

**Minutes of a meeting of the Council of Minister's
– Emergency Advisory Group ("EAG") –
Held on Monday 20 December 2021 at 4.30pm**

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

Present:

Mr John Spellman (Chair)
Mr R Mercer MLC, Tynwald Representative
Mr Peter Davidson
Hon J P Poole-Wilson MHK, Minister for Justice and Home Affairs (Vice-Chair)

MS TEAMS

Dr Rachel Glover
Mr Stevie Christian
Mrs Jacqui Bridson
Professor Peter Edge
Julie Hotchkiss
Kathryn Magson

In Attendance:

Mr D Davies, Chief Executive, Department of Home Affairs

Secretariat:

Miss J Alexander, PS, DHA

Apologies:

Mr Jonathan Wild

087/2021 Declaration of Interest or Conflict

- RG made a declaration of interest in relation to a project related to LFT/PCR testing.

088/2021 Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 29th November, 2021

There was a slight delay in the circulation of the Minutes held on 29th November, 2021 due to an absence of administration in Cabinet Office.

Action: Minutes of 29:11:2021 to have full approval before publication.

089/2021 Matters Arising:

Ref: 075/2021 (d)
Page 3: Communications Update

Action: Peter Boxer to be invited to the next meeting of the EAG.

090/2021 CoMin Revised COVID Strategy Assessment including

091/2021 Current COVID Strategy Assessment

092/2021 Standing Items

- Feedback is required from Mark Lewin in respect of the briefing held today. JPW and RM attended this briefing and will give an update.

- RG asked about PCR capacity and KM advised this not an issue.
- SC commented that there was an overall acceptance that Omicron will spread to the wider community but with increasing vaccinations the Hospital will not be overwhelmed and there will be fewer seriously ill. JPW added that Omicron is here and we must try to protect people as quickly as possible.
 - RG cautioned that these changes could cause a greater spread of Omicron and more rapidly and these changes go against accepted practice in other countries
 - JPW was conscious that in respect of PCR referral currently 89% was coming from people with a positive LFD test, 8% were symptomatic and 2% were from travel. A discussion ensued in respect to sensitivity of tests LFD-v-PCR.
 - PD expressed his support for the reasoning behind the switch to LFD testing.
 - RG highlighted the issue of trusting the public to do LFD's and said she expected a much higher number of people not reporting.
 - KM highlighted there had been 6,000+ tests done over the last month.
 - 400 PCR tests per day are taking place which is nowhere near capacity. However, RG reported that the path lab staff were overwhelmed and the need to reduce referral for PCR was an interesting point.
 - Hospital concerns are related to staff absence from Omicron
 - KM added that ultimately CoMin had considered the balance of risks.
 - A discussion ensued in relation to testing for critical services such as fire and rescue service and police.
 - PD mentioned that previously the UK rate of COVID infection was half of that of the IOM, now the UK is 2½ times that of IOM. In this context would it not be worthwhile to ask for LFT testing in country of departure.
 - RG emphasised the difference in sensitivity between PCR and LFD was significant. Also, variance in self-testing is significant.
 - PE Commented that comments by KM were clear and helpful.
 - PD was encouraged by data suggesting Omicron is not having the impact of Delta
 - RG added that all messaging came down to personal choice. Rest of world is bringing back their restrictions. Omicron is a different beast and caution must be taken. Government's messaging appears complacent

093/2021 Any Other Business

The question was raised, if there was anything else additional to capture?

The group broadly welcomed the additional measures.

PD wished it be recorded that good job had been done (and continued to) getting boosters out. These achievements were a good success story. Extremely efficient. 2.5 thousand people vaccinated today.

It was noted that comparisons to the UK are not viable as 2nd dose date on Island is different to date in UK. By the end of this week 60% over 16yrs. Will have been vaccinated.

The meeting closed at 17.45hrs closed.

POSTSCRIPT

- JS stated that it was appreciated that Committee members gave up time and energy to participate on the committee. This is also appreciated by Government who want to hear the challenges and opinion which are welcomed.
- RG stated that she will be resigning tonight due to her personal disagreement with the Government's stance on testing and the approach to Omicron. RG also stated that the group needed a more science based approach.
- JS said RG's expertise in the testing area was acknowledged and her view appreciated.
- PD stated challenge was helpful
- RG stated she would be writing to the Chief Minister and CoMin.
- JS asked RG to consider whether this was the right time to resign

JS thanked everyone for a lively meeting, and conveyed best wishes for Christmas – seconded by JPW.

Signed:

Date: