

**Minutes of a meeting of the Council of Minister's
– Emergency Advisory Group ("EAG") –
Held on Thursday 22 October 2021 at 3.00pm**

In the Department of Home Affairs Board Room and via MS Teams

Present:

Mr John Spellman (Chair)
Hon J P Poole-Wilson MHK, Minister for Justice and Home Affairs (Vice-Chair)
Mr R Mercer MLC, Tynwald Representative
Mr Jonathan Wild (Via MS Team - from 4pm)
Mr Peter Davidson
Mr Steven Christian (via MS Teams)
Mrs Jacqui Bridson
Dr Rachel Glover (via MS Teams)
Ms Julie Hotchkiss

In Attendance:

Mr D Davies, Chief Executive, Department of Home Affairs
Mr M Lewin, Chief Operating Officer, Cabinet Office
Mr D Kinrade, Head of Executive Office, Cabinet Office, Acting Secretariat (via MS Teams)

Apologies:

Professor Peter Edge

Dr M Haywood MHK in attendance at 3.00pm.

066/2021 Declarations of Interest or Conflict:

Standing declaration – Mr S Christian in respect of Mrs C Christian MHK; and association with a Covid-19 diagnostic company.

067/2021 Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 30 September 2021

Having been previously circulated, the minutes of Wednesday 01 September 2021 were **approved** for upload subject to the following amendments:

- Minute 063/2021(b) [Matters arising – Booster Programme Update] – 3rd bullet point to read:

EAG noted that the efficacy of certain vaccines (Pfizer) to prevent reinfection reduced over time, consequently, there existed a "window of opportunity" to rollout at pace.

- Minute 064/2021(a) 4th bullet point to read:

Mr Lewin advised that the UK's Colindale Laboratory continued to assist the Island with its identification of new variants via samples.

068/2021 Matters arising:

a) Booster Programme Rollout

Minute ref: 063/2021(b)

In respect of the action: *Mr Lewin to revert to EAG with clarification regarding visibility of the Vaccine Booster Programme rollout – in 'one place'*, EAG noted the complexity of the Booster Programme, and as such the difficulties with communication in respect of such.

EAG noted the increasing number of requests for clarity regarding the Booster Programme.

The Chair agreed to raise this matter at the initial meeting of the National Covid Response Group on 25 October 2021.

Chair

EAG agreed to carry this matter forward for an update at the next meeting.

Sec

The Chief Officer, DHA agreed to circulate information in respect of the Vaccine Booster Programme rollout to EAG.

DD

Action: Mr Lewin to revert to EAG with clarification regarding visibility of the Vaccine Booster Programme rollout – in 'one place'.

ML

Action: The Chair to raise the matter of the visibility of the Vaccine Booster Programme rollout at the initial meeting of the National Covid Response Group on 25 October 2021.

Chair

Action: The Chief Officer, DHA to share information in respect of the Vaccine Booster Programme rollout with the EAG.

DD

b) CO2 Monitors - Calibration

Minute ref: 063/2021(c)

In respect of the action: *EAG queried the number of CO2 devices in use, and a summary of their use*, EAG noted that approximately 140 CO2 monitors had been deployed across Island Schools and UCM, and that a further 200 monitors had been ordered.

EAG sought assurance on the adequacy of the monitors deployed and advised of the need to ensure oversight of the operation of and resulting measurements from such.

c) Communications Dialogue

Minute ref: 063/2021(d)

EAG noted that the outcome of the meeting between EAG and the Government Communication Service was to be discussed as a separate agenda item.

d) Further alignment of border pathways to mirror UK changes

Minute ref: 064/2021(b)

EAG noted the recent reclassification changes in the UK regarding border pathways, and that whilst the Isle of Man was aligned to such, this matter, along with testing pathways, was to be revisited by the new administration.

EAG noted that the Chair would raise the matter of border and testing pathways at the initial meeting of the National Covid Response Group on 25 October 2021.

Chair

Action: The Chair to raise the matter of border and testing pathways at the initial meeting of the National Covid Response Group on 25 October 2021.

Chair

069/2021 PCR Testing Laboratory: Dr M Haywood MHK - Observations

Further to the recent visit to the PCR testing facility at Noble's Hospital Pathology Laboratory ("the Path Lab") by Dr M Haywood ("Dr Haywood"), EAG noted the observations of Dr Haywood resulting from such, including:

- The process by which Variants of Concern ("VoC") are identified and the limitations, and consequently the value, of the current process;
- Increased demand as a result of additional confirmatory PCR tests following a positive Lateral Flow Test ("LFT");
- The operational implications associated with current increase in demand for testing; and
- Given the low numbers of positive cases, relative to other jurisdictions, the current approach to the outcome of positive PCR testing may need to be revisited, along with the value of continued identification of VoCs, particularly as the assessments of VoC took approximately 2-3 months to confirm

EAG noted that there were conflicting opinions [between some members of EAG] in respect of the current capacity for testing, and resourcing to undertake such, at the Path Lab.

Dr Glover advised that the Isle of Man would not ordinarily undertake academic biological research, and that the current process to identify VoCs was unreliable and of disproportionate value, relative to the significant costs involved.

Dr Glover further advised that it needed to be acknowledged that the Isle of Man was a breeding ground for new Covid variants, given the current high transmission rates via immunosuppressed patients; the lack of mitigations in place; and the likelihood of there also being undetected cases, and as such all positive PCR test results should be sent off Island for sequencing.

