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FROM: **ANDY COLE**   **Copy Distribution List Below**

DATE: **23 SEPTEMBER 2020**

TO: **PS/MINISTERS**

SUBJECT: **COVID-19 2ⁿᵈ WAVE – NIHUB ACTIVATION**

Issue:	Ministers have requested advice on the activation of the NIHUB in the context of rising COVID-19 cases.
Timing:	Urgent.
FoI implications	An exemption provided under Section 35(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 may be applicable.
Financial Implications:	Departments meet the costs of volunteer staff for the NI HUB.
	Cost of approx. £100k/month may be required to provide data analytics for a full stand up of the NIHUB. A Direct Award Contract would be required in the short term.
Legislative Implications:	None.
Press Office Implications:	The NIHUB provides a central coordination function for an NI Government response – and as such NIHUB products are classed as official sensitive and would not be released to the public.

Recommendations: It is recommended that Ministers:

- note the escalation model and protocols in place to facilitate a graduated NI emergency response;

- note the NIHUB status of "Alert" and volunteers now on notice; and

- agree that a full stand up of the NIHUB is not necessary at this time.

Northern Ireland Central Crisis Management Arrangements (NICCMA)

1. Northern Ireland has long established, tried and tested civil contingencies response arrangements in place. These arrangements are known as NICCMA and are led by the Civil Contingencies Group reporting to the Executive. The capabilities and capacities around these arrangements were strengthened during EU Exit preparations. Most notably, a central operations room to co-ordinate the cross cutting response, the NIHUB, was put in place along with a suite of individual Departmental Operations Centres (DOCs) to facilitate the effective delivery of individual departmental contributions to the response.

2. The core purpose of the NIHUB is to centrally coordinate information during an emergency response, across all NI Departments and key partners, providing situational awareness to enhance decision making at all levels, primarily for CCG (NI) and the Executive. The NIHUB is agnostic in design, can deal with single or concurrent issues and provides one single source of cross Departmental, NI wide impact to CCG (NI).

3. In the case of COVID-19, as preparations moved beyond the health space, there was a need for coordination of wider non-health work, in addition to COVID-19. Accordingly, TEO established CCG (NI) in February 2020 to act as a focal point for NI's emergency response and share information with key NI partners to seek input on preparedness to inform collective next steps and decision making at CCG (NI) and the Executive. The NIHUB was established in March to support strategic decision making at CCG (NI).

Escalation Protocols

4. As per the current CCG (NI) Protocol for the Escalation of Multi-Agency Response, local level emergencies will be dealt with through existing emergency planning and response structures. In the main most crises are dealt with an EPG/SCG and DOC level, the principle of subsidiarity being key; and only in the most extreme circumstances should it be necessary to escalate to a full stand up of the NIHUB to coordinate a cross departmental response.

5. At the end of August the NICS Board approved a revised escalation model for a future stand up of the NIHUB. The diagram at **Annex A** shows the NI crisis response architecture and mirrors the national model, using a traffic light system from green through to red, from local crisis through to national.

6. This model recognises that CCG (NI), as the link to the Executive, will be the central point for the dissemination of crisis management information. Once the conditions dictate that the intensity of CCG (NI) meetings need to escalate, the need to provide information to and from the NIHUB will also intensify with the staffing model flexing to meet those demands.

7. The present status is NIHUB "Alert" in the current escalation model, with CCG (NI) meeting routinely at present, the next meeting scheduled for 13 October. Volunteers have recently been put on notice to activate and commence refresher training in the event that the NIHUB needs to stand up to deal with multiple concurrent events such as COVID-19 and EU Exit alongside normal winter pressures during the November/December period.

8. Without a significant escalation or stress around hospitalisation and ICU capacity, or a wider concurrency it is difficult to see the requirement for an increase in the frequency of CCG (NI) and by definition, for an escalation to full activation of the NIHUB to HUB One or HUB Two status.

Current Position – DoH as LGD

9. Since June 2020 DoH has been acting as Lead Government Department (LGD) and has been managing the health response under its own emergency response procedures in close collaboration with the Executive Office.

10. DoH have been providing NI health data directly to the Digital Dashboard Team in the Cabinet Office, to facilitate the reporting of UK wide health statistics since the end of July, when the NIHUB data analytics provision was stood down. DoH also publish a daily dashboard with health statistics and provide more detailed health data to support Executive decision making as required.

11. DoH has advised that in response to a serious or catastrophic emergency, DoH will require a limited to full activation of its Health Gold Command facilities based in Castle Buildings initiating its emergency response plan. The DoH Activation protocol is attached at **Annex B**.

12. It is our understanding that DoH would be willing to stand up Health Gold in the absence of the full NIHUB being stood up. Activating Health Gold Command level 2 or level 3 requires approval from the CMO or a deputy. DoH would set up Health Gold if it was felt to be necessary for managing and co-ordinating the Health response to COVID-19 or any other health emergency which cannot be managed locally or at Bronze +/- Silver level.

13. Short of full activation, there may also be some particular functions of Health Gold that DoH consider useful to manage an escalating situation where UK-level co-ordination is required, such as increasing reporting to Cabinet Office or DHSC. Partial or 'soft' stand-up might assist in mobilising and re-distributing resource from across DoH to meet increasing demands for information, even if DoH do not decide to stand up the full Health Gold structures.

COVID Management Information Requirements

14. The above paragraphs outline the current escalation protocols and the current position in relation to DoH acting as LGD and the current data reporting arrangements in place. These are complemented by the work led by Karen Pearson across a number of strands in relation to relaxations and restrictions.

15. Should Ministers require more detailed management information or more focused or regular SitRep reporting for example, this could be discussed further and whether that can be handled directly by DoH as LGD or via another approach, short of full stand up of the NIHUB until that is deemed necessary.

