

3 May 2019

## Northern Ireland Civil Contingencies and EU Exit Planning – Initial Legacy Report

### References:

- A. Northern Ireland Central Crisis Management Arrangements (NICCMA), dated Sep 2016.
- B. Northern Ireland EU Exit Response - Lessons Identified dated 3 May 2019.
- C. Maintaining EU Exit Response Plans and C3 at Readiness, dated 3 May 2019.

### Summary and Key Recommendations

1. The Civil Contingencies Policy Branch (CCPB) within TEO is responsible for promoting and developing civil contingencies preparedness and for delivering the Northern Ireland Central Crisis Management Arrangements (NICCMA), at Reference A. The capacity and capability of CCPB was significantly tested when it took on additional responsibilities during the recent planning for the UK's exit from the EU, with significant external support employed.
2. Over 6 months of activity to design, build, test and stand up Northern Ireland's response to EU exit, a joint team from the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and Northern Ireland Office (NIO), established the contingency plans and command, control and coordination (C3) structures required to manage the impacts of a 'no deal' EU exit. This included the establishment of a Northern Ireland 'Hub', 9 Departmental Operations Centres (DOCs), and over 800 NI C3 staff mobilised, trained and exercised across NICS/NIO. This work also helped to build an extensive and highly engaged civil contingencies network across NI.
3. This represents significant progress but it was clear that NI's civil contingencies 'operating model' is under resourced and lacks realistic planning assumptions around operational commitments and concurrency. There is now an opportunity to enhance this operating model across NI Departments. This would improve NI's ability to respond to a range of future contingencies, including EU exit, augmented by a pool of staff from NICS and NIO. However, some increased investment in organisational structures, staff capacity and training, and ICT would be required.
4. **It is therefore recommended that:**
  - a. The direction of travel of this initial report is agreed.
  - b. Direction and guidance be provided to enable the initial recommendations to be refined.

### Background

5. **Aim.** The aim of this report is to make initial recommendations for enhancing NI's civil contingencies capability across the areas of organisation, people, process, ICT, training and exercising, in order to embed the gains of recent EU exit response work.
6. **Assumptions.** The following assumptions have been used:

- a. This scope of this report is wider than the work to learn lessons and maintain the readiness of NI's EU exit response covered at References B and C above. The recommendations in this document apply to all future civil contingencies, including a potential EU exit response.
- b. Civil contingencies will remain a priority activity within NI and will continue to receive funding, particularly within the context of EU exit.
- c. TEO(CCPB) will be a focal point for preparing for and managing civil contingencies across NI, providing a coordination function to support Departments and agencies in delivering their own civil contingency responsibilities, docked into UK national structures.
- d. TEO(CCPB), NI departments and NIO will maintain a core of trained civil contingencies staff to respond to the full range of civil emergencies, augmented by additional staff held at readiness, depending on the scale, duration and complexity of the response.

## Detail

7. **Organisational.** The existing HOCS-chaired Civil Contingencies Group (NI) (CCG(NI)) is responsible for coordinating strategic support for cross-Departmental civil contingencies. However, there is no established forum for coordinating cross-departmental operational and planning activity at desk level. In addition, it is challenging to enforce consistent standards and procedures across NI and share good practice. In terms of the organisational model for NI civil contingencies, there is currently no provision for the formal augmentation of operations rooms, beyond the temporary arrangements established for the EU exit response. It is recommended that:
- a. CCG(NI) becomes a strategic-level risk prioritisation forum attended by Permanent Secretaries and Grade 3s, informed by a CCG(NI) 'sub group' at Grade 5/7/DP level, to deputise for CCG(NI) and coordinate joint planning and C3 work across Departments.
  - b. The Civil Contingencies Policy Branch (CCPB) in TEO becomes a 'centre of excellence' for civil contingencies across NI, providing a focal point for consistent standards and operating procedures, contingency planning, validation, training, exercising and thought leadership, linked into the wider UK civil contingencies network.
  - c. Operations be delivered from a central core of CCPB and Departmental staff, supported by SMEs across NICS/NIO (e.g. CAL, HR and NISRA), and reinforced by a standing pool of augmentees held at readiness, depending on the scale, duration and complexity of the response (see Annexes A, B and C). A similar approach would be required for Departmental Operations Centres (DOCs).
  - d. Service Level Agreements (SLAs) are established with supporting and supported Departments and agencies, to formalise the arrangements for support and augmentation.

