

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE

**Civil Contingency Group (COVID-19 Response) Meeting
Thursday 9 April 2020
Block B, Level 5 Conference Room, Castle Buildings**

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
David Small – DAERA
Peter May - DOJ
Sue Gray - DOF
Jill Minne – NICSHR
Derek Baker - DE
Tracy Meharg – DfC
Mark Hamilton – PSNI
Alan Todd - PSNI
Alan Walmsley - NIFRS
Michael Bloomfield - NIAS
Joan McCaffrey – Local Government
Stephen Reid – Local Government
Maria Jennings – Food Standards Agency
Mark Larmour – NIO
Chris McNabb – EIS TEO
Hugh Widdis – DSO
Name Redacted – TEO
Lesley Hogg - NI Assembly
Name Redacted – NI Hub
Mark McGuicken – NI Hub
Name – NI Hub – Note taker

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

2. COVID-19 - CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGNOSIS

- Richard Pengelly updated the meeting:
 - To date there were 1,339 confirmed cases in NI and 78 deaths.

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- The revised modelling was discussed at the Executive meeting yesterday. This illustrates that compliance with social distancing appears to be having a positive effect. However there is a need to balance recognising the impact versus complacency resulting from overly positive messaging.
 - 4.9 million of 5.5 million items of PPE with the balance expected within the next few days.
- David Sterling advised that a COBR(M) meeting was taking place later today, which FM and dFM would be joining. Restrictions would not be lifted. The key message from the Executive is that social distancing is working but compliance needs to continue, particularly over Easter.
- JM Kearney raised concerns around the number of confirmed cases in care homes and asked for an update on plans for community testing. He also noted reports of concerns around both the supply of and guidance regarding the use of PPE in the sector. He expressed concerns regarding the experience of Italy and France, with residential homes becoming hot-spots for transmission into the community. He noted that, to date, there was confirmed cases in 20 out of 240 care homes (and a further 21 in the South) but that there was a potential to impact up to 16,000 residents.

Richard Pengelly advised that there was ongoing work between DoH and the IHEP, the independent body for the sector. No specific concerns have been raised. The Executive has discussed the testing strategy. Testing can be deployed where clusters in residential care homes have been identified but no clusters have been identified to date. Regarding the concern on the points of transmission, he advised that this reverts to the issue of PPE. There is a distinction between the clinical advice and guidance on the use of PPE versus the perception of health and social care colleagues and whether they feel protected. A dedicated contact point in each Trust for residential care has now been identified.

Action: Richard Pengelly (DoH) to provide an update tomorrow (10 April) on ongoing work in relation to residential homes regarding testing, PPE and engagement with industry bodies.

Peter May advised that a note would issue from the NI Hub today regarding non-social care staff testing. This would provide an indication of the scale of the need. David Sterling urged all Departments to provide an urgent response.

Action: All Departments to provide returns to the NI Hub by 13.00 today (9 April) with names and numbers of those to be prioritised for non-health testing.

3. ACTIONS REVIEW

David Sterling progressed through the actions from the meeting of 8 April 2020.

Revised Modelling Paper

- This paper had been presented to the Executive yesterday and noted that this information was to be kept “tight”
This action can now be closed.

Traffic Data

- This action is now complete and can be closed.
- ACC Alan Todd advised that there was a small rise in the ANPR readings, which was a concerning trend, along with some indications of traffic from social media.

Consumption of PPE

- David Sterling advised that this action had not progressed and was still ongoing.

PR on PPE

- Sue Gray advised that she had landed some positive messages at the Finance Committee and that her Department was producing a statement today for comments. Action ongoing.

Fly Tipping

- David Small advised that he had engaged with councils yesterday via the Strategic Waste Management Group. There is a mixed picture from councils with some reporting increases and others reporting decreases

Action: David Small (DAERA) to liaise with local government today (9 April) regarding more robust data on fly tipping.

- Stephen Reid noted that there were pressures for Household Recycling Centres to re-open, however the view from SOLACE is that they should remain closed to reduce road traffic

Airports

- Mike Brennan advised that DfT had issued a revised Business Case for grant funding to HMT last night for consideration. HMT are concerned

regarding repercussiveness of any assistance and the potential for challenge from other airports. He also noted that the Belfast – Heathrow service was to reduce to one flight per day.

- Sue Gray stated that she had spoken to Charles Roxburgh, Second Permanent Secretary, HMT, to reiterate the NI position.
- The action regarding the consistency of messaging is therefore closed.

Review of Legislation

- Chris Stewart to provide an update under Agenda Item 5 (Legislation Update) below.

Media Activity and Engagement

- Chris McNabb advised that he was liaising with DAERA and DfE in relation to a messaging strategy to avoid panic buying. Action ongoing.

CCG Easter Rhythm

- David Sterling advised that a final decision would be taken at CCG tomorrow. The current plan is that a SitRep would not be produced on Saturday, but one would be produced on Easter Sunday for Monday. CCG would be stood up as normal except for Saturday and Sunday. Action ongoing.

