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C3 COVID-19 RESPONSE – LESSONS LEARNED REVIEW AND FUTURE ROADMAP

In May 2020 I was asked by the NI Hub Chief of Staff, Anthony Harbinson, to sponsor an important piece of work to review the lessons learned from the deployment of the C3 structures to manage the Northern Ireland response to the Covid-19 pandemic and how these lessons learned could shape the future roadmap for our civil contingency capability.

Through the Civil Contingency Group (CCG) I have seen many of the outputs from the C3 structures such as the Situation Report and was keen to support this request from the Chief of Staff. I also recognised the value of this work with an eye on the potential challenges of a difficult EU exit at the end of the year.

We reached out to the entire C3 network from the Departmental Operations Centres through the Hub and into CCG. In addition and with the support of external professional services, I selected a number of senior stakeholders for more detailed one to one interviews which included Permanent Secretaries, PSNI, the Junior Ministers and senior civil servants.

This work has highlighted the hugely positive contribution that the C3 structures played in our response to the unprecedented health, social and economic crisis that Covid-19 created. It has also presented an opportunity to address any areas that can be improved upon and put Northern Ireland on a sound footing for the likely concurrent events that will emerge later this year. The final report is attached.

There are a number of issues in particular that I believe are worth calling out at this point.

- We need to build a strategic civil contingency capability that is not reactive and event focused (EU Exit, Covid-19, flooding, etc.) but instead, is an agile professional function that can support the C3 network across NI Government. and be able to adapt quickly to support the necessary response to a diverse range of risks. This will require investment in professional training;

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- In the short term we need to develop and refine the tools that will help us deliver a professional service including a risk register at Executive corporate level, contingency plans, horizon scanning and Situation Reports; and
- We should start preparing for the inevitability of needing to activate these structures again and build on the momentum that has been created from the current deployment. As such we cannot delay in implementing the recommendations included in this report.

A huge collective effort has went into our response to this crisis and I want to personally thank those who stepped up to fill the many critical roles. These varied from the volunteers in the DOCs and the Hub, the Ministers and Permanent Secretaries and the cleaners who worked tirelessly to keep us safe. Without them, the C3 structure would not have operated, and it is because of this period of operation that we have identified opportunities to make the structure even stronger in the future.

I suggest we discuss this at the next suitable opportunity, using the strategic recommendations (page 12 of the attached) as a focus for views on the next steps.

PD

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cc **David Sterling**
 Hugh Widdis
 Alex Gordon
 Chris Stewart
 Karen Pearson
 Anthony Harbinson