

MEETING NOTE (12 March 2020)**INV Number:**

TITLE/ORGANISATION:		COVID-19 – all Ministers and Perm Secs	
VENUE:	☐ e.g. PB	Block B Conf room, Castle Buildings	☐ OTHER:
LIST OF ATTENDEES:		FM, DFM, Exec Ministers and Perm Secs	
☒ Minister	☒ Spad	☒ PS	
OFFICIALS:	Mark Goodfellow – PPS FM Carol Morrow – PS DFM Chief Medical Officer Norman Fulton - DAERA		
OTHERS:	Philip Weir Stephen McGlade		
KEY DISCUSSION POINTS:			
FM welcomed all attendees, stating that the urgency of this meeting was driven by the statement this morning by the Taoiseach. DFM referred to public confusion. While we continue to follow the science and medical advice, we are now in a difficult position given Rol approach. Health Minister clarified that following the science continues to work for NI and that approach ought to continue. SAGE advice is that, when school closures are considered appropriate, it should be for 15 weeks but is unlikely to have a significant impact on spread of virus. He restated his view that any decision to			

close schools would collapse our healthcare system and would render futile much of the planning work to date. The absence of spikes reinforces need to not close schools at this stage.

Minister Weir – agree with Minister Swann – impact of 340,000 children not at school is immense. Many parents would be removed from providing front line services – child care implications huge.

Minister Hargey – managing the comms and messaging is key. World Health Organisation advice? Need to move quickly. Approx 30k cross-border crossings daily. Currently considering closure of 50 x JBOs.

CMO – need right combination of measures at right time to reduce the peak. Risk is creating a peak too early and inviting a further additional peak. We have access to the best advice and confident in quality of that advice. More work needed to provide support and advice for schools but would be concerned about unintended consequences of any school closures.

Finance Minister – need to understand why difference in medical advice in NI v Rol. Are CMOs on same page?

Health Minister restated his position – the health and science is clear – this is now a political call in relation to school closures and his view was not to follow the Rol position but would support announcing intent to close schools when the science supports that.

Derek Baker – 300,000+ children in schools – any decision would need to include primary and post-primary. Childcare implications huge for local economy. Power to close schools in place and can be used at any stage. Biggest issue – impact on exams and consideration of those eligible for free school meals.

Agreed that a core script should be developed quickly.

ISSUES AGREED:

N/A

ACTION POINTS / OFFICIAL RESPONSIBLE:

N/A

NOTE WRITTEN BY:

Mark Goodfellow

DATE:

12 March 2020

