



Briefing

COVID-19 RESPONSE GROUP: ROLE AND FUNCTIONS

To: Minister for COVID-19 Response (Hon Chris Hipkins)

Date	1/12/2020	Priority	LOW
Deadline	None	Briefing Number	DPMC-2020/21-315

Purpose

This note provides an overview of the advice, reporting and support that will be provided to you as Minister for COVID-19 Response by the COVID-19 Group at DPMC, following Cabinet decisions on the Group's mandate and funding.

It seeks to provide clarity on this function, with specific actions proposed to generate pace and progress immediately and into the new year.

Recommendations

1. **agree** to a regular meeting with the COVID Group officials as a mechanism for tracking progress, commissioning work and ensuring we are meeting your needs YES / NO
2. **direct** the COVID Group to provide you with a draft Cabinet Paper that would seek agreement to the Group providing comment on the economic, social and health system impacts of COVID-related Cabinet decisions. YES / NO
3. **agree** that if Cabinet agrees the role and functions of the COVID-19 Group, to send a letter to the Chief Executive of MBIE and the Director-General of Health (cc. COVID Chairs) setting out your expectations for how agencies should work with the Group. YES / NO

4. **note** that the COVID Group will provide you with advice on the establishment of an independent expert panel to support continuous review and improvement; on ways to tap into insights from business and community sectors, s9(2)(f)(iv)
s9(2)(f)(iv)

Cheryl Barnes
Cheryl Barnes
**Deputy Chief Executive
COVID-19 Group**

1/12/20

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

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Contact for telephone discussion if required:

Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Cheryl Barnes	Deputy Chief Executive, COVID-19 Group	s9(2)(a)	✓

Minister's office comments:

- Noted
- Seen
- Approved
- Needs change
- Withdrawn
- Not seen by Minister
- Overtaken by events
- Referred to

COVID-19 RESPONSE GROUP: ROLE AND FUNCTIONS

Purpose

1. This note provides an overview of the advice, reporting and support that will be provided to you as Minister COVID Response by the COVID-19 Group at DPMC, following Cabinet decisions on the Group's mandate and funding.
2. It sets this out (alongside what the Group currently delivers) in each of the areas you have signalled as being critical:
 - a) a '**strategic brain**', supporting Ministers to drive and direct the COVID-19 Response;
 - b) ensuring advice and work programmes are **coordinated and integrated** across government (critically, across Health and MBIE's managed isolation and quarantine work), to maximise impact, reduce duplication and drive sequencing and pace; and
 - c) **support for your Office** on the COVID-19 Response portfolio.
3. The proposed resourcing changes in each area (consistent with the current Cabinet paper) are noted. In each of these areas, an action is proposed as an immediate next step to ensure pace and progress.

Overview of future functions

Now	Future	Resource change
"Strategic Brain"		
Hold an overview of the strategic questions requiring work, plus sequencing, and pace	Continue to hold this overview; with greater capacity to drive the work where needed, including getting ahead of issues down the track	Increase by 3 FTE (to 4)
Working with Health on the elimination strategy framework (led by Health, building on work done by DPMC and others)	Coordinate an integrated strategic agenda across government, based on the elimination strategy framework Interrogate work being done, ensure connections between workstreams, and undertake work ourselves only where critical to fill gaps Coordinate an agreed work programme, linked to the strategic direction, with a fortnightly report and briefing to the COVID-19 Ministerial Group on progress	

	<p>Work with your office to connect discrete policy options with the overarching strategy and articulate issues to facilitate high-impact commissioning of work.</p> <p>Help move into a review and improvement model within the overarching elimination strategy.</p>	
	<p>Lead a cross-agency team to coordinate and deliver on the next steps of the elimination strategy framework; systematically working to update the settings in each pillar of the elimination framework. Ensure lead agencies engaged and leading as appropriate</p> <p>Lead work on how the introduction of a vaccination impacts the future strategy.</p>	
<p>Modelling and insights to support decision-making</p> <p>Working with Treasury and others to commission modelling advice from the academic community (including Te Punaha Matatini). Geo-spatial data to inform Alert level decisions.</p>	<p>Work with Treasury and others to ensure that commissioning reflects system and Ministerial needs. Build insights into a fortnightly update for the COVID-19 Ministerial Group.</p>	<p>Will reorient FTE capability. Total of 5 FTE</p>
<p>Advice on international response practice, insights and lessons for NZ</p> <p>Ad hoc only</p>	<p>International insights built into all advice; team holds and shares expertise and knowledge of international practice</p>	<p>As above</p>

4. **Recommended next step:** set up a regular meeting for the COVID-19 Group with you and your office to review progress, flag issues and commission future work.

