Te Tari Taiwhenua
Internal Affairs

Government Digital Services briefing

Hon Kris Faafoi
Minister for Government Digital Services

Title: **Draft Cabinet paper Cover briefing:** *Using the CovidCard to improve contact tracing*

Date: 24 July 2020

Key issues
This briefing provides an overview of the draft Cabinet paper: *Using the CovidCard to improve contact tracing*. The draft Cabinet paper provides an update on the work to assess Bluetooth technologies to assist contact tracing as part of New Zealand's effort to manage COVID-19. The draft Cabinet paper provides the following potential options for Cabinet to consider: • Option 1 - proceed with the next phase of the CovidCard, including trials and research into public sentiment (preferred option); • Option 2 - proceed with the next phase of the CovidCard in anticipation of full rollout; or • Option 3 – pause work on the CovidCard and focus on developing a technology plan for contact tracing. Officials are seeking your approval of the draft Cabinet paper.

Action sought	Timeframe
We recommend that you: **note** the contents of this briefing; and **agree** to the contents of the draft Cabinet paper: *Using the CovidCard to improve contact tracing*.	27 July 2020

Contact for telephone discussions (if required)

Name	Position	Direct phone line	After hours phone	Suggested 1st contact
Nigel Prince	GCDO COVID-19 Response Lead			✓
Sela Finau	Policy Manager, Policy Group	9(2)(a)	9(2)(a)	

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Cohesion reference	4UAZY7VS6QRJ-168030080-1067
Ministerial database reference	GDS202000215

Purpose

1.   This briefing provides an overview of the draft Cabinet paper: *Using the CovidCard to improve contact tracing*, attached as **Appendix A** (the Cabinet paper).

Background

2.   Effective contact tracing is a critical component of the strategy to isolate COVID-19 in New Zealand, by identifying close contacts, isolating them quickly, and stopping the spread of the virus. Digital technology can complement manual contact tracing by speeding up the process, filling in memory gaps and recording contact with strangers. It could also allow contact tracers to access contact information more rapidly which can improve the chances of identifying and isolating potential cases of COVID-19 quickly.

3.   On 20 April 2020, Cabinet noted that officials are assessing a Bluetooth-enabled card to support contact tracing and will report back to the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Minister of Health and the Minister for Government Digital Services [CAB-20-MIN-0175 refers]. On 13 May 2020, the Minister of Justice was added to this group and the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee noted that a report-back to Cabinet on the consumer application Bluetooth assessment, and the Bluetooth-enabled card, was scheduled for June 2020 [SWC-20-MIN-0043 refers].

4.   The Cabinet paper seeks Cabinet agreement to either:

    4.1   proceed with the next phase of the CovidCard, including trials and research into public sentiment (preferred option); or

    4.2   proceed with the next phase of the CovidCard in anticipation of full rollout; or

    4.3   pause work on the CovidCard and focus on developing a technology plan for contact tracing.

Further assessments have shown that the CovidCard works technically

5.   Following the issuance of the PPP's report, the Government Chief Digital Officer (GCDO) led cross-agency work to independently assess the CovidCard and the benefits of the CovidCard for contact tracing. Results from these assessments are promising but there are issues that require further investigation, including the CovidCard's security and the extent of false positives (when someone is incorrectly classified as a close contact).

6.   Independent modelling of the epidemiological value of the CovidCard has been completed. However, the findings are due to be released by the end of 24 July 2020 so have not yet been incorporated into the Cabinet paper.

7.   Officials have considered different deployment options for the CovidCard ranging from a nationwide rollout and more targeted rollout. A nationwide rollout would have a greater impact on the effectiveness at improving the current contact tracing system if the CovidCard achieved greater uptake. However, a nationwide rollout would have higher costs and greater implementation requirements.

Comment

8.   Digital technology can complement manual tracing by making it faster and more accurate. However, it should be noted that countries around the world have been attempting to use technology to improve contact tracing but one simple and effective

solution has not been identified, and we continue to monitor international developments.

9. The NZ COVID Tracer app has had good initial uptake and adds to the accuracy of the National Health Index data, yet its current limitations rely on people scanning QR codes and it links to a location rather than contacts with people. 9(2)(f)(iv)

10. The assessment of the CovidCard demonstrates that it works from a technical perspective, but it still requires further technical and security refinements to be investigated through the trial process. The success of any technology solution requires strategic policy decisions to address social licence and public uptake of the contact tracing technologies.

11. The draft Cabinet paper outlines three options for you to consider:

    11.1 *Option 1- Proceed with the next phase of the CovidCard, including trials and research into public sentiment (preferred option)*

    Under this option, officials would proceed with the next phase of work on the CovidCard which would be expected to be completed by the end of October 2020. This would involve open and closed field trials, research to test public sentiment to contact tracing technologies, and design work into the service platform design. This option would not include work to prepare for nationwide rollout of the CovidCard.

    11.2 *Option 2 – Proceed with the next phase of the CovidCard in anticipation of full rollout*
    9(2)(f)(iv)

    11.3 *Option 3- Pause work on the CovidCard and focus on developing a technology plan for contact tracing*
    9(2)(f)(iv)

12. The GCDO has worked with the PPP on the proof of concept for the CovidCard but new arrangements are required would be needed for future work on technology to support contact tracing. For option 1, it is important that work on design and preparation for implementation to deploy and operate the card and associated systems is led by an agency with strong digital capability. Additionally, the CovidCard would need to be successfully integrated into the wider contact tracing system. We propose that the Ministry of Health take the lead with support from the GCDO, PPP and other agencies. This approach would help ensure any technology solution can be successfully integrated into the wider contact tracing system. This position will need to be confirmed with the Minister of Health.

9(2)(f)(iv)

Next steps

14. We have been in discussion with the All-of-Government Caring for Communities work stream to discuss a possible location for the trial. The Team have proposed Rotorua as the community to trial the card. However, we will need to confirm public engagement and agreement from PPP. We will also need to confirm planning arrangements with a view to commencing the trial in late August, subject to discussions with PPP.

15. We are awaiting final results from the Defence Technology Agency's independent technical assessment of the card. We are also awaiting independent modelling results on the epidemiological value of the CovidCard, due to be released by the end of 24 July 2020. We will come back to you with more information when we receive these final results.

16. Officials will begin targeted agency consultation between 27 July 2020 to 29 July 2020. We will begin wider agency consultation between 29 July 2020 and 4 August 2020.

17. With your approval, we would seek to commence Ministerial, coalition and support party consultation between 29 July 2020 and 4 August 2020.

Recommendations

18. We recommend that you:

     a) **note** the contents of this briefing; and

     b) **agree** to the contents of the draft Cabinet paper: *Using the CovidCard to improve contact tracing*.   **Yes/No**

Ann-Marie Cavanagh
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Hon Kris Faafoi
Minister for Government Digital Services

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Appendix A: Draft Cabinet paper: *Using the CovidCard to improve contact tracing*