

**Minutes of a meeting of the Council of Minister's
– Emergency Advisory Group ("EAG") –
Held on Thursday 04 November 2021 at 3.30pm**

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 Teams)
Mr Peter Davidson
Mr Steven Christian (via MS Teams)
Mrs Jacqui Bridson (via MS Teams)
Dr Rachel Glover (via MS Teams)
Ms Julie Hotchkiss
Professor Peter Edge (via MS Team)

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: None noted

073/2021 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.

074/2021 Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 22 October 2021

Having been previously circulated, the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 22 October 2021 were **approved** for publication.

075/2021 Matters arising:

a) Booster Programme Rollout

Minute ref: 068/2021(a)

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

EAG noted that a newspaper insert, previously circulated [to EAG], regarding the vaccine booster programme, would be included within the IoM Courier dated 5-11 November 2021.

EAG questioned why the timetable for the IoM vaccine programme was behind that of the UK [approx. 6 weeks], and, as such, noted there was a need for public understanding of the disparity.

Post-meeting note: at the EAG meeting of 29 November 2021, the Chief Officer, DHSC explained that the programme was not lagging the UK's and asked that this be recorded [minute 084/2021 refers].

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.

The Chair advised that he had raised the matter of the vaccine booster programme, and communications in respect of such, with the National Covid Response Group ("NCRG").

ML

EAG requested that the timetable for the vaccine booster programme be circulated [to EAG].

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

EAG noted this matter as complete.

Action: The timetable for the vaccine booster programme be circulated [to EAG].

ML

b) Further alignment of border pathways to mirror UK changes

Minute ref: 068/2021(d)

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.

The Chair advised that he had raised the matter of consistency, in respect of the testing regime, at the meetings of the NCRG on 25 October and 3 November 2021.

EAG noted that border controls had been considered as part of the planning for the Winter Framework.

c) PCR Testing Laboratory: Dr M Haywood MHK - Observations

Minute ref: 069/2021

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.

The Chair advised that he had not yet had an opportunity to raise this matter with the NCRG.

EAG noted that new variants of concern ("voc") were referenced in the Winter Framework, in respect of one of the considerations that may drive a decision to move to Level 3, should a voc threaten vaccine efficacy.

The Minister for Justice and Home Affairs referenced a parliamentary question, tabled at the sitting of the House of Keys on 26 October 2021, in respect of testing protocols.

d) Communications Update

Minute 070/2021

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

EAG noted this matter as complete.

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

EAG noted that Winter Framework referenced the use of CO2 monitors, in respect of supporting a healthy environment, and would be amended to reflect the importance of ventilation.

EAG further noted that a press release, to be issued by the DfE, would emphasise the importance of businesses ensuring appropriate ventilation, particularly during the lead up to Christmas.

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.

EAG also noted the need for further public messaging had been acknowledged by the NCRG.

e) Half Term Holidays – Return to School

Minute ref 072/2021(a)

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.

EAG noted that the Chair had raised the matter of mitigation measures for pupils returning from Half term holidays with the NCRG.

076/2021 EAG Advisory Note

Further to the feedback received from EAG members, the latest Advisory Note was agreed for circulation.

077/2021 Arrivals Testing Overview (August to October 2021)

Having previously been circulated, EAG noted the Arrivals Testing Overview (August to October 2021).

078/2021 Winter Framework

Having previously been circulated, the Chair sought views from the EAG on the Winter Framework ("the Framework"), in particular the following was noted:

- As with the 'Exit Strategy', the need for there to be greater substance and assurances in respect of adherence to the Framework;
- Whether triggers needed to be identified to instigate the escalation through each level of the Framework – noting that Covid was one example of the pressures being faced by the Department of Health and Social Care over the winter, and that the Framework represented a broad approach, as opposed to a plan to be followed, given the impact of Covid could not be anticipated over the winter months;
- The promotion of responsible citizenship was a key consideration in supporting the measures in the Framework;
- That the Framework provided a degree of fluidity should the measures within the Framework need to be deployed earlier or later;
- The Framework needed to balance measures regarding health with other critical infrastructure, such as public transport, retail etc., noting that the economic impact and recovery was a key consideration for the NCRG;
- It was imperative, due to the plateauing/falling number of Covid cases, that messaging regarding personal responsibility to mitigate a range of winter pressures, beyond Covid, was reinforced;
- Approximately 30% of those invited for booster vaccinations had not attended for such or had cancelled appointments;
- Potential complacency across the younger age groups regarding the perception that they had immunity having had Covid required strong messaging to parents, without demonising this age group;
- Public information, regarding those who were immunosuppressed needing to receive a third dose of the vaccination, was needed;

Ms Julie Hotchkiss joined the meeting (via MS Teams) at 4pm.