8. **People.** Staffing numbers and experience levels within CCPB are currently well below those required to manage existing civil contingencies and future commitments, including any EU exit response. Critical knowledge currently sits in a small number of existing staff, and there is a need to retain these staff, whilst recruiting and training additional capacity. Should the scale, duration and complexity of the response dictate, additional staff would be required to surge in to augment CCPB and Departmental operations rooms, and this process should now be formalised, with the appropriate training, integration packages and allowances established. Given recruiting and retention challenges, there should be greater incentives to serve within the civil contingencies 'profession', including the establishment of a standardised career path and options for secondments. It is recommended that:
  - a. Existing CCPB expertise be retained and additional staff be recruited to deliver the core structure shown at Annex B, in order to enable CCPB to effectively deliver its business as usual and operational roles.
  - b. NICS/NIO maintains a pool of civil contingency augmentees at readiness across NICS/NIO, with formalised annual refresher training, regular staff communications and an induction package to integrate staff at short notice.
  - c. Civil contingencies becomes a standardised career path for permanent staff across all NI Departments, with formal training (EPC/CAL delivered), and associated allowances agreed.
  - d. Opportunities be offered for attachments and secondments of NI civil contingencies staff to CCS, EPC and other partners, with reciprocal arrangements also in place.
9. **Processes.** Whilst there are well-established protocols for NI civil contingencies, there are no existing planning assumptions around scalability, readiness or concurrency. No definitions exist for different scales of emergencies and responses (i.e. small, medium and large), the readiness levels of each response (i.e. notice to stand up, including mobilisation of augmentees), or the around concurrency (i.e. how many responses should NI be able to manage concurrently and at what scales). There is also a lack of cross-Departmental consistency over operational and planning processes and templates. In addition, the frequency, criteria and methods employed to validate contingency plans are not standardised. Lesson management is also not driven centrally to ensure that good practice is shared and embedded across NICS and NIO. On communications, whilst the Executive Information Service (EIS) works closely with TEO(CCPB) over civil contingencies, the EU exit response work demonstrated that NICS/NIO have no central function for coordinating large-scale internal and external communications across all stakeholders in NICS/NIO, business, industry and the general public. It is recommended that TEO(CCPB):
  - a. Establishes planning assumptions around the different scales, readiness and concurrency of NI's civil contingency response against the most likely scenarios.

- b. Formalises and oversees consistent operational and planning processes and templates across NI Departments.
  - c. Has a central role in providing planning guidance for civil contingency planning, for validating existing and new contingency plans across NI Departments, and for driving lessons management.
  - d. Informs a TEO review of how communications is delivered for NI civil contingencies in order to make recommendations on future scope and the capabilities required.
10. **ICT.** NI currently employs outdated information systems to manage civil contingencies, using email, whiteboards, maps and Microsoft software. ResilienceDirect is not fit for purpose in terms of resilience and functionality, and there is no capability to update information across the NI civil contingencies network in real time in order to facilitate shared situational awareness. This is largely driven by the systems employed nationally for civil contingencies by CCS, which will need to be addressed in due course. In the meantime, some internal enhancements will be implemented in NI as part of the lessons from the EU exit response period. On secure communications, the existing above Official Sensitive VTC suite and data communications in TEO are unreliable and not fit for purpose. It is recommended that TEO(CCPB):
- a. Implements a real-time, cloud based IT platform to enhance collaboration and shared situational awareness for operations and planning. The use of GIS systems should be considered to enhance spatial awareness. This should be rolled out across NI Departments and partners where possible.
  - b. Installs a fit for purpose secure communications suite in the existing TEO operations room.
11. **Training and Exercising.** As a result of budget reductions within TEO, CCPB's ability to design and deliver civil contingency training and exercises has been considerably reduced, leading to the employment of external resources to deliver these functions during the EU exit response period. An uplift of staff and some additional training within CCPB would restore this capability, allowing NI to run an annual programme of training and exercising to enhance the preparedness of core staff and augmentees without external support. In addition, wider engagement and information-sharing with partners, the UK civil contingency network and academia would further build the capability and reputation the civil contingency staff in NI. It is recommended that TEO(CCPB):
- a. Establishes a formal training programme for all NI civil contingencies staff, including entry training, annual top-up training, soft skills, career progression training, and training for augmentees.
  - b. Establishes an annual internal NI civil contingencies exercise programme to complement the UK national programme.

