

**Civil Contingency Group (COVID-19 Response) Meeting
Wednesday 25 March 2020
Block B Level 5 Conference Room Castle Buildings**

Note of Meeting

Attendees

David Sterling (Chair)
Anthony Harbinson - TEO
Chris Stewart – TEO
Karen Pearson – TEO
Katrina Godfrey - DfI
Richard Pengelly – DoH
Mike Brennan - DfE
Dennis McMahon - DAERA
Peter May - DOJ
Sue Gray - DOF
Jill Minne – NICSHR
Derek Baker - DE
Karen Pearson – TEO
Tracy Meharg- DfC
Simon Burns - PSNI
Michael Graham - NIFRS
Michael Bloomfield - NIAS
Jo McCaffrey – Local Government
Maria Jennings – Food Standards Agency
Mark Larmour – NIO
Chris McNabb – EIS
Hugh Widdis – DSO
Bernie Rooney – TEO
Name Redacted – NI Hub
Andy Cole – NI Hub
Lesley Hogg - NI Assembly
Name Redacted – TEO – Note taker

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. COVID-19 - Current Situation and Prognosis

- Richard Pengelly gave a brief update on the current situation - 172 confirmed cases at present – as more cases come in a new daily report is being produced which will have more data, including clusters. DoH now also plugged into Imperial College modelling.
- DoH working on enhancing internal capacity for testing in addition to ongoing work with Public Health England. 1,000 tests per day available by next week. Waiting on PHE evaluation of testing kits being produced by local companies.
- An issue of concern was raised in respect of the possible closure of construction firms, who assist in enhancing ventilator capacity, hooking up oxygen supply etc.

Action DoH: DoH to identify whether it is possible to identify critical construction work required across all health trusts.

- An additional issue around the construction sector was that builder merchants had shut down. Meaning no supplies for those construction workers still operating.

Action DoF: CPD to speak to construction sector re keeping some builder merchants open for critical work.

3. Actions Review

- David Sterling advised that current action reporting for CCG was being revised
- Action Secretariat: To produce a revised action log for CCG in advance of the meeting on 26 March.**

Enforcement powers

- Chris Stewart said that he had productive meetings with PSNI and local government around enforcement.

Enhanced Testing Programme

- Richard Pengelly gave an update on the current work on testing, with the CMO chairing an expert group and focusing on enhancing the current testing capacity before working on prioritisation.
- Anthony Harbison said that he had received new information that PPE supplies had been purchased in China and would start flowing soon.

Offers of help

- Anthony Harbison said he had been in discussion with local government and advised that offers of help from private companies etc were now being processed within the Hub.

Local Producers of Testing Kits

- Mike Brennan said that the EU had temporarily banned the export of testing kits, so these should be available for internal redeployment as soon as they have been approved for use.

Supply of IT Kit

- Sue Gray said that she had identified 50 laptops for DfC to help with their redeployment. She said IT Assist was doing all they could but that departments needed to redistribute the kit they held to their priority areas as much as possible to assist with the ongoing supply problems.

4. Legislation Overview

- Chris Stewart gave an update on the Coronavirus Bill. No amendments being accepted by UKG at present, so expected to have Royal Assent on Thursday. Local directions are focused on retail activity and events.
- Chris Stewart said that more legislation may be required that would focus on citizens with powers around places of worship etc. At present neither Chris

Stewart nor Mark Larmour (NIO) had any visibility on more legislation being considered by UKG.

- Issues have arisen over work place canteens and off licenses. Work Place canteens have been closed and are causing problems for key workers being asked to attend and unable to get food.
- Off licenses being asked to close will put additional pressure on supermarkets, with queues going against social distancing rules and potential illegal activity/smuggling being increased.
- David Sterling said that these issues needed to be escalated to Ministers today.

Action TEO: Chris Stewart to ensure the issues of work place canteens and off licenses are escalated to Ministers today.

- Lesley Hogg from the NI Assembly raised the point that the Assembly was considering reducing hours or closing due to the covid-19 situation. Lesley also said that committees in the assembly had been asked to scale back normal operations during the current emergency.
- David Sterling said he would get Neill Jackson (TEO) to consider the legislative programme and identify essential work as a matter of urgency. This should then be passed to Lesley so that the assembly could be asked to prioritise.

Action TEO: Neill Jackson to consider the legislative programme and identify essential work and pass to Assembly.

- An issue has arisen about the potential closure of Hotels and B and B's. NIHE put many emergency accommodation persons into B and B's. The UK legislation is meant to exempt those providing emergency accommodation from closure.

Action DfC, DfE and TEO: Tracey Meharg, Chris Stewart and Mike Brennan to arrange officials to meet with NIHE and the hospitality sector to ensure they are aware of the rules and that there are no conflicts.

5. Member Updates

PSNI

- No issues requiring escalation to CCG.

NIAS

- No issues requiring escalation to CCG.

NIFRS

- No issues requiring escalation to CCG.

FSA

- Raised an issue around social distancing in food manufacturers, that it would not always be possible to follow government advice on social distancing.

Local Government

- No issues requiring escalation to CCG.

DAERA

- To be aware, the vacancy rate in the agri food sector was rising (12%) and could become a concern.
- There may be an issue around the ability to use AFBI labs to assist in the emergency – this was being checked out.

DE

- 250 schools had no pupils attending yesterday – extending rationalisation operation among those schools.

DfE

- Sorting out capital grant payments was currently a major focus for DfE.
- To be aware, with so many businesses closing, prices are likely to increase soon.

DfI

- Construction sector closing could have an impact on water maintenance and critical infrastructure needs.
- Katrina Godfrey flagged an issue around ferry companies getting concerned about ability to remain a going financial concern at present. They have been asking for a reduction in port charges.

Action DfI: DfI to continue to engage with the ferry companies and to escalate immediately if situation changes.

- Katrina wanted to flag that the department would not be able to remain within its budget for this financial year.

DoF

- No issues requiring escalation to CCG.

DoJ

- No issues requiring escalation to CCG.

DfC

- Coming under increasing pressure on maintaining social distancing within DfC offices from the unions.

6. Communications Strategy

- Public information campaign starts today.
- Letters being issued to all households and another to those over 70.
- David Sterling highlighted that any new communications from all departments must go to NI Direct as soon as possible – coming under criticism for not having it up to date.

Action All Depts: to ensure all communications to the public are copied to NI Direct at the same time as issued.

7. AOB and Date of next Meeting

Date of next meeting

- 08:30, 26 March 2020, Block B Conference Room, Castle Buildings