Recommendations

16.　　It is recommended that Ministers:

- note the escalation model and protocols in place to facilitate a graduated NI emergency response;

- note the NIHUB status of "Alert" with volunteers now on notice; and

- agree that a full stand up of the NIHUB is not necessary at this time.

PD
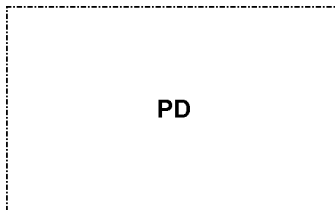
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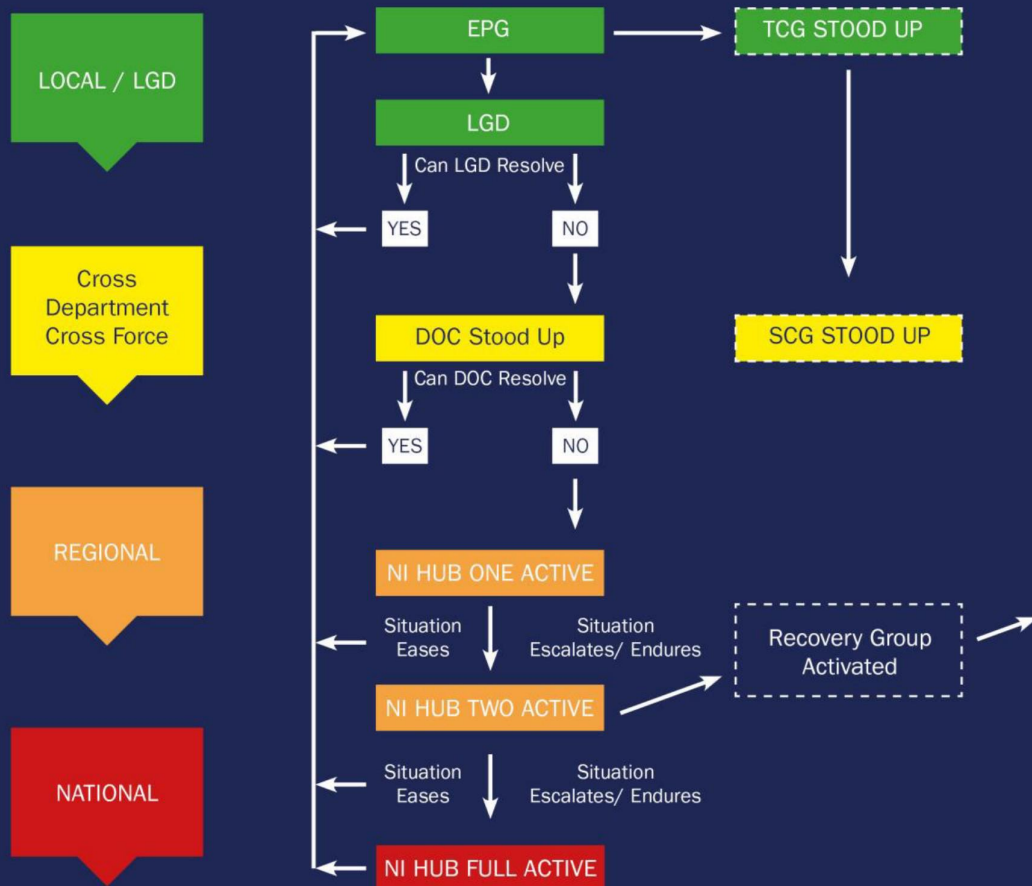
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NI HUB ESCALATION AND DE-ESCALATION

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LGD – Lead Government Department EPG – Emergency Preparedness Group TCG – Tactical Coordination Group
SCG – Strategic Coordination Group DOC – Departmental Operations Centre

LOCAL / LGD

Cross Department Cross Force

REGIONAL

NATIONAL

EPG → TCG STOOD UP

LGD

Can LGD Resolve

YES | NO

DOC Stood Up

Can DOC Resolve

YES | NO

SCG STOOD UP

NI HUB ONE ACTIVE

Situation Eases | Situation Escalates/ Endures

Recovery Group Activated

NI HUB TWO ACTIVE

Situation Eases | Situation Escalates/ Endures

NI HUB FULL ACTIVE

NI HUB STEADY
CCG (NI) Meeting routinely
Normal Business

NI HUB ALERT
CCG (NI) Meeting more Frequently
Core Hub and Specialisms (as required) put on Notice to Activate
Start Training & Induction

NI HUB ONE ACTIVE
CCG (NI) Meeting Weekly
One Shift Mon-Frid 09:00 to 17:00
Other Shifts on Training & Induction Cycle & Notice

NI HUB TWO ACTIVE
CCG (NI) Meeting Twice Weekly
Two Shifts Mon-Frid 07:00 to 19:00
Two Locations
Remaining Shifts on Training & Induction Cycle & Notice

NI HUB FULL ACTIVE
CCG (NI) Meeting Daily
24/7 MANNING
Two/Three Locations

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ACTIVATION PROTOCOL

Table 1 below provides a summary of the DoH Activation Protocol.

Crisis level	Local	Level 1: Significant	Level 2: Serious	Level 3: Catastrophic
Response level	HSC Bronze	HSC Silver	Health Gold Command	NICCMA / Platinum
Geographical Extent	Local	Localised	NI-wide (or prolonged)	UK-wide
Management Extent	Operational only	Tactical	Strategic	Overarching strategic
Lead role	HSC Trust(s)	HSCB, PHA & BSO	DoH	NICCMA
DoH involvement	Watching brief only	Monitoring & advice	Strategic leadership	Strategic leadership