

NICS Board Meeting

Executive Room, Stormont Castle

Friday 28 February 2020

Minutes

Board Members	
David Sterling (Chair)	Hugh Widdis
Andrew McCormick	Jill Minne
Katrina Godfrey	Derek Baker
Denis McMahon	Chris Stewart
Sue Gray	
Tracy Meharg	
Mark Browne	
In attendance	
Dr Michael McBride (deputy for Richard Pengelly)	NR (Secretary)
Colin Lewis (deputy for Mike Brennan)	Brenda Henderson (for item 6a)
NR deputy for Brenda King)	
Anthony Harbinson (deputy for Peter May)	

1. (a) Apologies

Apologies were received from Mike Brennan, Brenda King, Peter May and Richard Pengelly

(b) Minutes of 31 January 2020 meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

(c) Matters arising

Board members reviewed the matters arising from previous meetings, providing updates where appropriate.

(d) Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Brexit Update

Andrew McCormick provided an overview of Brexit related developments including recent meetings with stakeholder governments.

3. Budget update

Sue Gray outlined the timeline for the budget bill and advised that the Finance Minister recently met with Steve Barclay, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, to discuss the financial pressures across the Executive.

4. Strategic HR Issues

Jill Minne provided a verbal update on the papers presented, including the process for staffing SCS posts and the latest position on pay negotiations.

HOCS requested that a brief dashboard summary be provided in future, with the potential to drill down into further information.

ACTION: Jill Minne

Board members were asked to consider a request from the NIO to advertise a G5 secondment opportunity, with the possibility of advertising a further 12 secondment opportunities. Following discussion it was agreed to decline both of these requests.

5. Governance

(a) Make the Call Wraparound Service

Brenda Henderson from DfC spoke to the paper provided and gave an overview of the Make the Call (MtC) Wrap-around service delivered by DfC explaining that the purpose of the service is to connect with people across NI to make sure individuals and/or households are receiving the benefits, supports and services they are entitled to.

She explained that departments are likely to have common customers, and was asking Permanent Secretaries to consider the relevance of an expanded MtC Wraparound model to the work of their departments. Members welcomed the opportunity to consider the expansion of this service and it was agreed that Tracy Meharg would write to all departments about the next steps.

ACTION: Tracy Meharg

(b) Covid 19

Dr Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer, briefed board members on the latest Covid 19 situation and confirmed the first presumptive case has been diagnosed in Northern Ireland. He provided reassurance that the public health system is experienced in planning for such events. He also advised that Chief Medical Officers in each UK administration would take the lead in media engagement.

Dr McBride advised that it would be prudent to plan for reasonable worst case scenario and urged Permanent Secretaries to ensure that all business continuity plans, and those of their ALBs, are up to date.

Chris Stewart provided an update on the plans in place to stand up C3 arrangements if required. He sought agreement to write to departments to seek additional volunteers to staff the C3 structures. This was agreed.

ACTION: Chris Stewart

There was discussion around the need to ensure clear and accurate advice is accessible to the general public, and also the need for advice and guidance to NICS staff. Dr McBride advised that the PHA is responsible for the provision of advice to the public and indicated that discussions are taking place with the NHS 111 service, to provide access for NI. It was agreed that EIS staff will liaise with DoH press officers regarding taking forward advice for NICS staff.

ACTION: EIS / DoH Press officers

The need to consider how the NICS should deal with Covid-19 related staff absence was also discussed. It was agreed that Jill Minne would look at this issue.

ACTION: Jill Minne

It was also agreed that a paper with core messages should be drafted, which could be used as an aide memoire by senior officials and/or Ministers, to ensure consistency of messaging.

ACTION: Chris Stewart

Tim Losty, Director of the NI Bureau in China, provided an update on his experience of living in Beijing when the city was on lock down as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak. He explained what daily living was like, and indicated that ensuring strong messaging regarding hand washing and isolation is absolutely essential to minimising the spread of the virus.

HOCS offered thanks from the NICS Board to colleagues in the PHA and other agencies and departments who have been working around the clock to deal with the Covid-19 outbreak.

6. AOB

DoF

Sue Gray advised that a number of Non-Executive Directors across the NICS are nearing the end of their contracted appointments. Sue explained that DoF will not be running a central competition and that individual departments should consider the best way to fill these positions.

NICS HR

Jill Minne advised that further volunteers are required for the SO/DP assessment centres and asked Board members to encourage staff to volunteer.

ACTION: All

DAERA

Denis McMahon advised that he planned to run a video conference across the NICS to raise awareness of and share learning from the policy champions' network.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Friday 27 March 2020.