

7 September 2020

## **CDL meeting with the FMs and dFM NI**

### **Winter summit**

1. CDL invited the FMs and dFM of NI to a meeting on 14 September to discuss preparedness for the period September to March, and in particular:
  - Covid-19 and other potential public health challenges (such as pandemic flu),
  - the end of the EU transition period, and
  - concurrent challenges (such as severe weather, industrial action, and public disorder)
2. None of the DAs has accepted the invitation formally but DA officials indicate they will do so, subject to greater clarity about the purpose of the event. However it is far from clear that they will all be represented at FM level. There appears to be scepticism from all of the DAs about the value of the summit and the foundations for better coordination between them and the UK Government. (The date of 14 September itself does not seem to be compatible with diaries.)
3. Today's meeting is likely to indicate the degree of appetite the FMs have for the summit altogether and should be useful for indicating the issues that the FMs would raise at the winter summit if it proceeds. The obvious topics are
  - governance arrangements for coordinated decision making with the DAs treated as equal partners with the UK Government, and
  - the duration and application of macro-economic support interventions (such as furloughing) during Covid-19 outbreaks.

### **Joint statement**

4. The proposal for a joint statement on the four UK administrations' approach to tackling Covid-19 was proposed by the FM Scotland at an earlier meeting between CDL and DA FMs. On 28 July CDL told the Scottish media that a joint statement would be released shortly. The FM Scotland took the credit for the idea in the media.
5. In July it was commonplace for the FM Scotland to assert that the SG was seeking to eliminate Covid-19. By contrast the FM asserted the UK Government had no strategy and was content to allow the virus to circulate. She wanted the joint statement to assert that all UK administrations were committed to elimination. Professor Chris Whitty (CMO for England) advised CDL that elimination is not a viable option in advance of a functioning vaccine and its widespread administration.
6. The wording of the joint statement was negotiated around this issue with a form of words about bringing the virus down as low as possible eventually included. That form of words was agreed by the PM and the FM Wales, and it appeared that the FM Scotland might be prepared to agree it. The FM and dFM NI, did not appear to disagree with the wording, but they declined to endorse the statement until more progress was made with convening a British Irish Council meeting on Covid-19.

7. Since the outbreaks in Aberdeen and Glasgow it might be thought that the FM Scotland's political impetus for a vehicle to highlight the supposed differences of approach between the UK Government and the SG has diminished, but SG officials continue to push NIE officials for a resolution.

#### **Public communications**

8. Cabinet Office has devised a new public campaign called "hands, face, space" with basic public health advice. It is meant to be suitable for use across the UK and its intended to have links to devolved public health agencies more detailed advice. DA communications officials have been briefed about it.
9. CDL has had a recommendation that he should use this call to try and persuade the DAs to agree to use the campaign.

#### **Integrated review**

10. CDL has had advice that he should discuss with the DA FMs the resilience section of the integrated review. As well as covering the reserved matters of foreign policy, defence and national security, the integrated review will also cover resilience. It will promote the concept of much closer integration between responses to hostile threats (such as terrorism, state attacks, and cyber attacks) and responses to hazards (such as pandemic and severe weather). Responses to hazards are generally devolved in Scotland, Wales and NI.
11. The intention is that the resilience section of the IR should cover the whole of the UK, and not just the responsibilities of UK departments. This will require the agreement of the DAs. Securing agreement to text on resilience, with sufficient care, should not be too challenging. The DAs may however seek to influence the review in respect of reserved matters such as the UK relationship with the EU and their stance on that may make agreement on the resilience section much harder to achieve. CDL may decide not to raise the integrated review today.