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FROM: **ANTHONY HARBINSON** **Copy Distribution List Below**

DATE: **18 MAY 2020**

TO: **HOCS**

SUBJECT: **COVID-19: SCALING OF C3 & MAINTAINING AT READINESS**

Issue:

The NI Command, Control and Co-ordination (C3) were put in place at short notice and at pace from 18 March 2020 to deal with the rapidly escalating COVID-19 emergency.

C3 is fully scalable; current need requires the level of C3 to be scaled back but with surge capacity retained so that C3 is maintained "at readiness" for Covid-19 impacts and future concurrent emergencies.

Timescale:

Immediate. It is proposed to scale down shifts from Tuesday 26 May 2020. Staff and Departments need to be notified as close to 20 May 2020 as possible.

FOI Implications:

An exemption provided under Section 35(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 may be applicable.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that you:

- approve the proposed scaling down as outlined at paragraphs 8-15; and
- note the need to retain resilience and approve that NICS C3 be "maintained at readiness" from 22 June with a retained C3 core of 5-7 people sitting alongside CCPB and led by a G5, to ensure continuity from the current phase and readiness for scaling up.

Background

1. You will be aware of the detail but it is useful to briefly set this out as context, to the proposal which follows. The NI Hub and C3 structure was stood up and operational from 18 March with CCG meeting on a daily rhythm from 21 March.

2. Three teams were deployed across 3 sites, with 2 of those teams recently moving for a second time, now to NICS owned estate. One reserve team was established and a total of 90 volunteers have come forward to work on C-19, a testament to the commitment of NICS staff across all Departments and grades. The teams have fully supported CCG in its strategic decision making role and produced almost 50 SitReps, the quality of which has increased significantly since stand up.

3. Given the speed of the response a full programme of training was delivered whilst operational initially, then in a more managed away, across the full C3 system encompassing the NI Hub, all DOCs and LOs. The Hub design and functionality whilst largely based on the EU Exit model was flexed to meet the C-19 need; accordingly revised ConOps and SOPs were developed and implemented. External workforce support was put in place and scaled down in a short number of weeks and a number of key reviews have been undertaken including a full DOC effectiveness review, a Hub review and a CCG review. A full C3 lessons learned review is currently underway to ensure all key learning from these experiences are captured to enhance future capability.

Current Position & Horizon Scan

4. There has been ongoing review of the Hub and C3 structures to ensure it continues to meet business needs. Saturday working was stood down a number of weeks ago and the Hub has now moved to week day working only; CCG has reduced from a daily rhythm to more recently two per week and only meeting once this week.

5. Going forward consideration needs to be given to how we best integrate the recovery strand and in particular how the C3 structures will be used to support this work. It is clear that the SitRep will need to evolve as we transition to recovery to ensure it continues to provide a common information picture and identifies cumulative risks. Retaining such capability is, in my view, a prerequisite for successful management of the situation.

6. We also need to be cognisant of concurrency and ensure we stand ready to deal with a potential second wave or other civil emergency requiring a response; additionally the end of the transition period associated with EU Exit is rapidly approaching. It is within this context the following proposals have been shaped. The time is right to scale down the current resourcing of the Hub, however it is equally important that we do not lose the ground we have made in recent weeks and that we remain ready to scale up when the necessary triggers determine we do so. It would attract heavy criticism and considerable embarrassment, including nationally, if we were to fail to do so.

7. As Chief of Staff it would be my intent to leave this phase with all reviews concluded and recommendations implemented, with a Hub scaled on a maintain readiness footing, with a volunteer cadre which we continue to invest in over the coming months, and with a defined programme of work for the retained Hub staff. The following outlines how that could be achieved and the necessary steps over the coming days and weeks.

Proposed Current Scaling

8. As indicated, there are currently 3 operational teams (3 x 15 people) across 3 sites and with only 1 CCG planned for this week and different arrangements thereafter, we are now in a position to scale back.

