

**Civil Contingency Group (COVID-19 Response) Meeting
Monday 30 March 2020
Block B Level 5 Conference Room Castle Buildings**

Note of Meeting

Attendees

David Sterling (Chair)
Arlene Foster – FM
Declan Kearney – JM
Gordon Lyons – JM
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
Tracy Meharg - DfC
Mark Hamilton – PSNI
Mark O'Neill - 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
Jane Holmes – NI Hub
Andy Cole – NI Hub
George Hamilton – 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 to the meeting. The latest figures were 410 cases with 21 deaths.
- 742 tests had been conducted over the past 48 hours, but there was an issue on matching up the number of tests with individuals, since some individuals have had to have multiple tests.

Modelling

- DoH are looking at the modelling from imperial college today to identify the best and worst case scenarios and then identify the most likely scenario going forward.

Availability of PPE

- DoH are working well with CPD and a lot of orders have been placed for PPE. Richard Pengelly said that there was a large amount of misinformation about this issue on social media, but that we must not lose sight of the genuine concerns about this from front line.
- UKG have told DoH that they are not anticipating any significant changes to the guidance on PPE. The guidance may evolve a little over time, but nothing major planned.
- DoF said that they have been actively chasing PPE options.

Action DoF: DoF to provide an update to all members on current ordering of PPE later today.

Hospital capacity

- Existing reconfiguration work ongoing, but has run into some issues with supply for the construction sector.

Action DoF: DoF to meet with construction employer's forum to discuss ongoing supply issues.

- Three sites have been examined for the possible site of a field hospital for Covid-19 patients. Maze Long Kesh, Titanic and Film Studio. Early technical testing has favoured the MLK site, but no decisions have been taken and further work ongoing with construction experts.

Blood Donations

- JM Kearney asked about blood supply.
- Richard said that stock is holding up well. Work ongoing in sorting additional sites to hold blood donation sessions.

3. ACTIONS REVIEW

- Anthony Harbinson gave an update on the outstanding actions from 27 March.

PPE Guidance

- Already covered under the DoH update – Completed.

Additional PPE requirement

- DoF had a good response on Friday from departments and emergency services - Completed.

Additional Hand Sanitiser requirements

- Departments and Emergency Services have been liaising with DoF – Completed.

DfE/DoF liaison re Finance Minister

- DfE/DoF liaison took place to brief the Finance Minister in advance of his call with UKG on Friday – Completed.

Blood transfusion venues

- Departments have been providing information on additional venues re blood transfusion – Ongoing.

Status of BoC Ltd workers

- DoH notified BoC Ltd that their workers had been added to the list of key workers.

FAQs on NI Direct

- Departments have been reminded about the need to reinforce all communications on NI Direct and departments have been making good returns to EIS.
- NI Direct much better populated.

Clarity on Furloughed Workers

- DfE have received further guidance from HMG but this still lacks clarity.

Action DfE: DfE to liaise with HMG on providing more detailed guidance on furloughed workers.

4. SITREP UPDATE

- Anthony Harbinson took the meeting through the main issues arising from yesterday's Sitrep.
- He said that there would be more updates to the Sitrep in the near future, this would include clearer graphics.

Ferry companies financial difficulties

- Katrina Godfrey said that the issue is not just with ferry companies but all ports. Her Minister was in the lead but input required from DAERA and DfE also.
- First Minister said she had been speaking to some freight companies around the issue of transporting empty containers. They are facing a substantive financial issue and this needs resolved as a matter of urgency.
- Mike Brennan said the haulage companies want either free haulage for empty containers or subsidies.
- Denis McMahon said this had the potential to impact on food supply. NIO may need to be involved to help smooth issues with London.

Action DfI, DAERA and DfE: The three Departments to meet to agree specific actions to resolve financial difficulties being experienced by ferry companies.

Blood transfusion

- Already covered under the action update.

Risk to Chemical supply chain

- Risks to supply of chemicals identified around freight transport viability.
- Similar issue to issue with ferry companies and ports.

Action DfI, DAERA and DfE: The three Departments will also consider the issue of potential risk to the chemical supply chain as part of their meetings to resolve the ferry/port/haulage companies' issue.

Funeral Directors

- Covid 19 guidance has issued to all funeral directors.

Potential Airport Closures

- Current traveller restrictions have been significantly impacting on local airports making them unviable. Risk that City of Derry Airport and Belfast City Airport may have to close.
- Mike Brennan said that Logan Air was shutting down operations and that Easi Jet has grounded their whole fleet.

Grants to Business

- First run of payments of £10k grant to the 6,725 ratepayers was processed on 26 March.

Non EEA fishing crews

- Issues over social distancing for non EEA fishing crews.

Action DfC: DfC agreed to pick up the issue of social distancing for non-EEA fishing crews and seek resolution.

Body bags

- DoF have been placed orders for Body bags to resolve potential supply issues.

Food producers – staff shortages

- Denis McMahon said that projected staff shortages figures among food producers has not yet materialised yet. DAERA has been working with FSA on safety have issued guidance to food producers. No further action is necessary at present but the situation will be monitored closely.
- Mike Brennan said that the engagement forum would be meeting later in the day and this issue would be raised then. Anthony Harbinson said that there had been good meeting with the Health and Safety Executive yesterday.

Action DfE: To ensure the readout of the Engagement Forum was shared with Ministers.

Testing

- Mark Hamilton from PSNI asked about Covid 19 testing.
- Richard Pengelly said that the expert group was looking at prioritisation of testing within Health.

- DoF looking at testing for organisations outside health. Had now got clearance from Public Health England that the Randox testing kits were approved for use.
- Now need to assess what the demand is across all non-health organisations and match this to the new supply.
- All members were asked to send an assessment of their need to Anthony Harbinson in the NI Hub. This would include any other organisations working with departments – so that public and private sector are not competing for the same materials.
- In addition all departments and emergency services should provide assurance that the specification of testing is appropriate for their workforce. Any existing prioritisation assessment undertaken by departments or emergency services should also be sent through to the NI Hub.

Action All: All members to send an assessment of their testing needs to Anthony Harbinson in the NI Hub – to include assurance of the specification of the testing and any prioritisation.

- This item will be raised at the General Public Sector Ministerial implementation Group meeting later today which junior Ministers will be attending. Karen Pearson agreed to send out a readout from the GPS meeting to members.

Action TEO: Karen Pearson to issue readout of GPS meeting to all members.

5. LEGISLATION OVERVIEW

- Chris Stewart said that DoH had issued more regulations over the weekend.
- He asked all members to feedback intelligence on the operation of the regulations as soon as it became available.
- The additional restrictions imposed by Rol look broadly similar to the UK restrictions but they have taken the opposite approach. Rol has listed what is permitted and the rest is restricted. UK has said what is restricted and the rest is permitted. Will keep the working of both systems under review.
- Two areas of divergence have been identified at present. Rol has tighter controls on the construction sector and have included a blanket inclusion for all over 70's in their shielding programme.
- Chris reported that some legislation was being progressed in Scotland around the mitigation of restrictions.
- Chris said that he has asked UKG to give early warning of any future restrictions so that NI will have time to prepare for implementation, he asked for NIO help in this regard.
- Stephen Reid said that he had queries with respect of the interpretation of restriction powers for Local Government.

Action TEO, Local Government and DfC: Chris Stewart to arrange a meeting with Local Government and DfC to discuss interpretation of restrictive powers.

6. MEMBER UPDATES

No members reported any issuing requiring escalation to CCG.

In addition:

- Maria Jennings asked for an invite for FSA to the Engagement Forum event.

Action DfE: Mike Brennan to forward request for FSA invite to Engagement Forum.

- NI Assembly said that they would be going into recess on Friday and asked TEO to liaise with them urgently on any further legislative requirements.

Action TEO: Chris Stewart to liaise with NI Assembly on future legislation requirements.

- Denis McMahon reported that DAERA and DfC are continuing to work on the Shielding programme.
- Tracey Meharg reported that claims for Universal Credit still remained very high.

7. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

- Chris McNabb said that the Television advertisements would begin today.
- A press conference would be held later today, with consideration being given to the range of Ministerial attendance at future press conferences.
- Remote press conferences facility being considered.

8. AOB AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Date of next meeting

- 08:30, 31 March 2020, E.4.02 Conference Room, Castle Buildings.