

MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE MEETING: 22 JULY 2021

MEETING CONDUCTED VIA ZOOM

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

In attendance: Junior Minister, TEO (Mr. Middleton)
Junior Minister, TEO (Mr. Kearney)

Interim Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service
Sir Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer
Professor Ian Young, Chief Scientific Adviser
Head of Executive and Central Advisory Division TEO

INTRODUCTION

The deputy First Minister chaired agenda items 1 - 4.

AGENDA ITEM 1

E (M) (21) 37

Minutes of the Executive Meeting of 8 July 2021

1. Consideration of the minutes of the Executive meeting of 8 July 2021 was deferred to the meeting scheduled for 29 July

AGENDA ITEM 2

Covid-19 Report by the Minister of Health

2. The Chief Scientific Advisor gave a presentation on, and the Executive discussed, statistical data relating to the pandemic. He noted a continued significant rise in positive cases and test positivity, largely driven by the unvaccinated 18-30 cohort, although there had also been a doubling of cases among the over 60s. Projections of the current rate of increase suggested that previous peaks in infection rates and hospital admissions could be exceeded in the near future. He also illustrated increases in infection rates across local government areas, and particularly Belfast. A first vaccination rate of 85% was anticipated by the end of August which was lower than in the rest of the UK, and meant that the susceptible population was also larger. Further data on impacts would be available by the end of the following week.

AGENDA ITEM 3

Actions from previous meetings

3. The deputy First Minister advised that the action log had been circulated.

AGENDA ITEM 4

COVID Management

Executive COVID Taskforce – update

4. The Secretary to the Executive advised that the ECT Dashboard and the weekly written update on the Executive COVID Taskforce had been circulated to Ministers. She drew attention to the update on adherence and communications work which had been provided drawing on recent concerns raised by the Minister of Health. The picture was not as negative as some commentators might suggest.

She pointed to the risks of confused and contradictory messaging in other parts of the UK as well as in NI all of which reinforced the need for the Executive to be clear and consistent about decisions and messaging, particularly in response to the increased cases.

5. The Secretary agreed to examine what further information was available about the activity of Covid Ambassadors (marshals) across local government district areas.

E (21) 157 (C) Updated Health Advice to Inform Executive Consideration on Ratification of Decisions for Further Relaxations to Coronavirus Restrictions from 26 July 2021

6. The Minister of Health introduced this paper which was discussed by the Executive.
7. The Minister for the Economy requested that the paper which he had circulated on the Economic Impact of current restrictions be included on the agenda of a future meeting which he considered would be consistent with the inclusion of the weekly health report.
8. Following discussion, the Executive agreed:
 - i. to ratify those relaxations assessed as low risk in Annex A to Executive Memorandum E (21) 157 (C) ;
 - ii. that the relaxations assessed a moderate risk, and the wearing of face coverings in places of worship, would be considered in the light of any further information at the Executive meeting scheduled for 26 July
 - iii. that relaxations assessed as high risk would be considered at the Executive meeting scheduled for 29 July.

Face Covering Regulations

9. The First Minister, on behalf of himself, the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, the Minister for the Economy and the Minister of Education, expressed concern about the recommendation in the paper to extend the Health

Protection (Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings) Regulations (NI) 2020 to 24 March 2022. He advised that there was no objection to their extension but that this should take place on a rolling timescale consistent with the review of other restrictions. All other Ministers indicating their agreement to the recommendation, the Executive agreed that these regulations should be extended to 24 March 2022.

The First Minister chaired the remaining items in the agenda

AGENDA ITEM 5

Note of Urgent Decision

10. The Executive noted the following urgent decision, taken in accordance with paragraph 2.14 of the Ministerial Code.

E (UP) (21) 21

Travel Relaxations for Fully Vaccinated Passengers

AGENDA ITEM 6

Any Other Business

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Executive would take place on Monday, 26 July, for a dedicated discussion on hospital waiting lists and consideration of the ratification of relaxations, as agreed earlier and on 29 July for Covid and departmental business.