

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE

**Civil Contingency Group (COVID-19 Response) Meeting
Monday 13 April 2020
Block B, Level 5 Conference Room, Castle Buildings**

Note of Meeting

Attendees

David Sterling (Chair)
Arlene Foster - FM
Michelle O'Neill - dFM
Declan Kearney - JM
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
Simon Byrne - PSNI
Aidan Jennings – NIFRS
Michael Bloomfield - NIAS
Stephen Reid – Local Government
Maria Jennings – Food Standards Agency
Mark Larmour – NIO
Chris McNabb – EIS TEO
Hugh Widdis – DSO
NR – TEO
Lesley Hogg - NI Assembly
NR – NI Hub
Secretariat – NI Hub

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

2. COVID-19 - CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGNOSIS

- Richard Pengelly (DoH) updated the meeting:
 - To date there had been 1,806 confirmed cases in NI and 118 deaths.
 - The Testing Group met on Friday to discuss the continued expansion of testing.

- There has been difficulty securing Health workers to be tested and therefore testing at the SSE has been stood down until Wednesday. Testing at Balmoral continues.
- A new North West Testing Centre will be created at City of Derry Rugby Club which will be operational from Wednesday.

3. ACTIONS REVIEW

David Sterling progressed through the actions from the meeting of 10 April 2020.

Prioritised Testing for non-health service testing

Peter May (DoJ) advised that:

- Testing has now taken place for 3 days. Police and Prisoner Officers who were self-isolating have attended along with one DAERA member of staff. No requirements have been expressed by other Departments. The scope of testing was widened on Friday to include those workers requiring tests for economic or health purposes.
- 3 Prison Officers have tested positive, including one who was working in the Isolation Unit in Maghaberry for new prisoners. The Justice Minister wrote to the Health Minister yesterday proposing a change in the testing policy to include prisoners.
- Simon Byrne expressed thanks from the PSNI for the testing programme for workforce and their families. He noted this had provided reassurance and boosted morale.

PPE

Richard Pengelly (DoH) advised that:

- PPE within the residential care sector is an ongoing issue. Trusts have reiterated the single point of contact with the Residential Care centre. The department has been in contact with the industry bodies as well as individual care providers and there has been a more positive response from the sector. The current issue is that residential care homes would like longer term stocks of PPE on their sites for reassurance over certainty of supply, however due to the reality of the PPE stock position, there are currently more frequent deliveries providing supplies for 2 to 3 days. The Department has also put residential care providers in contact with local manufacturers of PPE.

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- The FM noted some negative media coverage regarding the supply of PPE to Belfast GPs and stated that it was important to address any confidence issues expressed by doctors in relation to PPE.
- RP noted that the concerns expressed by George O'Neill were not consistent with the view held by other Doctors. Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer has been in touch with the BMA and RCGP and encouraged them to engage proactively with the media today.
- The dFM queried whether there was any intention to revise downwards the guidance on the use of PPE.
- RP advised that there was no plan to minimise, and with appropriate use of PPE in line with the current guidance, usage is expected to increase. The issue is matching usage to the Supply Chain. He noted that some scientific evidence suggested that a "bare beneath the elbows" policy was more effective in terms of ability to wash, however the issue was balancing the science with health workers' confidence in PPE.
- SB advised that the PSNI had received legal advice regarding the use of PPE under Sections 4 and 5 of the Health and Safety Act. This was particularly in relation to 'persons in custody' and the use of PPE by PSNI staff.

Action: Hugh Widdis (DSO) to liaise with PSNI regarding legal advice on institutional responsibility for the public sector.

Fly Tipping

- Denis McMahon (DAERA) confirmed that work with councils was ongoing and noted that there had been some coverage of this issue by the UFU.
- JM Kearney expressed concern that there was a substantial increase in fly tipping in rural areas, which could pose a public health issue, and that there might be an argument for considering the re-opening of HRC. He also queried the definition of fly tipping being used in the data.
- SR noted that the data provided for the past 2 weeks by local councils showed a mixed picture. There are concerns around re-opening HRC resulting in increased traffic on the roads and also the difficulty of implementing social distancing at HRC sites.
- JM Lyons agreed that social distancing was the key issue, however the longer HRC are closed, the greater the increase in traffic once they re-open.

Updated Action CCG1004/03: Denis McMahon (DAERA) and Stephen Reid (Local Government) to update CCG on Friday 17 April regarding of fly-tipping and review the potential for HRC to re-open.

Policy Issues Paper

- Chris Stewart (TEO) advised that 2 Executive papers were being produced:
 - The first paper regarding a formal review of the regulations is currently with Minister Swann for consideration. This paper is to be presented to the Executive meeting on Wednesday.
 - The second paper is regarding potential amendments to the regulations. CS noted that any review of the re-opening of HRC may delay this paper to Friday.