EAG noted that should a new variant be identified from on Island sequencing the resulting data would be of limited value given the time lag and non-specific nature of the sequencing undertaken.

EAG discussed the relative merits of sending all positive test data to the Colindale Laboratory for genomic sequencing.

EAG considered whether, given their sensitivity, a lateral flow test, and the potential wider use of such, should be enough to confirm a positive case of Covid-19, without having to subsequently undertake a mandatory PCR test.

Dr Glover advised that should PCR tests be suspended this could have a negative impact on the perception of the Isle of Man by other jurisdictions.

EAG discussed the potential options to curtail the current spread of Covid-19 and the implications, including financial, in respect of such.

EAG noted that immunosuppressed patients had been offered a third dose of the Covid-19 vaccine as part of their primary vaccination schedule, but this relied on patients voluntarily opting for such.

The Chair summarised that the discussions [of the EAG] had indicated the continuation of PCR tests; that mitigation measures to curtail the spread of Covid-19 were required; and that on-Island sequencing, via the Path Lab, for VoCs should be suspended, in favour of sequencing via the Colindale Laboratory.

EAG noted that the Chair would convey the points raised by EAG, in respect of PCR testing and VoC, to the initial meeting of the National Covid Response Group on 25 October 2021.

Action: The Chair to convey the points raised by EAG, in respect of the approaches to PCR testing and VoC, to the initial meeting of the National Covid Response Group on 25 October 2021.

070/2021 Communications Update

EAG noted an update further to the meeting that Mrs Bridson and Mr Davidson had undertaken with Mr Peter Boxer, Executive Director, External Relations, Cabinet Office and representatives of the Government Communication Service ("GCS").

EAG also noted the Communications Update feedback document previously circulated to EAG members, an overview of which was provided by Mrs Bridson and Mr Davidson and subsequently discussed by EAG, in particular:

- The need for better alignment of policy and communications, given that the situation can change rapidly;
- Consideration be given to inviting representatives of the GCS to a meeting of EAG for further discussion;
- Concerns regarding the lack of use of CO2 monitors and lack of communication in respect of the data resulting from such, noting that the GCS advised that CO2 monitors was a policy rather than a communications matter, noting that the COO, Cabinet Office would follow this up; and
- Mitigation measures, in respect of ventilation, had been agreed by the last administration and accepted as policy by Tynwald.

**COO,
Cabinet
Office**

EAG agreed that the Communications Update feedback document be provided to GCS.

Sec

Dr Glover advised of the need for simple and effective mitigation measures accompanied by clear public messaging.

Mr J Wild joined the meeting via MS Teams at 4pm.

EAG noted the need for layered messaging to clearly convey targeted mitigations.

Dr Glover advised that the current number of Covid-19 cases appeared to have been normalised by the public and consequently mitigations, such as mask wearing, had diminished.

Dr Glover further advised that there appeared to have been a shift to technological focus for mitigations in respect of CO2 monitoring.

The CO, DHA observed that the main themes of discussion were in respect of mitigations regarding CO2 monitoring, ventilation and the booster programme.

EAG noted that the Chair would convey the points raised by EAG, in respect of communications, to the initial meeting of the National Covid Response Group on 25 October 2021.

Action: The Communications Update feedback document be provided to the Government Communication Service.

Sec

Action: COO, Cabinet Office to liaise with Government Communication Service regarding communication in respect of the use of CO2 monitors.

**COO,
Cabinet
Office**

Action: The Chair to convey the points raised by EAG, in respect of communications, to the initial meeting of the National Covid Response Group on 25 October 2021.

Chair

071/2021 National Covid Response Group – Terms of Reference

EAG noted and considered the Terms of Reference ("ToR") for the National Covid Response Group ("NCRG").

EAG made the following observations in respect of such:

- The principle of the NCRG was welcomed and considered to be a sensible approach;
- In general, the lack of information forthcoming to EAG was frustrating, but that it was hoped that this would now improve with the NCRG being constituted;
- Going forward, clarification was required in respect of the interactions envisaged between the Council of Ministers, the NCRG, EAG and Public Health, and the role EAG has in that structure;

- EAG needed to be closer to 'live' policy matters in real time;
- Noting that the Chair of EAG was a member of the NCRG, the need for there to be specialist representation from EAG at NCRG, along with the Chair, as and when required – recognising that the ToR for NCRG provided for such;
- The need for a root casus analysis to be undertaken to assess the positives and negatives over last 18 months in respect of the response to Covid to inform decision making going forward; and
- Given the breadth of expertise, the wider utilisation of EAG for broader strategic analysis and advice on matters others than Covid, noting that the role of EAG was to provide observations not scrutiny;

EAG were generally supportive of the ToR for the NCRG and it was acknowledged that the Chair would be accompanied by an EAG member, as and when required, when attending meetings of such.

072/2021 Any Other Business

a) Half Term Holidays – Return to School

Mrs Bridson sought clarification in respect of the mitigation measures being considered to manage the return of pupils to schools following the half term holiday.

The Chair agreed to raise this matter at the initial meeting of the National Covid Response Group on 25 October 2021.

Chair

Action: The Chair to raise the matter of mitigation measures being considered to manage the return of pupils to schools following the half term holiday.

Chair

b) EAG – Sub-Groups

Mr Davidson suggested that consideration be given to the formation of sub-groups of EAG to consider and provide observations on specific topics.

The meeting closed at 4.30pm.

Date of next meeting: Thursday 4 November 2021 at 3.30pm.

Signed:

Date: