

**Civil Contingency Group (COVID-19 Response) Meeting
Wednesday 1 April 2020**

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Note of Meeting

Attendees

David Sterling (Chair)
Arlene Foster – FM
Gordon Lyons – JM
Declan Kearney - JM
Anthony Harbinson - TEO
Chris Stewart – TEO
Karen Pearson – TEO
Katrina Godfrey - DfI
Richard Pengelly – DoH
Mike Brennan - DfE
Denis McMahon – DAERA
David Small - DAERA
Peter May - DOJ
Sue Gray - DOF
Jill Minne – NICSHR
Derek Baker - DE
Tracy Meharg - DfC
Simon Byrne - PSNI
Mark Hamilton – PSNI
Alan Todd - PSNI
Mark Deeney – NIFRS
Michael Graham - NIFRS
Michael Bloomfield - NIAS
Joan McCaffrey – Local Government
Stephen Reid – Local Government
Maria Jennings – Food Standards Agency
Mark Larmour – NIO
Chris McNabb – EIS
Hugh Widdis – DSO
Andy Cole – NI Hub
Jane Holmes – NI Hub
Name Redacted – NI Hub
Bernie Rooney – NI Hub
Lesley Hogg - NI Assembly
Name Redacted – NI Hub – Note taker

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

2. COVID-19 - CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGNOSIS

Modelling

- Richard Pengelly gave a brief update on the modelling DoH had been working on with Imperial College London. Three models have been developed on the; worst case scenario, best case scenario and the central case scenario. The central model shows that there could potentially be a peak of 180 Covid-19 patients requiring ventilation and critical care beds during the first wave of the epidemic. The peak number of Covid-19 hospital admissions would be 500 per week.
- Under this central case scenario, the projected number of cumulative Covid-19 deaths in Northern Ireland over 20 weeks of the epidemic is estimated at 3,000.
- A paper on the modelling exercise has issued to Ministers, who will want to take time to consider an approach on the basis of this report.
- The modelling is not to be considered a forecast but provides a basis for policy planning. DoH are not planning to publish the outcome of the full modelling exercise in case the public misinterpret the impact of the best case and reduce compliance with social distancing requirements.
- The First Minister asked how the outcome of the modelling exercise would impact on capacity planning. Richard Pengelly reported that the central model would be manageable under existing hospital capacity, with the addition of the field hospital as a step down facility.
- The peak under the central model is expected between 6th and 20th April. Junior Minister Kearney advised of the need to consider escalation of community testing to indicate clusters and to enforce sequestering. Richard said that the medical group led by the Chief Medical Officer was considering the policy implications of the modelling.

3. ACTIONS REVIEW

- David Sterling progressed through the actions from the meeting of 31 March.

Update for Ministers on critical care capacity - Complete

- Report from DoH issued to Ministers this morning.

Financial difficulties for Ferries, Ports and Hauliers - Ongoing

- Junior Ministers raised the issues with UKG yesterday.
- Karen Pearson advised that UKG had taken concerns on board and an urgent piece of work is required today. She intends to engage with relevant departments during the day to coordinate a paper for UKG. This would need a clear focus from NI that we must ensure the financial viability of ferries, ports and freight operators.

Action TEO: Karen Pearson to co-ordinate an input to a DfT/NIO paper on freight, ferries and ports.

- Mark Larmour from NIO said that they would be liaising directly with DfT on this issue.

Briefing for Ministers engaging with HMG - Complete

- Briefing produced 31 March and shared with relevant Ministers.

CCG suggestions on Sitrep - Ongoing

- Comments were received from several departments.

DfC leading on food supplies to vulnerable - Complete

- Sitrep cell informed.

Testing

- Peter May provided an update on testing.
- Randox already have a contract in place with UKG, so there is no opportunity for NI to establish a separate contract with them. All testing requests will need to be progressed through UKG. Current work is exploring the supply side of this issue.
- CCG members have provided their lists of numbers for testing, including those considered highest priority. These volumes are very high. DoJ will continue to work on prioritisation for critical workers with departments and emergency services so that tests can be allocated to the most critical areas as they become available.

Action DoJ: DoJ to discuss further refining and prioritisation of urgent testing needs with all departments and emergency services.

- DoJ will work with DoH, so that when the volume of tests available for health workers is sufficient, some could be made available for critical areas outside health.

Action DoJ and DoH: DoJ and DoH to discuss when health testing can be redirected to other sectors.

4. SITREP UPDATE

- Anthony Harbinson took the meeting through the main issues arising from yesterday's Sitrep.

Concerns around Ferries, Ports and Haulage operators

- This was covered under the action log update.

Free School Meals BACS payments

- EEA reported that they will have issued back payments for 51,000 families entitled to free school meals by the end of this week.

Shortage of frontline staff

- DfC reported that there was a shortage of frontline staff to deal with the large increase in ESA, JSA, Universal Credit, Discretionary Support and LPS queries.
- David Sterling asked if DfC was managing with the numbers of available staff. Tracey Meharg said that they have removed checking from benefit systems, which leads to an increased fraud risk but that they were managing with the volume at present. This will be kept under daily review.

DoH expressions of interest

- DoH reported that they had received 10,363 expressions of interest in paid vacancies within the Health Service in NI and more than 3,000 have progressed to full application form.

Sitrep

- Anthony said that the Sitrep should focus more on the newly emerging issues and less on recurring matters that are being actively dealt with.

5. LEGISLATION UPDATE

Scottish Bill

- Chris Stewart said that the Scottish Emergency Coronavirus Bill has been published. He asked all departments to review the Bill and to consider any read across to NI.

Action All Depts. All departments to review the Scottish Bill and provide views on read across to NI to Chris Stewart.

6. MEMBER UPDATES

No members reported any issuing requiring escalation to CCG.

In addition:

- DoF informed the meeting that the Finance Minister would be meeting with the three NI airports this morning and speaking to the Aviation Secretary later today.
- NIO said that two briefings were coming up on: "Capacity in NHS hospitals" and "Testing". They will ensure colleagues are aware of the details around these briefings.

Action NIO: NIO to ensure colleagues are aware of upcoming briefings on "Capacity in NHS hospitals"; and "Testing".

- Chris McNabb asked about NIO involvement in the UKG public awareness campaign.

Action EIS and NIO: EIS and NIO to discuss the cross government public awareness campaign to ensure messaging is consistent.

- DAERA informed members that they are continuing to work with councils on ensuring the continuation of waste collections.
- DAERA are also working on a support package for the fishing industry.
- DfC said that they are progressing work around the food packages for the vulnerable.
- DSO reminded members that while primary legislation may have stopped substantial subordinate legislation programme is ongoing.

7. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

- Chris McNabb said that there had been 660,000 views on the NI Direct coronavirus web pages since 1 March.
- Media were currently focusing on the following three issues:
 - PPE;
 - Field hospitals; and
 - Testing.
- It is planned to hold virtual press conferences from next week.

8. AOB AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Date of next meeting

- 08:30, 2 April 2020

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