

In Confidence

Office of the Minister Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

Chair, Cabinet

COVID-19 INDEPENDENT CONTINUOUS REVIEW, IMPROVEMENT AND ADVICE GROUP: RAPID REVIEW OF AUCKLAND FEBRUARY 2021 OUTBREAK AND FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Proposal

- 1 This paper provides a report back to Cabinet on:
 - 1.1. the COVID-19 Independent Continuous Review Improvement and Advice Group's (the Group) findings from their rapid review of the Auckland February 2021 outbreak (the Outbreak);
 - 1.2. a summary of the Group's future work including how they are linking in with the 'Reconnecting New Zealand' work and working with the Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group and the Business Leaders' Forum.

Executive Summary

- 2 Overall, the Group found that the response to the Outbreak builds on some lessons from previous outbreaks but there are a number of areas where continuous improvements should be made to further enhance and de-risk performance. These areas include (but are not limited to):
 - 2.1. Formalisation of the early aggressive approach;
 - 2.2. Scenario planning;
 - 2.3. Roles and decision making;
 - 2.4. System capacity;
 - 2.5. Workforce fatigue;
 - 2.6. External expert input; and
 - 2.7. Equity and diverse communities.
- 3 The Group have completed a report¹ (the Report) which sets out their findings from the review of the Outbreak. The Report also puts forward a number of

¹ 'Review of the February 2021 Auckland COVID-19 Outbreak and New Zealand's current COVID-19 Outbreak Response Capability'

Leaders' Forum in a way that leverages off their respective work and expertise, avoids duplication and covers any gaps.

Review of the Auckland February 2021 outbreak

Background to the review

- P. 13 In March 2021 I established the Group to provide advice on specific areas of the COVID-19 response where improvements could be made with the benefit of alternative and independent perspectives [refer CAB-21-MIN-0055].
- 14 I asked the Group, as their first area of focus, to undertake a rapid review of the Outbreak to:
- 14.1. Give reassurance that previous recommendations related to COVID-19 outbreak response have been acted upon in a timely fashion;
 - 14.2. Give reassurance that there have been appropriate lessons taken from the Outbreak, including planned timely and measurable improvements to the system; and
 - 14.3. Provide assessment and recommendations independent of internal review.
- 15 That phase of work is now complete, and the Group have completed their Report which identifies areas and proposes recommendations for continuous improvement.
- 16 Members of the Group Dr Debbie Ryan and Professor Philip Hill have led the review with support from the Chair, Sir Brian Roche, and the other Group members. The Report is based on a review of documentation obtained from the contributing organisations and interviews and information provided by key people.
- 17 In summary, 14 interviews were held that included 13 different organisations from across central agencies, public health operational agencies and other groups. Forty-four individuals took part in interviews that spanned approximately 18 hours in total. Approximately six days' worth of effort were taken to prepare the Report. The rapid review commenced with interviews on 30 March 2021, the draft Report was completed on 23 April 2021 prior to agency fact checking², and the final Report provided to me on 04 June 2021.

High level summary of the review findings

- 18 Overall, the Group found that the response to the Outbreak builds on some lessons from previous outbreaks. They have, however, identified a number of areas where continuous improvements should be made to further enhance and de-risk performance. These areas include (but are not limited to):
- 18.1. formalisation of the early aggressive approach;
 - 18.2. scenario planning;

² The draft Report was provided to the Ministry of Health, Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission and Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet for fact checking. Feedback from these agencies has been received and considered by the Group.

system actors such as business communities, Māori, Pacific and other diverse communities, rural communities, general public and so forth.

- P. 37 The System can be described as containing two sub-systems: 'prevention' and 'response'. Linking these two systems and triggering the shift in the response from the former to the latter is 'detection'.

High level focus of the work programme

- P. 38 The System was set up as a crisis management system to respond to a present and substantial threat. The System has served New Zealand well in both keeping out and stamping out COVID-19. It is now clear, however, that New Zealand will be managing and dealing with COVID-19 for the longer term. As such, the System must necessarily shift from a crisis management response and become part of the broader preparedness and response system that can sustainably manage cases of COVID-19 that occur while the wider New Zealand health system overall continues to deliver other functions as normal.

39 Going forward, the Group are shifting the focus of their work to capturing lessons and innovations to inform a 'fit-for-the-future' model that builds on what is already in place, and reflects a changing environment with an increasingly vaccinated population and opening of borders (both domestically and globally).

- P. 40 To deliver on this focus they will shift away from the 'review' and 'report' type approach to one that is iterative and identifies improvement opportunities in real time for immediate consideration. This will see the Group working alongside the Ministry, the DPMC, PSC, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (Managed Isolation and Quarantine), and other agencies through open, collegial and transparent relationships that will be more effective in supporting and enabling continuous system improvements.

41 The independent perspective and advice of the Group following this engagement will be summarised by the Secretariat, checked with the relevant agency, reported to me, and I will lead consultation with the Minister of Finance, Minister of Health and Associate Ministers of Health. The Group will not be held accountable for any actions undertaken by agencies at the direction of the Minister as a result of their advice.

42 The Group's work programme and areas of focus will be agreed and refreshed through regular workshops with myself, the Chair and relevant Chief Executives across the System.

43 Innovation, in line with the best scientific and public health advice, rather than just sticking with the 'tried and true' will be key to keeping up with the evolving COVID-19 environment. Furthermore, a critical success factor is that we have the infrastructure, processes and accountabilities documented and stress tested to allow successful deployment anywhere within New Zealand.

Design and operation of the future system

44 In terms of the future operating system the Group will identify the core components of the operating system (and their current state of readiness and resourcing). These core components involve such things as: