
From: Jayne Brady

Date: 14 December 2021

To: Permanent Secretaries

COVID – OMICRON VARIANT & BOOSTER SURGE CAPACITY

1. As you know from our recent meetings, the Omicron variant is spreading at an exponential rate and while the full effects of this in Northern Ireland is still emerging it is however very likely that the variant will impact directly on public services, the wider economy and therefore societal resilience. Accordingly, I am writing to you to outline the actions and decisions that will be taken to ensure we have the capacity in place over the next six weeks as we prepare for the potential disruption.
2. The immediate tasks now are: (a) providing capacity to ensure that key posts necessary to maintain the machinery of government continue to be staffed in TEO; (b) ensuring that there is enough cover to support immediate acceleration of Booster roll-out through the Department of Health; and (c) providing wider Omicron surge capacity to deal with issues as they arise over the coming weeks. We will also need to plan ahead for the New Year and ensure that we have capacity in place to deal with new challenges as they arise.
3. I have decided to stand up a Cross-Departmental Surge Team which will identify and pool resources and allocate them as required. I have asked Denis McMahon to lead this team. Volunteers will be temporarily redeployed to the

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™
We invest in people Silver

The personal information (e.g., name, personal email/home postal address) included in your correspondence, which the Executive Office now holds, will be handled in accordance with data protection legislation. It will be kept secure and only shared with relevant officials for the purpose of providing a response. This information will be retained for no longer than is necessary, and in line with the Department's retention and disposal schedule.

surge team, who will in turn ensure that volunteers are allocated to urgent pressures. While members of the team will work to their host Departments, the surge team will maintain line management responsibility for the period that volunteers are deployed to them. This will enable us to provide volunteers with assurance that they will not, in effect, be transferred to another Department permanently. In terms of the tasks identified above, the following approach is being adopted:

(a) Capacity for Machinery of Government

4. TEO has identified a series of staff who will step into key roles in the event that Omicron impacts in a way that cannot be managed within teams. This will include capacity for Private Offices; Executive Information Services; Central Contingency and Covid Response. If we need to use this capacity, this will inevitably mean that some areas of work will need to be paused. It is my expectation that other Departments will wish to use the same process to deal with their internal emergency pressures.

(b) Capacity for Covid Surge Team

5. We have also begun to identify some people to assist the Department of Health, which will be on the front line in delivery of the Booster program and protecting society from the impacts. TEO will not however have enough capacity to meet the needs of DoH (currently assessed at 2x SCS, 6 people at Grade 7 and 6 people at DP level; note that in this case functional competence will be more important than grade.) Accordingly, we are asking Departments who have the appropriate skills to meet these needs and asking them to volunteer. I realise that this would not be an ideal approach under normal circumstances, but it will be necessary in the circumstances which we now face. It is important that we all work together to support colleagues in Departments but ultimately this is about delivering vital services to citizens.
6. This will provide a vehicle for addressing the wider capacity issues which will be likely to emerge. For example, it is likely that DfE and DfC will face particular



The personal information (e.g., name, personal email/home postal address) included in your correspondence, which the Executive Office now holds, will be handled in accordance with data protection legislation. It will be kept secure and only shared with relevant officials for the purpose of providing a response. This information will be retained for no longer than is necessary, and in line with the Department's retention and disposal schedule.

pressures in the event that additional support is required for workers, businesses and the economy.

7. We are be looking for volunteers under four key headings:

- (a) Legislation;
- (b) Policy Development;
- (c) Programme and Project Management;
- (d) Service Delivery and Support (to include customer service such as call handling, payment processing and verification; grant programme administration).

(c) Other Options for Prioritising Surge Programme

8. There are other options which would enable us to prioritise the Surge Programme NICS wide. A letter is being drafted to go to the Assembly, if necessary, in order to reduce pressure on staff arising from Assembly business. There is scope to identify additional resources through secondments from Arms' Length Bodies and relevant third sector organisations – I would propose that Permanent Secretaries write to their relevant bodies to identify the scope for support. Consideration should also be given as to use of contract resources. Likewise, I would ask that Permanent Secretaries identify DPs from the recent competition who could be diverted for a limited period to meet urgent demands. (We will also engage directly with NICSHR on this issue.)

Conclusion

9. These are exceptionally challenging circumstances and I recognise that people are experiencing huge challenges, personally and professionally, as a result of the sustained pressure that they have been under. I am also conscious that failing to plan for this scenario would put undue pressure on the very same teams that have been giving 120% over the past 20 months. I really value your co-operation in making this work and of course I am open to other suggestions which may enhance this programme.



The personal information (e.g., name, personal email/home postal address) included in your correspondence, which the Executive Office now holds, will be handled in accordance with data protection legislation. It will be kept secure and only shared with relevant officials for the purpose of providing a response. This information will be retained for no longer than is necessary, and in line with the Department's retention and disposal schedule.

10. Grateful for your input by close on Thursday 16th December please.

Personal Data

JAYNE BRADY

Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service



The personal information (e.g., name, personal email/home postal address) included in your correspondence, which the Executive Office now holds, will be handled in accordance with data protection legislation. It will be kept secure and only shared with relevant officials for the purpose of providing a response. This information will be retained for no longer than is necessary, and in line with the Department's retention and disposal schedule.