Action: David Sterling and Chris Stewart (TEO) to consider the timing of the policy paper on changes to regulations in advance of any update of HRC issue on Friday.

CCG Actions

- DS noted that that actions still in progress would be followed up today, with DOCs to provide an update to their Liaison Officers or evidence to support closure of an action.

Critical Freight Transport

- Katrina Godfrey (DfI) noted that there had been further work on this issue in GB over the weekend and a national announcement was expected this week, following the Easter holidays in Whitehall (Friday and Monday).

Updated Action CCG0904/04: Katrina Godfrey (DfI) to provide an update to CCG by Friday 17 April on the outcome of DfT and HMT support for Critical Freight Transport.

Support for Airports and Airlines

- Similarly Mike Brennan (DfE) reported that an update was expected from DfT and HMT following the Easter holidays.

Updated Action CCG0804/06: Mike Brennan (DfE) to provide an update to CCG by Friday 17 April on the outcome of DfT and HMT support for airports and airlines.

4. SIT-REP UPDATE

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

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- DfI mobile cameras were deployed to tourist hot-spots over the weekend. The data is yet to be fully analysed but initial feedback is that public compliance with remaining at home over Easter appears to be good.
- KG noted that the locations for the cameras were selected in conjunction with the PSNI.
- SB noted that the PSNI had commenced issuing fixed penalty notices on Friday and that 107 had been issued to date. Multiple tickets have been issued to some individuals.
- JM Kearney raised the use of Military Aid to the Civil Authorities (MACA), including the timing of any decision and the level of engagement with the PSNI and freight industry to determine their capacity to assist.
- RP advised that he was not aware of the precise timing when options crystallised. He noted that military assistance was being considered in relation to two specific issues:
 - Transportation of ventilators, which may be at short notice; and
 - Building a Nightingale Hospital.
- RP noted that the pre-conditions for use of MACA included that all other options had been fully explored. A piece of work is ongoing to look at other capacity.
- SB stated that he was not aware of any dialogue between the PSNI and the Department of Health regarding the use of Military Aid to the Civil Authorities (MACA). He noted that any military transport would require PSNI support.

Action: Military Aid to the Civil Authorities (MACA) to be considered by the Executive at its meeting on Wednesday 15 April.

- AH noted the age profile of confirmed cases, and that it was concerning that there were similar numbers of those over 70 to those under 44, when it was expected that those over 70 would be shielded.
- The data supports a trend of increased road traffic.
- The PSNI has the lowest absence rate of any UK police service. Testing of non-health staff will assist this further with staff testing negatively able to return to work.

5. LEGISLATION UPDATE

- Chris Stewart (TEO) advised that he had nothing further to add to the earlier discussion.

6. MEMBER UPDATES

- **NR** (PSNI) noted that he had received advice from PPS which supports the legality of travelling to exercise. This conflicted with guidance issued by the College of Policing for England and Wales which suggested that any restriction in travelling to exercise may contravene Art 5 rights. He advised that the legal advice would need to be taken into account in policy development and reiterated that the test was the reasonableness and necessity of any journey i.e. travelling long distances to exercise.
- Christ Stewart noted he would need to reflect upon this advice along with the legal advice from DSO and consider whether any adjustments to the regulations are required.

Action: Chris Stewart (TEO) to liaise with DSO and PSNI regarding legal advice on travelling to exercise and any required amendments to the regulations.

- Both NIAS and NIFRS expressed their thanks for the effective testing programme and commented upon the positive impact this has had in reducing staff absence. NIAS absence has halved and NIFRS absence has reduced from 160 to 120.
- Sue Gray (DoF) noted that the Chancellor was expected to make a further statement around financial support today. The Finance Minister will present a paper on the outcome of this statement to Wednesday's Executive meeting.
- Mark Larmour NIO advised that the key issues for NIO were:
 - Feedback has been sought from Health on an Adult Social Care Strategy. Comments are due back today
 - Awaiting feedback from DfT and HMT on support for freight and airports.
 - In relation to the use of MACA, he advised that there was a well-established process to consider any requests.
- Peter May (DoJ) noted that the issue regarding PPE for funeral directors was still ongoing and that the action had been closed prematurely. He asked for the action to be re-opened and advised that his Department were continuing to engage with Health colleagues.

Updated Action CCG0904/03: To be re-opened

- Denis McMahon (DAERA) advised that the market effects on the price of agricultural products was a developing issue. The Agriculture Minister met industry representatives in relation to beef on Friday.

7. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

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- Chris McNabb (EIS) advised that the campaign which had ran over the weekend focussed on staying at home for Easter. He has a call scheduled with Peter Jackson, BBC today, regarding the nature and quality of reporting.

8. AOB AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Date of next meeting

- 08:30, 14 April 2020, 5th Floor Conference Room, Block B, Castle Buildings.