4. SIT-REP UPDATE

Anthony Harbinson took the meeting through the main issues arising from yesterday's Sit-Rep which were as follows:

- Issues with calls to COVID19 Community helpline not being answered. Additional call handlers have been deployed to address;
- DoJ has been made aware of an immediate need for PPE for funeral directors to safely manage those who have passed away as a result of COVID-19.

Action: Peter May (DoJ) to liaise with Richard Pengelly (DoH) regarding the guidance and supply of PPE for funeral directors.

- A letter has issued from DE to schools to encourage vulnerable children to attend. This work is ongoing with DoH and HSC;
- PPE has been made available all schools including Special schools;
- Issue with the availability of PPE for Search and Rescue;
- DfI traffic data shows a slight increase in vehicle traffic, however the trend is that traffic flow is still 27% down from Tuesday 24th March;
- Significant reduction in flights;
- Comms – Easter stay at home campaign starts today;
- In Rol the Gardaí have been granted additional enforcement powers for the Easter weekend;

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- The RoI Government has announced €15m million support for key ferry routes;
- Health theme – Immediate need for revised guidance for funeral directors;
- Justice theme
 - lack of consistency on opening of public spaces such as parks and venues;
 - 106 prisoners have been released under the Temporary Release Scheme;
- Communities theme
 - DE is developing a proposal for substitute teachers;
 - Social landlords are seeking guidance on home allocation policy.

In relation to infrastructure, Katrina Godfrey advised that there were positive indications in terms of supports to ferries and ports, however she noted that there were 3 inter-linked parties and that the haulage industry was also critical. Some of the assistance for ferry companies will alleviate but not resolve all haulage issues.

Mike Brennan noted that there were significant concerns from the local haulage sector in relation to commercial problems from transporting empty loads and the practicality of enforcing social distancing in lorry cabs. Potential interventions include support for transporting empty loads, Fuel Duty Rebate and the suspension of Road Tax. These have been flagged to BEIS and DfT.

Action: Mike Brennan (DfE) to provide an update tomorrow (10 April) re the challenges faced in the haulage industry

5. LEGISLATION UPDATE

- Chris Stewart noted that the paper regarding amendments to emergency legislative provision to support the COVID-19 response was taking longer than expected, due to the complexity of the issues.
- The key issues under consideration are:
 - Clarity around enforcement of travelling for exercise is expected today but won't be ready in time for Easter.
 - New regulations in the RoI have been issued and upon comparison:
 - The RoI regulations appear less restrictive in terms of gatherings and the number of people permitted;
 - The RoI regulations are more restrictive in relation to a 2km limit for exercise. NI is not minded to follow this.

6. MEMBER UPDATES

- Alan Todd flagged 3 issues from PSNI:
 - Clarification of the legal position regarding driving to exercise.
 - Widening those designated to take enforcement action under the Health Regulations. Currently the PSNI and Harbour Police are the only bodies designated to take enforcement action.
 - Parks and Beauty spots and the consistency and robustness of preventative action, for example closing car parks.
- In relation to clarification of the legal position, Alan Todd advised that PSNI had sought legal advice from PPS and that the Chief Constable was discussing this with the Justice Minister.
- FM expressed concern if there was not clarity in the legal position before Easter. She emphasised that the position and message would need to be clear in the Press Conference later today, otherwise there could be a lessening in compliance with social distancing.

Action: ACC Alan Todd to liaise with Chris Stewart (TEO) and Hugh Widdis (DSO) to clarify the legal position on travelling for exercise by lunchtime today (9 April).

Action: Richard Pengelly (DoH) and Chris Stewart (TEO) to consider wider enforcement avenues via health under the regulations.

- In relation to parks, Stephen Reid advised that rural parks are closed, however town parks, which allow for social distancing, are open to allow for exercise opportunities. The need for a consistent approach will be reinforced with a call with Solace this afternoon.

Action: Stephen Reid to provide an update from councils on the effectiveness of park closures tomorrow (10 April).

- David Small noted that all forest and country parks are closed to vehicles. The Agriculture Minister reinforced this message yesterday and further activity is planned in advance of the Easter weekend.
- David Sterling queried the potential for tourism bodies to reinforce messaging about not travelling. Mike Brennan noted most tourism attractions are already closed and agreed to raise this with the tourism bodies.

Action: Mike Brennan (DFE) to liaise with tourism representative bodies to reinforce messaging via their social media channels today (9 April) regarding not travelling to tourist attractions over Easter.

In addition:

- Maria Jennings noted that the FSA was preparing more flexible guidance on food labelling to allow some supply to be diverted from catering to retail.
- Mark Larmour noted that the focus of UKG today was continued social distancing and the need to avoid complacency.

7. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

- Chris McNabb advised that the key message from today's Press Conference by FM, dFM and Chief Constable would be staying at home over Easter.
- He noted that there had been in excess 900k page views and 500k visits for the online portal and that the digital campaign was performing well with 1.9 million impressions.

8. AOB AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Date of next meeting

- 08:30, 10 April 2020, 5th Floor Conference Room, Block B, Castle Buildings.