

**Civil Contingency Group (COVID-19 Response) Meeting  
Friday 3 April 2020  
Block B, Level 5 Conference Room, Castle Buildings**

**Note of Meeting**

**Attendees**

David Sterling (Chair)  
Arlene Foster – FM  
Michelle O'Neill - dFM  
Gordon Lyons – JM  
Anthony Harbinson - TEO  
Chris Stewart – TEO  
Karen Pearson – TEO  
Katrina Godfrey - DfI  
Richard Pengelly – DoH  
Mike Brennan - DfE  
Denis McMahon – DAERA  
Peter May - DOJ  
Sue Gray - DOF  
Jill Minne – NICSHR  
Derek Baker - DE  
Tracy Meharg - DfC  
Mark Hamilton – PSNI  
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  
NR TEO  
Lesley Hogg - NI Assembly  
Andy Cole – NI Hub  
Jane Holmes – NI Hub  
Bernie Rooney – NI Hub  
NR – NI Hub – Note taker

**1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

**2. COVID-19 - CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGNOSIS**

- Richard updated the meeting that there had been a total of 774 cases in NI to date and 36 deaths.
- DoH are using the modelling that had been produced to plan the operational response.

- DoH would be holding further meetings today on PPE and testing. A paper will be produced for the Health Minister.

**Action: Expert Testing Group is to provide a Testing Strategy paper to the Health Minister today, who will update the Executive.**

- David Sterling advised that Public Health England will also be publishing a testing strategy later today.

### 3. ACTIONS REVIEW

David Sterling progressed through the actions from the meeting of 2 April.

#### **Testing Strategy**

- This was covered under the Health update at agenda item 2.

#### **Prioritisation of testing for key workers outside health**

- Peter May reported that good progress has been made with departments and emergency services. He said he would provide an update via the NI Hub later today.

**Action: DoJ to provide an update on the prioritisation of testing to NI Hub today.**

#### **Procurement of PPE**

- Sue Gray reported good engagement with DoH on this issue and that they have flagged up the NI requirements with Health in London.
- DoF have also established a work stream to manage future orders with firms in China.
- In addition, DoF have received a huge no of offers from local suppliers. Additional staff have been drafted in to work through these offers and begin to source locally produced kit.
- DoH in London have a shortage of gowns and is providing specifications for local providers here to fill that gap.
- David Sterling asked if it would be possible to have graphics in the Sitrep that would show PPE orders, the “burn rate” of consumption of PPE and expected delivery times.

**Action: DoF and DoH to consider the inclusion of graphics in the Sitrep to show burn rate of consumption of PPE, orders made for additional kit and expected delivery times and to report back to CCG.**

#### **Freight companies, Ferries and Ports**

- Karen Pearson said that she will be in touch with relevant departments to consider asks for interactions with DfT.
- Katrina Godfrey reported good engagement across the board on this issue, including with DfT. She thanked FM and DFM for clearing the

urgent procedure which paved the way for the three nations push on the relaxation of the state aid rules.

#### **Guidance on Furloughed Workers**

- Mike Brennan advised that further guidance had been received from HMRC and a Question and Answer template for businesses and employees has been developed.
- The main clarification was that employees can work for others as long as this work does not breach their contract with their main employer.

#### **Opening of Schools over Easter**

- Derek Baker advised that 247 schools are available to open to receive the children of key workers over the Easter holidays.
- DE are encouraging schools to consider clustering at a local level to improve overall contingency for staff. Plans have been prepared and would be updated over the weekend as more information became available.
- A helpline has been set up for key workers so they can identify school placements for their children.
- The First Minister praised the work of DE in setting up the arrangements for key workers, including the very useful helpline.

#### **Departmental Operation Centres (DOC)**

- DOCs had been asked to send information through to NI Hub in a timely manner. Anthony Harbinson confirmed that the flow of material from DOCs was improving.

#### **4. SIT-REP UPDATE**

- Anthony Harbinson took the meeting through the main issues arising from yesterday's Sit-Rep which were as follows:
  - The establishment of the Dignity Reference Group;
  - Progress on distance learning with 51,000 students and teachers accessing the EA network yesterday;
  - The designation of the Belfast City Hospital as NI's first Nightingale hospital;
  - Belfast Trust is planning for a testing facility at Boucher Road DVA test centre and considering another at the Odyssey;
  - Comparison of travel numbers for roads, rail, bus and ferries are set out on page 5 of the Sitrep and show a significant decrease in all areas;

**Action: All departments to consider and put forward suggestions for ways of tracking compliance with social distancing among the general population.**

- The report on media activity has now been enhanced with expected media activity to show potential areas that the media may be about to focus on;

**Action: All departments to provide information on potential future media activity to the Sitrep.**

- There are also much more comprehensive details on Health and the Economy; and
- Agri-food absenteeism is now up to 14% and they are currently projecting a production drop of 15%. Denis McMahon provided an updated absentee figure of 12% showing that some staff are returning to work.

## **5. LEGISLATION UPDATE**

- Chris Stewart reported that TEO has received confirmation of a new set of regulations being developed in England that should be released next week.
- These regulations are expected to be mainly a tidying up and clarification exercise, although it is possible that they may involve relaxation of some business restrictions in selected areas.
- One example of the easing of restrictions is expected to be that Livestock markets be allowed to reopen. Livestock markets in NI had closed voluntarily because of social distancing problems at the beginning of the emergency.

## **6. MEMBER UPDATES**

**No members reported any issuing requiring escalation to CCG.**

In addition:

- JM Lyons asked whether PSNI were setting up vehicle checkpoints to look for breaches of social distancing. Mark Hamilton agreed to check and go back to Minister Lyons.
- Mike Brennan updated the meeting on the number of complaints around social distancing to the Health and Safety Executive. It had been at 70 per day last week but this has now dropped to 30, 13 of which relate to food companies.

- Sue Gray advised that the Chancellor had announced an amendment to the business loan provisions, extending the scheme to include more small business, removing the requirement for small businesses to seek corporate loans in the first instance and extending the scope to include those with turnover above £45m.
- Tracey Meharg advised that on shielding, DfC hoped to be in a position to start issuing food boxes towards the end of next week.

## **7. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

- Chris McNabb reported that the portal was performing well, with 750,000 views to date.
- TV advertising would be running on UTV on Monday.
- Advertisements would be in newspapers from next week.
- The main items in the media at present are:
  - Testing;
  - PPE; and
  - Divisions among the Executive.

## **8. AOB AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- Agreed not to hold a CCG meeting over the weekend.

### **Date of next meeting**

- 08:30, 6 April 2020, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room, Block B, Castle Buildings.