they could remain fully engaged with the response across the whole system. Some members reported that the presence of Ministers may have unintentionally reduced the ability for wide ranging exploration of views and the initial development of consolidated advice. This was described by some as a reason why CCG meetings became shorter and more of an 'information sharing' type forum. In looking to the future, there is an opportunity to build in regular updates and briefing sessions for the Executive distinct from their formal decision making roles and meetings (see recommendation 22).

31. The creation of a more formal (O)fficial and (M)inisterial structure is considered in more detail later in this review, and was suggested by many as a way of improving quality and depth of discussion and policy development. It was felt that this approach would also enhance the quality of support provided to the Executive in their decision making role.

32. All meetings were necessarily held virtually; this is not the usual mode for CCG. Members reported that ***the technology generally worked well, and that through the chair, all voices were heard***. However, some reported that the necessity for virtual meetings reduced the ability for 'side bar' conversations, and as lockdown is reduced, CCG should think carefully about how best to manage a hybrid attendance model. There is a risk the participants may feel forced back into face to face attendance if too much business is being done in the margins. ***CCPB should consider how best to convene future CCG meetings in a way that there is no difference in access or involvement from those attending physically or virtually. A move to virtual by default is recommended (recommendation 7)***, and this should include how informal discussions and 'chat' functions can also be maintained virtually.

33. Whilst formal membership was well managed, ***wider attendance at meetings became an issue***. As time progressed, the number of those dialling in to meetings increased to a point where the ceiling of participants was exceeded, and a number of members could not access the call. Aside from the obvious impact of not having all members able to access the call, members also commented on feeling discomfort and uncertainty about not knowing who was on the call.

34. Having a fixed dial in number also meant that there was no control over who was dialling in, and potentially open to unintended participants joining. However, the virtual nature of the meeting also had advantages; it allowed a wide range of relevant partners to join, and members reported greater meeting discipline. For future meetings (either in Covid or other civil contingencies) ***an officially supported video/audio conferencing facility which allows for all participants to be identified and participation managed should be used (recommendation 8)***

35. Whilst attendance has been good, and representation senior, many partners have relied on a single official to attend every or the vast majority of meetings. Whilst this aids continuity, there is an inherent resilience risk in this approach, especially considering the nature of the event that is being managed. It is of course a matter for individual departments and partners, but as these issues will continue for many months, ***consideration should be given to ensuring adequate cover arrangements are in place for ALL key members and support staff (recommendation 9)***.



***Coordinating cross cutting issues, including the use of Working Groups***

36. One of the core roles of CCG is to provide coordination across the system. Individual departments tend to have well established command and control systems, escalating to ministers. As previously described, it is clear the CCG provided the opportunity to share situational awareness and updates.

37. Coordination will be even more important going forward. This review has already suggested that the role of the CCG should be clarified, especially around its remit for decisions which will go on to bind individual departments. As well as providing advice to ministers, progressing issues as far as possible, coordinating efforts across partners, any future group needs to have a holistic view of all cross cutting work which supports an overall strategic recovery plan.

38. ***Significant departmental coordination during the response phase was evident, both bilaterally and between a wider group of departments.*** Much of this happened outside of and without the need for CCG direction. However, it remained critical that this work was reported and coordinated, so that ALL partners had a complete and shared situational awareness, and that all decisions could be viewed and impacts understood. Progress on these issues was generally reported back into CCG, albeit predominantly retrospectively.

39. This collaboration may have been further strengthened by more structured updates being provided, allowing all partners to register an interest in a topic being taken forward. It is recommended that all recovery proposals passing to the Executive should come through a Coordinating Group for discussion (see recommendation 23). This is not proposed to fetter or constrain individual departments or ministers, but to ensure all policy advice and proposals are supported by a full assessment of their overall impact on the system.

40. As set out in the CONOPS, a Working Group *is*:  
*'A temporary structure, bringing together a number of departments under the control of a nominated Permanent Secretary, to resolve an issue requiring a cross-departmental response. Where issues cannot be resolved through working groups, they will be escalated to CCG(NI) via the NI Hub. Working Groups will report progress to the NU Hub'.*

***Working Groups were used to limited effect during the response phase, and tended to develop in an organic and reactive rather than planned manner.*** This appears to have been a function of speed, and there is an opportunity to get ahead by proactively setting up working groups across a range of cross cutting themes.

41. The provision of Working Groups, whilst quite limited in the response phases was well understood, and worked generally effectively. For example, the PPE

working group led by Perm Sec DoF supported a collaborative effort across partners. A similar approach was taken by Perm Sec DFI on the issue of Ferry provision, again with a very positive outcome.