Now	Future	Resource change
Coordination & Integration		
System readiness for a resurgence in cases of COVID-19		
<p>Draft National Resurgence Response Plan developed</p> <p>Plan developed, agreed, with testing underway. Plan to be regularly updated, including with lessons from experience</p>	<p>Refined systems for updating and testing the plan; with specific plans developed for events or periods in time (e.g. looking</p>	<p>Increase by 3 FTE (to 7)</p>

<p>Tailored response to the summer holiday period; with a supporting communications plan being developed</p> <p>Advice to Cabinet on ensuring that policy and legislative settings are in place in advance of any future resurgence (including the setting and operation of regional boundaries; agreement in advance of critical services permitted at any alert level; and template Orders to be drawn on at pace).</p>	<p>to winter 2021; possible changes needed once vaccinations are in play)</p> <p>Constant review of policy and legislative settings; with any emerging issues resolved quickly across agencies</p>	
<p>Public Communications and Engagement</p>		
<p>Leading and delivering the Unite Against COVID-19 campaign. Supporting mass compliance with the Alert system rules, especially through paid advertising, social media, the Covid19.govt.nz website, and distributing core public health information in 23 languages and 5 accessible formats</p> <p>Engaging and mobilising the wider capacity of government, local government and core partners' COVID-19 communications ensuring information flows smoothly, quickly and consistently</p> <p>Engaging Iwi and Māori organisations to assist the distribution of communications to their audiences</p> <p>Working with the Ministry for Pacific Peoples to deliver a cross agency communications initiative to ensure Pacific communities and Pacific stakeholders are informed.</p>	<p>Maintaining readiness in the event of any future community-based outbreak, delivering trusted and effective communications to support public compliance with Health orders</p> <p>Maintaining an active public health information campaign. Evolving to keep messaging engaging while addressing seasonal challenges, and issues like complacency, for example, the <i>Make Summer Unstoppable</i> campaign (December-February)</p> <p>An ongoing engagement programme with key stakeholders and partners, including supporting assurance and innovation</p> <p>Lifting engagement with Iwi and Pacific communities</p> <p>Counter misinformation, rumour and disinformation, especially in the online environment.</p>	<p>Increase by 4 FTE (to 29)</p>
<p>Oversight of the COVID-19 work underway across agencies</p>		
<p>Hold an overview of the COVID-19 response work programme across government agencies; which is shared with CEs</p>	<p>Work programme in place, agreed by Ministers and regularly reviewed and updated</p>	

<p>Basic tracking of COVID-19 related Cabinet Papers</p> <p>Draft response to Simpson/Roche recommendation that the COVID Group comment on all Cabinet Papers</p>	<p>Weekly report to Minister COVID Response setting out all upcoming COVID-related Cabinet papers</p> <p>Cabinet mandate for COVID-19 Group to comment on all Cabinet papers that relate to the COVID-19 response</p> <p>Ensure public health comments and key agencies' views are systematically included in papers and advice; and connections to related workstreams made</p> <p>Regular meeting with the COVID-Group to provide advice on upcoming decisions and their system (health, economic and social) impacts</p>	<p>Increase by 2 FTE (to 4)</p>
<p>System assurance and continuous improvement</p>		
<p>Assurance, advice and secretariat support for the COVID Chairs Board and Ministers</p> <p>Provide basic secretariat support; risk framework under development (linked to overall strategy)</p> <p>Challenge role provided by Chief Executives - drawing on their external stakeholders</p>	<p>Ministers receive a regular report from the Chairs Board with a progress update on key parts of the work programme, early sight of risks and advice on mitigation</p> <p>Ministers can call on a standing expert panel (epidemiologist, operations and business system specialists) for rapid reviews and advice as needed</p> <p>Regular dashboard reporting, including for Cabinet (cf Employment, Education and Training work); supported by an agreed risk and assurance framework</p> <p>Challenge and innovation provided by external panels – drawn from the business and community sectors</p> <p>s9(2)(f)(iv)</p>	<p>Increase by 12 FTE (to 12)</p>

5. **Recommended next step:** COVID-19 team to provide you with briefing notes on:
- a) a draft Cabinet paper template setting out the strategic, economic and social impacts of the decision proposed; and
 - b) a proposed approach to establishing external business and community panels, to be drawn on for ideas and challenge on specific topics of interest as useful (e.g. opening the border; vaccination communications; managed isolation and quarantine)
 - c) s9(2)(f)(iv)

Ministerial Office Support	
<i>Ministerial Office well supported – advisory; coordination and reach into other agencies as needed</i>	
Short-term arrangement in place; supporting core functions and process	Resource(s) in the Office, to help coordinate and drive the work programme, act as liaison with the COVID-19 Group and other agencies as needed; support the office in asking the right questions to commission and seek assurance in advice, and help drive pace and direction.

6. **Interim next step:** COVID-19 Group to work with the office on a set of expectations for a private secretary; to inform a live expressions-of-interest process underway.

Communication

7. We recommend that you send a letter to the Chief Executive of MBIE, and to the Director General of Health, confirming Cabinet's decision. Specifically, we recommend that this sets out the agreed role and functions of the DPMC COVID-19 Group, and an expectation that both the Ministry of Health and MBIE work openly and closely with DPMC on all COVID-19 response matters. We would be pleased to draft a letter to this effect if required. It could usefully be copied to the COVID Chairs Group for transparency.