- c. Generates an internal NI capability to design and implement complex, scenario-based exercises.
- d. Establishes a regular series of events and workshops to share civil contingencies good practice and 'thought leadership', including publications and an online presence. This would also build relationships with NI departments, agencies, CCS, EPC and other civil contingency stakeholders across the UK.

NR

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Distribution:

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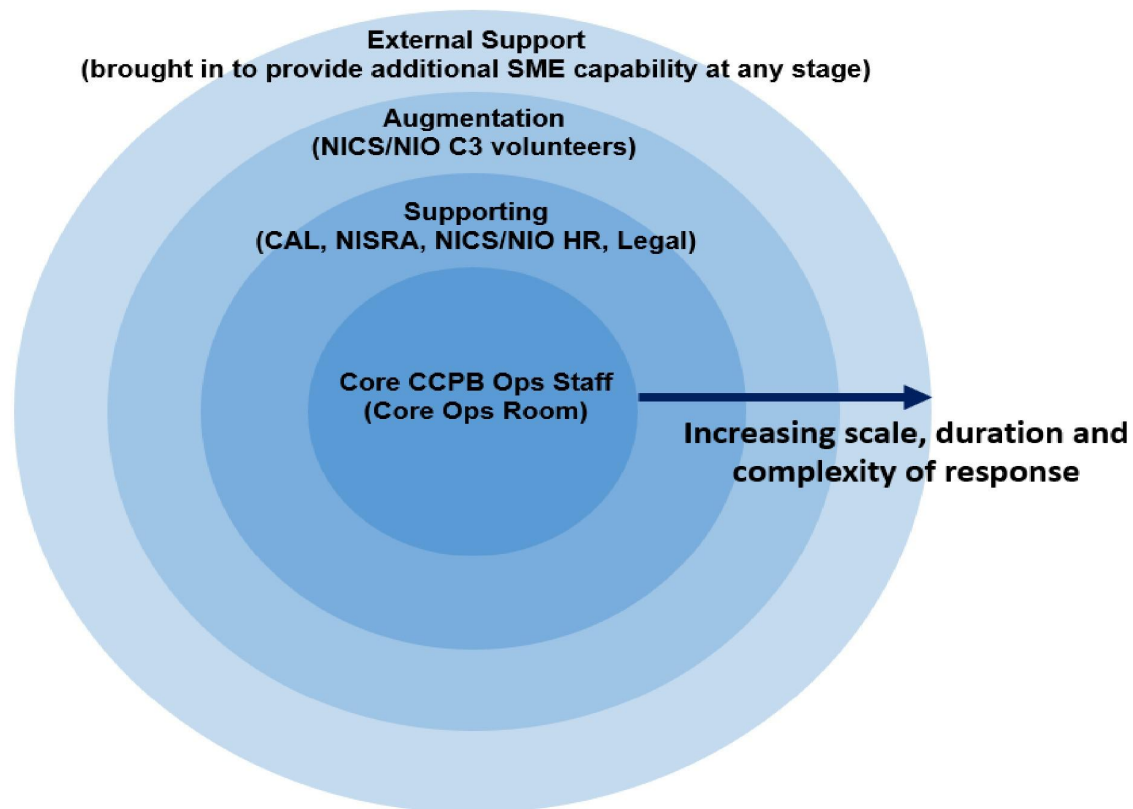
Local Government

Annexes:

- A. NI Civil Contingencies Operating Model (proposed).
- B. Core CCPB Staff Structure and Small Scale Response (proposed)
- C. Core CCPB Staff Structure within a Medium and Large Scale Response (proposed).