42. This type of approach will be even more important in the months ahead. It is recommended that Working Groups are set up in advance at the start of the recovery phase around a number of known cross cutting themes (see recommendation 21). Issues should be assigned to these groups as they arise, rather than a plethora of *ad hoc* and single issue groups being set up. Working Groups would benefit from greater structure, formality and support. There may also be an advantage in assigning a lead on the basis of corporate leadership rather than policy ownership in areas that cut across multiple partners.

### ***Wider support***

43. The recovery and renewal phase will require a wider societal response. Coordinating arrangements (including Working Groups) would be enhanced by the inclusion of members of an advisory or reference group (see recommendation 22)(already proposed elsewhere) which draws on wider expertise, and binds in a broad cross section of society and business into NI's recovery. If recovery is to be a cross society issue, policy development needs to be informed by a true cross section of views and opinion. However, there is a choice to be made as to the role of advisory or reference groups in recovery. Such a group (or more probably groups) will provide helpful support to Working Groups (including with members being part of working groups) and an SRG, but careful consideration should be given before widening the formal membership of an SRG (effectively the (O) group) to those not directly accountable to the Executive for delivery.

### ***Information and data flows, including information management***

44. In any crisis, information is key; every part of the system must be feeding in information at an appropriate time. Whilst this worked well in most cases (and supported the high levels of situational awareness described elsewhere), ***some respondents have commented that there appeared to be times where information could have been shared in a more timely fashion***, both in terms of progress of issues, but also in the coordination of forthcoming announcements.

45. Information and communication flows generally worked well, with EIS playing a full part in the CCG process. They were able to proactively manage many of the media aspects of the response phase in a coordinated manner. The inclusion of current and future media focus in the SITREP was welcomed by members, and sought to provide awareness of future announcements.

46. However, there was some feedback (mainly as a result of departmental announcements being made ahead of CCG awareness), that not all information was always being passed on in a timely fashion. Some announcements outside of CCG are inevitable (e.g. the release of information about the Kinnegar TRS and early consideration for a Nightingale facility on the MLK site, as well as pre-emptive announcements on potential MACA requests), but where announcements are in the gift of a department, ***even greater effort should be made to ensure that EIS are aware of what is planned, and that departmental announcements are deconflicted (recommendation 10).***

47. Effective decision making also requires accurate and timely data. In the response phase, this focussed around quantitative factors which were in the main retrospective, with limited forward projection. ***The hub developed an effective SITREP for the response phase***, and whilst a small number of responses indicated that it may have contained too much or sometimes confusing or irrelevant information, it was generally recognised to have added a great deal of value to discussions. ***The SITREP improved significantly over the response phase but it will need further redesign to provide the most useful insight during the next phase.*** Work is already underway to develop a new template, and this should form the basis of an information pack for future SRG meetings. In support of this, ongoing situation reporting will be required, but ***the SITREP should move towards having a future focus, with reduced frequency and a refreshed focus on recovery (recommendation 11).***

48. It is also important that the type of analysis evolves. Some concern was expressed that NISRA expertise was not able to be fully utilised in the initial phase of this crisis. Whilst engagement has improved significantly, ***greater access to professional statistical advice and support will be even more critical in the coming phase (recommendation 12).*** Future arrangements would benefit from ***the development of a commonly recognised, tested and consistent recovery data set (recommendation 13).*** Without this, there is a risk that the focus will remain on those things that can most easily be counted; these are unlikely to be the most helpful or insightful measures.

49. ***It is also important that that system is able to produce a 'single source of truth'.*** Ministers and others will be looking for certainty and precision on data. Some respondents commented on the development of apparently parallel information streams, with data flowing from the Hub as well as directly from departments. This sometimes led to a lack of precision and confidence in the numbers, with CCG being unclear at times over the single accurate picture.

### **Systems issues and ways of working: CCG as part of C3**

50. Overall, the CCG structures and ways of working followed the intent set out in NICCMA and the C3 CONOPS. The speed of deployment meant that the supporting system was not fully in place prior to the first meeting, but this quickly caught up. The Hub and CCG secretariat stood up quickly and the SITREP developed significantly and rapidly.

51. The relationship between CCG and other parts of the system appeared clear to most respondents. The Hub provided an effective central coordinating function, but can only ever be as strong as the information it receives from partners. Whilst the principle of subsidiarity means that departments retain responsibility for work within their competence, communication and coordination of this work with other parts of the system is critical. It was evident from a separate review of DOC arrangements that departments took different approaches to the size and depth of their DOCs.

