8. LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (including Mayors)

As demonstrated during Covid-19, local authorities play a critical role in responding to pandemics. Their local leadership, knowledge of communities, and ability to quickly adapt and design services to meet local needs, puts them at the forefront of response.

From public health protection, to economic growth, the expertise of local authorities is vast, meaning they can help tackle the full range of potential impacts on local people, places and the economy.

The specific roles of local authorities in a future pandemic will depend on multiple factors at the time, such as government response strategy, the provision of additional funding, and the availability of local resources. These roles could include:

- Providing **systems and community leadership** – for example, by providing health protection and multi-agency response leadership; being a trusted source of information and advice for local residents and businesses; using knowledge about local communities to shape the response; and maintaining local democracy.

- **Supporting local health and care services** – for example, by supporting the delivery of test, trace and vaccination programmes, ensuring continuity of social care in line with any new government measures; managing additional demands on the death management system; and helping to provide local access to PPE.

- **Community and local public services support** – e.g. by supporting the provision of food, medicine and other support (such as housing) for vulnerable people and the general community; helping to ensure continuity of education and other key services where possible; and working with businesses to ensure compliance with rules.

- **Economic / financial support** - e.g. by providing welfare and benefits support for individuals, and administering financial support schemes for businesses.

- **Recovery** – by setting and leading delivery of the local recovery strategy.

For any future pandemic response, MHCLG will have a key role in emphasising to OGDs the importance of early engagement and co-design with local authorities, particularly where it is possible that local authorities will lead or support delivery.

More broadly, MHCLG should produce a local engagement strategy, making use of

established mechanisms (such as those utilised by the Local Government Engagement Division) and considering what new approaches may be required.

MHCLG must also closely monitor the financial impacts on local authorities and their ability to continue to deliver services arising from a pandemic response.

LOCAL RESILIENCE FORUMS

Through Local Resilience Forums, plans exist to ensure a co-ordinated multi-agency response at the local level. Ongoing engagement with local multi-agency response structures is key to ensure that local issues are understood by Government, and that appropriate support can be provided.

FAITH LEADERS AND NETWORKS

During the COVID-19, MHCLG's Faith team were responsible for guidance on the safe use of places of worship, working closely with the PM's Faith Task Force and faith communities. Should a new infectious disease require the re-introduction of controls, MHCLG would be able to stand up this community again at short notice to agree and disseminate any new guidance required. Faith groups and their Places of Worship (PoW) were also significant contributors to the vaccination drive, engaging hard to reach groups and hosting pop up centres. They would again be ready and willing to support further drives as required.

COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

to be completed – reference to the potential for introducing a programme similar to the CC programme in place during covid-19 response.

UK-WIDE RESPONSE

During the previous COVID-19 pandemic, Devolved Governments have previously instigated their own policies in key areas, including vaccine deployment, shielding, mask mandates and lockdown measures. Engagement between UKG and the Welsh and Scottish governments and the Northern Ireland Executive was maintained with regular meetings between the Secretary of State and First Ministers.

MHCLG's Nation & Devolution Team can assist with the engagement plan, acting as a conduit between the RED team and SWNI stakeholders. In the event of a new infectious disease, MHCLG would continue this approach of early and regular engagement with SWNI stakeholders, with focus on sharing best practice; alignment