

**DRAFT MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE MEETING: 15 OCTOBER 2020**

**(Reconvened on 16 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  
Ms Karen Pearson, Director of EU Relations, TEO

**INTRODUCTION**

The deputy First Minister chaired agenda items 1 - 4.

**AGENDA ITEM 1**

**E (M) (20) 57          Minutes of Executive meeting held on 8 October 2020**

1. The minutes of the Executive meeting of 8 October 2020 were agreed.

**E (M) (20) 58          Minutes of Executive meeting held on 13 October 2020**

2. The minutes of the Executive meeting of 13 October 2020 were agreed subject to the amendments requested by the Minister for Infrastructure.

## **AGENDA ITEM 2**

### **COVID-19 Report by the Minister of Health**

3. The Minister of Health provided an update on, and the Executive discussed, developments in the COVID-19 pandemic, including the 'R' number; increasing hospitalisation and ICU figures; rising age demographic of cases; care home testing; and staffing capacity.
4. The deputy First Minister advised that Q&A information would be provided to all Ministers as soon as possible in relation to the most recent restrictions.

## **AGENDA ITEM 3**

### **Actions from Previous meetings**

5. The deputy First Minister advised that the Action Log had been circulated.

## **AGENDA ITEM 4**

### **COVID-19 Management**

#### **E (20) 242 (C)      Review of Offences and Penalties for Breaches of COVID Restrictions - Potential New Offence for Large Gatherings and Unlicensed Music Events**

6. The Minister of Justice introduced this paper.
7. The Executive agreed to:

- (i) the creation of a new offence of organising or participating in large gatherings and unlicensed music events;
- (ii) defining a 'large gathering' as consisting of 30 or more persons;
- (iii) applying penalties consistent with the existing suite of penalties, as set out in paragraph 14 of Executive Memorandum E (20) 242 (C); and
- (iv) defining an unlicensed music event in line with the definition of 'rave', for which the limit would also be 30 persons.

8. The Executive noted that a COVID protest was planned for the Stormont Estate.

**E (20) 246 (C)      Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020: Third Review of the Need for the Restrictions and Requirements**

9. The Minister of Health introduced this paper

10. The Executive agreed that:

- (i) the requirement in regulation 3 for a review of the need for the restrictions and requirements in the No. 2 Regulations had been duly met;
- (ii) the current restrictions and requirements in the No. 2 Regulations, as amended, continued to be an appropriate and necessary response to the serious and imminent threat to public health which was posed by the incidence and spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) in Northern Ireland;
- (iii) overall the restrictions and requirements imposed by these Regulations continued to be proportionate to what the Regulations sought to achieve, which was a public health response to that infectious disease threat in the context of a then rising rate of infection in Northern Ireland;

- (iv) the Regulations should be amended to clarify the restrictions and requirements in respect of bubbling and household sizes, as per paragraphs 14 – 17 of the Executive paper;
- (v) a small number of technical amendments should be made to clarify the Regulations or to correct drafting errors;
- (vi) the Executive Office should work with Departments to consider the legislative references to Departmental guidance, and
- (vii) the Department of Health should engage with DSO to produce and publish a consolidated version of the regulations on the DoH website alongside the Regulations as made.

## **COVID-19 – Any Other business**

### **Support for Children’s and Adult Hospice Services**

11. The First Minister raised the issue of support for Children’s and Adult Hospice Services.

12. Following discussion, the Minister of Finance advised that he would circulate a paper on emergency funding for the Hospice to the next Executive meeting, with the Minister of Health to provide clarification on engagement between the Hospice and the Health Boards.

### **Guidance for university students**

13. The Minister of Justice raised, and the Executive discussed, the issue of Guidance for university students.

14. The Minister of Health advised that he would circulate to all Ministers advice previously provided by the Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Scientific Adviser to the Department for the Economy with regard to universities.

15. The Minister for Communities advised of hardship being endured by students. The Minister for the Economy advised of her engagement with the universities in relation to availability of the Student Hardship fund.

#### **Civil Contingencies Group**

16. The Minister of Justice requested, and the deputy First Minister provided, an update on the Civil Contingencies preparations.

17. At the proposal of the Minister for Infrastructure, the Executive recorded its appreciation for the work of officials in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **COVID-19: Department for Communities Additional Financial Support**

18. The Minister for Communities provided an update on areas of additional financial support to be provided by her department.

#### **Free School Meals**

19. The Minister of Education advised that he would be seeking Executive support for additional funding to meet the cost of Free School Meals to be provided during the additional week of closure agreed by the Executive.

**The First Minister chaired the remaining items on the agenda.**

#### **AGENDA ITEM 5**

**Other papers requiring Executive agreement**

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

**AGENDA ITEM 6**

**Any other business**

**Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Bill**

23. The Minister of Justice advised that she would be issuing an urgent decision request in relation to her Executive paper on Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Bill.

**24. The Executive meeting was adjourned.**

**25. The meeting was reconvened at 4.00 p.m.**

**E (20) 247 (C)      Extension of the Financial Support Agreed for Derry City and Strabane District to all Areas**

26. The Minister of Finance introduced this paper.

27. The Executive agreed Recommendations (i), (iii), (iv) and (v) of the paper as follows:

- i agreed that the geographical coverage of the financial assistance scheme agreed for Derry and Strabane should be extended to all districts;
- iii noted that the Department of Finance Accounting Officer had indicated that she required a Ministerial Direction to take the support forward at these levels as value for money could not be justified; and
- iv agreed, on the basis outlined at recommendation (iii) of the Executive paper, to double the levels of support paid through the scheme;
- v increased the amount allocated to DoF for this purpose to £35m.

28. Consideration of Recommendation (ii), referring to the close contact list, was deferred pending further discussion.

**29. The Executive meeting was adjourned.**

**30. The meeting was reconvened on Friday 16 October at 9.30 a.m.**

31. Apologies were received from the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

### **Close Contact List – Driving Instructors**

32. The Minister for Infrastructure referred to her letter of 15<sup>th</sup> October in which she advised of her view that Driving Instructors should be included in the close contact list at Recommendation (ii) of E (20) 247 (C) - Extension of the Financial Support Agreed for Derry City and Strabane District to all Areas, based on the definition of close contact provided by the Chief Scientific Adviser.

33. Following discussion, the Executive agreed that Driving Instructors should be included in the close contact list.

34. The First Minister recorded her concern about the decision and stressed the need for a more coherent approach to the imposition of restrictions on different groups.

**Financial Support for Business Activity impacted by COVID-19 Restrictions**

35. The Minister for the Economy introduced this paper, which had been included as a discussion item on the agenda.

36. The First Minister advised that she and the deputy First Minister would write to the Prime Minister, copied to the Treasury, in relation to funding for economic support programmes.

37. The Minister for the Economy advised that she would circulate a paper regarding financial support for businesses at the beginning of the following week.

**Date of next meeting**

38. The date of the next scheduled meeting of the Executive would be Thursday 22 October at 1.00 p.m.