52. There was an apparent correlation between this and the level and timeliness of information available to CCG across departments. There is scope to further improve understanding of the C3 system as a whole, especially in reminding departments that it is not an 'either/or'; commitment to central structures should not be seen as detrimental to departmental set up arrangements (and vice versa). ***It was evident that relatively few Hub volunteers from the previous EU project returned for roles here***, and there were significant changes in leadership personnel. This lack of continuity required a rapid upskilling of new staff as the response was in full flight. ***Greater focus should be placed on retaining an trained and tested cadre of staff deployable at pace into DOCs and the Hub (recommendation 14)*** NICS HR has a key role to play in the retention (and potentially reward) of such a cadre. The benefits of regular testing and exercising of the system cannot be underestimated. The whole system should be tested regularly. ***CCPB should set out a forward programme of testing and exercising, with tests at least quarterly, and a whole systems test on an at least annual basis (recommendation 15).***

53. Questions were asked about why a Strategic Coordination Group was not stood up. Under the CONOPS, the role of an SCG is to *"Deliver regional multi-agency coordination to prevent or mitigate the effects of civil emergencies where there is a major, widespread and imminent threat to life (which cannot be dealt with by other public authorities within existing resources and capability); or the scale and complexity of the humanitarian issues require Command; Control and Coordination by the PSNI as a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act on the basis that urgent intervention to prevent a worsening of the situation is required"*.

54. Whilst these events clearly presented a threat to life, the trigger for a distinct SCG was not met, primarily because the immediate response was dominated by

Health issues, and key players were fully engaged within the Health GOLD structures. DoH were in effect operating as the SCG, and none of the CCG partners expressed a view that a further coordinating structure was required in these circumstances. However, this issue could have been closed off earlier by a clearer indication from CCG that this was the case. Given the possibility of a subsequent return to response, ***partners should review the criteria for calling an SCG, and be clear how, when and by whom it could be invoked (recommendation 16)***

55. Members reported being supported by the secretariat, with the provision of timely agendas, actions and papers. Whilst note of each meeting was taken, and an action log was maintained and circulated, the note itself was not widely circulated amongst members. This led to two issues; it was not always clear to action owners what discussion had taken place to inform the action, and as there was no centrally shared note, some members produced their own notes for information of their stakeholders. ***Information sharing could have been improved by a short summary note being issued along with actions to all participants (recommendation 17).***

56. This was symptomatic of a wider information sharing issue; whilst all papers were marked appropriately, the relatively wide distribution of papers, and their secondary distribution amongst partner networks increased the risk of sensitive material becoming more widely available than was intended or helpful. As new arrangements are set up, it would be beneficial if a ***reminder were to be sent out about the protective marking and handling arrangements for information and documentation (recommendation 18).***

57. Actions were logged, tracked and reported, although some feedback suggested that the actions themselves would have ***benefited from being more tightly worded, and followed through more formally to closure during CCG meetings (recommendation 19).*** It was not always clear how actions had been prioritised, and which were being given the greatest emphasis. This links to the earlier point about CCG being more proactive in setting the future agenda within an agreed working strategy.

### ***Forward look - bringing this all together***

58. The next few weeks are key; ***the approach taken now will set the tone for many months to come.*** In any crisis situation, the recovery phase lasts far longer than that of response.

59. ***This is also the point of maximum structural risk;*** the last few weeks have seen partners coming together around a response, which although dominated by a small number of key departments has nevertheless brought shared situational

awareness and a common sense of direction. As the immediate crisis starts to dissipate, there is a real risk of departments sliding back into less joined up ways of working, and focussing on immediate and more narrowly cast decisions.

60. Coordination of longer term recovery will be required. This review recommends *the creation of a Strategic Recovery Group (recommendation 20)*, of officials providing consolidated advice to Ministers, which is *supported by a series of pre-set Working Groups (recommendation 21)*, and advised by a widely drawn *reference or advisory group (recommendation 22)*. Drawing in a wide cross section of views has already begun, and the forthcoming 10,000 volts exercise is a good example of harnessing the views and insight of a range of key parties to inform and help develop policy options.

61. It is recommended that any **SRG should be an Official level group**, able to work through cross cutting issues, resolve and progress those which do not require collective ministerial sign off, and escalate and seek agreement from the Executive on those issues which require a higher level of decision making. It is important that its role, remit and status is understood and agreed across the system, and that *cross cutting policy options should be reviewed by this group prior to submission to the Executive (recommendation 23)* in order to provide ministers with consolidated advice.

62. Ministers will continue to require up to date information and updates, and have a strong wish to show visible leadership with all partners. Future arrangements may include such access through *regular Ministerial briefings with front line partners (recommendation 24)*, in addition to formal Executive meetings.