## Annex A - NI Civil Contingencies Operating Model (proposed)

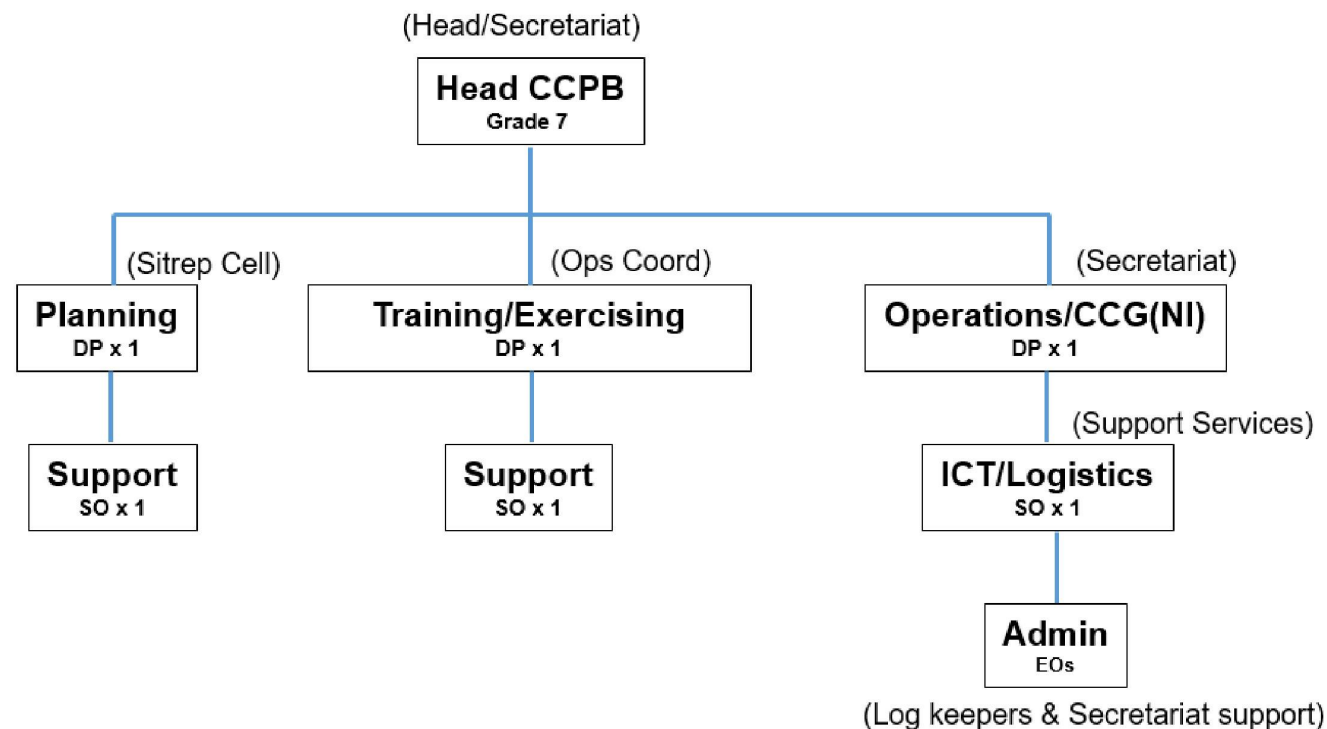
CCPB would be structured to deliver its core business as usual roles, as well as all the functions of an operations room to support CCG(NI) for small scale civil contingencies, with support from EIS, NISRA, Legal and others as required. Where the scale, duration and complexity of the response dictated, this core would be augmented by a pool of existing NICS/NIO C3 volunteers to deliver a larger scale operations room (the NI 'Hub' model). Should there be any capacity or capability gaps, which cannot be filled through augmentation, additional support could be provided by specialists from Departments, a MACA request, or through external contractors/consultants. A similar approach would be required for Departmental Operations Centres (DOCs).



## Annex B - Core CCPB Staff Structure and Small Scale Response (proposed)

The diagram below shows the proposed functions and structure of the Civil Contingencies Policy Branch (CCPB) within TEO. Staff would run the core CCPB business as usual functions, with their operational roles for a **small scale civil contingencies response** shown in brackets below. EIS would provide media and wider communications support as required. The proposed grades of the core CCPB staff are as follows:

- **Head CCPB** – Grade 7
- **Operations/CCG(NI) Support** – DP
- **Training and Exercising** – DP
- **ICT/Logistics** - SO
- **Support** – SOs
- **Admin** - EOs



### Annex C - Core CCPB Staff Structure within a Medium and Large Scale Response (proposed)

Should the small scale CCPB operations room require augmentation, as a result of the scale, duration or complexity of the response, the standing pool of NICS/NIO C3 volunteers would fill the roles of branch leads and additional staff. The Head CCPB would remain as the Head of the Secretariat with an additional role of supporting and deputising for the Chief of Staff. The diagram below shows how the core CCPB staff would be augmented by C3 volunteers and supported by EIS, Legal and NISRA (as per Annex A). The staffing would be tailored to each response and not all staff roles are shown below for simplicity, only the core CCPB roles (with core roles shown in brackets), senior augmentees and support roles.