9. **Week commencing 18 May** – I propose we operate on reduced hours this week, scaling back from a 7am 12 hour shift to a 9am (except Wednesday for CCG) to

6:30pm shift to feed the 6pm daily SitRep process. Departmental LOs would also follow this rhythm.

10. **Week commencing 25 May** - I propose to reduce to 2 operational teams (2 x 15 people) from 2 sites, those being Castle Buildings and either Goodwood or Lanyon.

11. We completed a recent exercise across the 3 teams to identify those who wished to continue to work in the Hub and the results of that were high with almost 73% wishing to return. It is possible, with attrition and alignment of a number of HR issues which needed addressed (eg grading, equal pay considerations, contracted hours), for 2 fresh teams to be identified.

12. These teams would operate on a normal flexi basis to meet the business needs of producing SitReps, however we determine their frequency. I propose to hold this pattern for two weeks, moving to further step down w/c 8 June.

13. **Week commencing 8 June** – I propose to reduce to 1 operational team only (15 people), from Castle Buildings. In advance of this date, I will undertake a further exercise across volunteers and in consultation with their Departments, to identify how the one remaining shift can best be resourced.

14. **Week commencing 22 June** – the above having run for two weeks, we will be in a much better position to further scale down if the conditions are appropriate to do so. My current thinking is we should be able to scale down a further 50% to a Hub which retains a core 5-7 people which will operate on a maintain readiness mode which is further detailed below.

15. Over the period 18 May to 22 June it would also be my intention, to phase SIB staff back to their organisation. They have contributed enormously however it is important that C3 arrangements are sustained by core NICS staff.

16. The above reflects a proportionate scaling back in accordance with current need whilst I ensure an appropriate footing is maintained for dealing with any ongoing response and concurrency.

Maintain Readiness

17. Whilst the C3 Review remains ongoing, one of my key observations from stand up under C-19, is the importance of not "closing down" the Hub and then expecting to be able to effectively "switch it on" when necessary. There was significant work to identify volunteers where circa 90% of whom were not carried over from EU Exit. There was also significant work flexing existing structures and processes to meet the C-19 need. It is important therefore that we apply the lessons and secure the investment in staff and training which has already been made, and we continue to invest in that in the coming months in the interests of resilience.

18. A residual core C3 team of staff would be retained in the Hub to deliver the "at readiness" work and operate separately to but alongside the Civil Contingencies Policy Branch ready to scale up when needed. There is a defined programme of work to be undertaken in the coming months by this team; in addition to however any SitRep process evolves and meetings to be serviced, there is work that needs completed that will not only ensure there remains a resource on "response" but a resource that will strengthen any concurrency and scaling of the Hub in the months to come.

19. Fresh volunteer lists will need to be established with COPRU. A full grading exercise for Hub roles needs undertaken in conjunction with NICS HR to regularise a number of current anomalies. To maintain a ready cohort of volunteers, a programme of training will need to continue and should include test exercises and refresher events. A communications strand will need to ensure volunteers maintain committed and engaged. Significant work exists around the IT, systems and infrastructure e.g. over 100 laptops are presently deployed remotely; those need to be recalled and ready for future deployment. The ConOps and SOPs require ongoing development and test as do the BCP arrangements. These together with the anticipated Strategic Review to be undertaken for CCPB, require proper resourcing and my recommendation is it should be led as a G5 command to ensure proper scale down from the current response, and readiness for future response and scale up of the C3 structure.

Implementation

20. Moving to scale down and restructuring the teams and Hub requires careful handling and communication. Subject to your approval of the proposal, I plan to communicate with all Hub staff as soon as possible, to allow some space before the new teams deploy next Tuesday. It would also be useful if our approach could be shared with Permanent Secretaries; I am happy to do that as a briefing at PPS on Friday or if preferred, to draft a communication for issue.

21. I am happy to discuss in greater detail as necessary.

Anthony Harbinson
NI Hub - Chief of Staff