63. By adapting and improving the model used in the response phase, effective coordination and successful delivery of outcomes can be achieved. This review offers a range of options to learn from and build on recent experience as NI moves forward to a longer term and even more complex recovery phase.

## Summary of key findings and recommendations

Para	Finding	Recommendation
17	CCG delivered effective situational awareness, information sharing, progression of key issues, and sustained senior level engagement across all key partners.	
18	CCG (and the wider C3 system) stood up rapidly to face a challenge of unprecedented scale and complexity	1 - Some form of C3 arrangements should stay in place throughout the recovery and renewal phases
19	Terms of reference were taken from NICCMA and the CONOPS, and were followed as closely as the situation allowed	2 - It would be beneficial to (re)state the specific ToR and purpose of CCG to a given situation
20	The principle of subsidiary was maintained throughout	
23	CCG will no longer need to meet in the current format or frequency to manage recovery	3 - Traditional CCG arrangements will need to stand ready to deal with residual c19 response issues including a move into a secondary response phase, as well as concurrent contingency events 4 - CCPB should refresh its horizon scanning
24	Any successor to CCG will have an increasingly critical function in the coordination of interconnected but increasingly competing demands	5 - CCG should be reconfigured and refocused as response moves into recovery
25	Many of the discussions around the CCG table related to wider policy approach rather than immediate operational decision making	6 - In setting up future arrangements, time should be taken to restate the respective decision making roles of the Executive, [CCG], and individual departments .
26	Whilst the JESIP principle of a 'lead responder' works well for tightly defined immediate crisis management, it is sub optimal for the progression of longer term cross cutting issues	See recommendation 20
27	Some concern was expressed around the visibility of decision making in departments	See recommendations 20 &23
28-30	Membership and participation at meetings was strong and sustained, and the presence of Ministers at CCG impacted the way in which meetings ran	See recommendation 24
32	Virtual meetings generally worked well, through positive participation and effective chairing.	7 - CCPB should consider how best to convene future CCG meetings in a way that sees no difference in access or involvement from those attending physically or virtually. A move to virtual by default is recommended
33&34	Wider attendance at meetings began to lack control	8 - An officially supported video/audio conferencing facility which allows for all participants to be identified and participation managed should be used
35	Membership was senior and sustained. However, greater focus should be given to resilience	9 - Consideration should be given to ensuring adequate cover arrangements are in place for ALL key members and support staff

38	Significant departmental coordination during the response phase was evident, both bilaterally and between a wider groups of departments.	
40	Working Groups were used to limited effect during the response phase, and tended to develop in an organic and reactive rather than planned manner.	See recommendation 21
44-46	Some respondents commented that more information (in relation to planned announcements) could have been shared in a more timely fashion	10 - Even greater effort should be made to ensure that EIS are aware of what is planned, and that departmental announcements are deconflicted
47	The SITREP improved significantly over the response phase but it will need further redesign to provide the most useful insight during the next phase.	11-The SITREP should move towards having a future focus, with reduced frequency and a refreshed focus on recovery
48&49	It is important that data analysis evolves and that the system is able to produce a single source of truth	12 - Greater access to professional statistical advice and support will be even more critical in the coming phase 13 - The development of a commonly recognised, tested and consistent recovery data set is necessary
52	It was apparent that relatively few Hub volunteers (and leaders) from the previous EU project returned for roles here	14 - Greater focus should be placed on retaining a trained and tested cadre of staff deployable at pace into DOCs and the Hub
52	There is a need to ensure all parts of the system work together and that this is tested regularly	15-CCPB should set out a forward programme of testing and exercising, with tests at least quarterly, and a whole systems test on an at least annual basis
54		16 - Partners should review the criteria for calling an SCG, and be clear how, when and by whom it could be invoked
55	Ways of working	17-Information sharing could have been improved by a short summary note being issued along with actions to all participants
56		18-All members and partners should be reminded about protective marking and handling arrangements for information and documentation
57		19 - Actions would have benefited from being more tightly worded, and followed through more formally to closure during CCG meetings
60	Overall structural recommendations	20 - The creation of a Strategic Recovery Group 21 - supported by a series of pre-set Working Groups, and 22 - advised by a widely drawn reference or advisory group
61	There is a need to ensure ongoing coordination and the provision of consolidated policy advice	23 - Cross cutting policy options should be reviewed by this (SRG) group prior to submission to the Executive
62	It is essential that Ministers are able to hear directly from responders	24 - Regular ministerial briefings should form part of the C3 set up

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