- Consideration be given to replacing references within the framework to 'legal restrictions' with 'legal interventions' to convey the fluidity of the Framework;
- Ventilation and vaccination needed to be given a higher profile within the Framework;
- Local interventions could be instigated on an area by area basis;
- If no basic mitigations can be instigated, e.g. ventilation, then other mitigations must be used, i.e. masks, basic hygiene etc. as part of normalising such behaviours;
- Emphasise that choice must be balanced against responsibility, and that in some circumstances there may not be an ability to act autonomously;
- Consideration of measurement of CO2 in key locations, along with practical measures to increase ventilation and reduce infection rates;
- Consideration of a ventilation accreditation scheme, however messaging is the preferred approach;
- Subject to capacity, the potential role of environmental health officers regarding auditing and advising, via a telephone helpline, on ventilation measures to be included in EAG Advisory Note;
- Government operated sites to lead by example regarding the promotion of mitigation measures;

- The need to address public apathy and complacency regarding mitigation measures through clear and simple messaging; and
- The QR Code included within the Courier insert which provides information on those who should receive a third primary dose of the vaccine may not be appropriate for the elderly;

079/2021 NCRG/EAG

Having previously been circulated the minutes of the meeting of the NCRG held on 25 October 2021 were noted, and the potential interaction between the EAG, NCRG and the Council of Ministers going forward was discussed, in particular:

- Input from EAG into NCRG at an early stage to ensure consideration of matters and input into decision making at the appropriate juncture – which may negate the need for or reduce the frequency of meetings;
- Observations, input, challenge and diversity of views from EAG was welcomed and considered beneficial [the Winter Framework was cited as an example of such], and that the future format for providing input may not necessarily need to be a formal meeting, noting that circulation of documents by email for comment had worked well;
- EAG reiterated that, given the breadth of expertise, EAG could be utilised for broader strategic analysis and advice on matters others than Covid;
- Acknowledgement that EAG provided input and views for the consideration of NCRG and the Council of Ministers, noting that the expectation of EAG was not to provide a single, collectively agreed view;
- There was a need to ensure the mechanism to obtain and provide views from EAG did not become overly bureaucratic;
- That the role EAG and NCRG would evolve, with the potential to consider other longer term strategic matters, subject to the requirements of the Council of Ministers, and as such, the need to revisit the role of EAG at regular intervals;
- That there may be an opportunity for to EAG to develop from a group into a panel of experts;
- EAG reaffirmed that the Chair [of EAG] would be accompanied by an EAG member, as and when required, when attending meetings of NCRG;
- EAG would benefit from a representative of the Government Communication Service being in attendance at meetings;
- The situation in respect of Covid should continue be monitored prior to any changes being instigated in respect of the role of EAG; and
- EAG are available to officers to assist with decision making

080/2021 Any Other Business

a) Department of Education Sport and Culture: CO2 Monitoring Schools

EAG noted that the Department of Education Sport and Culture had made good progress in respect of monitoring CO2 levels in schools and that going forward this would be enhanced further.

EAG further noted that there was a view that better ventilation assisted the learning environment.

b) Covid Dashboard – School Data

EAG noted the lack of context within the current dashboard, in particular school data.

EAG further noted the parliamentary question tabled at the sitting of the House of Keys on 26 October 2021:

Whether the 14-day COVID-19 case notification rate will be included in the dashboard.

EAG agreed that this matter would be discussed further at the next meeting. **Sec**

Action: The lack of context within the current dashboard, in particular school data, to be discussed at the next meeting of EAG. Sec

c) Vaccine Wastage Rates

EAG noted that there had been mixed public messaging regarding the levels of vaccine wastage.

The Chair agreed to raise this matter at the next meeting of the NSRG. **Chair**

Action: The Chair to raise the levels of vaccine wastage at the next meeting of the NCRG. Chair

d) Long Covid

The Chair agreed to raise the matter of long Covid at the next meeting of the NCRG. **Chair**

Action: The Chair to raise the matter of long Covid at the next meeting of the NCRG. Chair

e) EAG Remit

EAG discussed the potential for the Group to provide input in respect of preparedness for other emergencies in order to mitigate such.

The Chair agreed to seek the direction of the Chief Minister in respect of the remit of the EAG going forward regarding forward planning for other emergencies.

Action: The Chair to seek the direction of the Chief Minister in respect of the remit of the EAG going forward regarding forward planning for other emergencies. Chair

f) Attendees at EAG

EAG noted the need to ensure that there was clarity in respect of the purpose of any guest attendees invited to the meetings of the EAG.

g) Financial Support – Self Isolation

EAG noted that clear messaging and information was required in respect of the financial support available for those persons self-isolating due to Covid-19 and consequently were unable to work, in order to ensure that they followed the protocols.

EAG also noted that employees on zero-hours contracts or those who were self-employed and required to self-isolate needed to be supported.

EAG further noted that reference to such could be considered for inclusion within the Winter Plan.

The meeting closed at 5.05pm.

Date of next meeting: Thursday 29 November 2021 at 3.00pm.

Signed:

Date: