

MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE MEETING: 29 OCTOBER 2020

MEETING CONDUCTED VIA ZOOM

Present: First Minister (Chair)
deputy First Minister (Chair)
Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Minister for Communities
Minister for the Economy
Minister of Education
Minister of Finance
Minister of Health
Minister for Infrastructure
Minister of Justice

In attendance: Junior Minister, TEO (Mr. Lyons)
Junior Minister, TEO (Mr. Kearney)
Head of Executive and Central Advisory Division, TEO

Dr Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer
Prof Ian Young, Chief Scientific Adviser
Permanent Secretary, Department of Education

INTRODUCTION

The deputy First Minister chaired agenda items 1 - 4.

AGENDA ITEM 1

E (M) (20) 60 Minutes of Executive meeting held on 22 October 2020

1. The minutes of the Executive meeting of 22 October 2020 were agreed.

AGENDA ITEM 2

COVID-19 Report by the Minister of Health

2. The Minister of Health provided an update on developments in the COVID-19 pandemic, including: the 'R' number and the COVID-19 Community Mobility Report, which had been circulated to Ministers; increase in inpatient numbers; increase of ICU capacity/Nightingale facilities; testing in care homes; workforce appeal; sickness absence levels among HSC staff; and improvements in the COVID statistics for Derry City/Strabane District council area.
3. The Chief Scientific Adviser gave a presentation on statistical data relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the request of the Minister of Justice, he advised that he would provide a graph for the following week demonstrating the impact of a range of restrictions and relaxations on the progress of the virus. At the request of Junior Minister Kearney, the Chief Scientific Adviser advised that he would provide information the following week on projected transmission rates, suppression of the virus and potential rate of deaths over the coming weeks.
4. The Chief Medical Office advised that a paper would be circulated on new rapid testing technology.

AGENDA ITEM 3

Actions from Previous meetings

5. The deputy First Minister advised that the Action Log had been circulated.
6. The First Minister requested that engagement on the issue of off-license sales in pubs should be taken forward as quickly as possible.

AGENDA ITEM 4

COVID-19 Management

7. The Minister of Finance introduced this paper.
8. Following discussion, and an agreed amendment to Recommendation (e), the Executive:
 - a) noted the level of COVID-19 funding available;
 - b) agreed that £100 million be held to provide support for any further restrictions;
 - c) agreed the proposed COVID-19 allocations at Annex H to Executive Memorandum E (20) 256 (C);
 - d) agreed that £7.3 million be allocated for hospices and £19 million be allocated for bus/coach and taxi industries from the funding held centrally for sectoral support, £10 million of that funding continued to be held for airports, £6 million held pending finalisation of costs for the bus/coach and taxi industries with the remaining £18.9 million held pending proposals from the Department for Infrastructure for support for Bus/Coach, taxi and haulage industries and from relevant departments for other sectors including travel agents, event organisers, the printed news sector, wet pubs and Bed and Breakfasts;
 - e) agreed that the Health Minister would work to address issues relating to 50/50 hospice support before the end of the financial year;
 - f) agreed that £60 million be held for Economy Support Schemes;
 - g) noted the update in relation to the Fresh Start agreement, ongoing Treasury engagement and the Central Issues;
 - h) noted the level of reduced requirements (Annexes B and C to the Executive paper);
 - i) agreed the proposed reclassifications (Annex D to the Executive paper);
 - j) agreed that continued internal budget flexibility be provided to departments until January
 - k) agreed the proposed October Monitoring allocations (Annex G to the Executive paper);

- l) noted that the October Monitoring round concluded with all available funding in respect of Resource DEL allocated, an over-commitment of £12.7 million in respect of Capital DEL and £43.7 million Financial Transactions Capital available; and
- m) noted the need to ensure no public comment was made on the outcome of this Monitoring Round until the statement has been made to the Assembly.

9. The Minister for Infrastructure recorded her agreement to the proposals in Executive Memorandum E 20) 256 (C) regarding allocations to other departments, but advised that she could not support the proposed allocation of funding for public transport and in particular Translink, given the consequences for front line jobs and front line services. The Minister reminded the Executive of its commitment to ensuring the viability of the public transport network. The Minister of Finance advised that he would engage with the Minister on the matter.

10. At the request of the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, the Minister of Finance advised that he, along with the Minister of Health, would consider reimbursement to the Agri-Food and Bio-Sciences Institute for its provision of COVID-19 testing services.

E (20) 257 (C)

Mandatory Face Coverings on Dedicated Home to School Transport

11. The Minister of Education introduced this paper.
12. The Executive noted that face coverings would be mandatory for all post primary school aged children on all dedicated home to school and public transport subject to the current exemptions.

E (20) 258 (C)

Financial Assistance due to Coronavirus for the taxi, private bus and coach sectors

13. The Minister for Infrastructure introduced this paper.

14. The Executive:

- (i) noted the First Minister's and deputy First Ministers' designation that the Department for Infrastructure should provide financial assistance to the taxi, private bus and coach sectors;
- (ii) endorsed the proposals to provide financial assistance to mitigate the effect of this hardship by means of two schemes provided for in accordance with the Financial Assistance Act (NI) 2009; and
- (iii) approved the funding bid to cover the cost of these schemes (£25m).

15. The Minister for the Economy and the Minister for Infrastructure agreed that their departments would engage to ensure that companies and organisations did not receive double funding from the range of financial assistance schemes being implemented.

COVID-19 – Any Other business

Financial Support Schemes

16. The Minister for Infrastructure suggested that the Executive should invite the Comptroller and Auditor General to review its agreed Financial Support Schemes. Following discussion, it was agreed that if they wished to do so Ministers should engage directly with the Comptroller and Auditor General in relation to departmental funding schemes they were planning to introduce.

The First Minister chaired the remaining items on the agenda.

AGENDA ITEM 5

Other papers requiring Executive agreement

Irrelevant & Sensitive

AGENDA ITEM 6

Any other business

Irrelevant & Sensitive

Date of next meeting

23. The date of the next scheduled meeting of the Executive would be Tuesday 3 November at 9.00 a.m.