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MEMORANDUM E (21) 033 (C)

FROM: FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

DATE: 4 FEBRUARY 2021

TO: EXECUTIVE MINISTERS

FINAL EXECUTIVE PAPER: INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL – EXECUTIVE COVID TRAVEL (ECT) UPDATE

This paper is to:

- **Update the Executive on international travel issues; and**
- **Outline key decisions needed as the work progresses.**

Background

1. The Executive agreed that the Task Force would take forward the necessary work on self-isolation arrangements on return from travel from Red list countries where there are new covid variants.
2. A TEO-led Task and Finish Group has been established and will meet weekly. DoH, DfE, DfI and DoJ attend. Central Procurement Directorate will join the Group this week. TEO continues to engage in four nations discussions, and in discussions with officials from the Irish Government.
3. There is not yet an agreed implementation date and Cabinet Office officials have advised that work will be needed on the following issues:
 - procurement and commercials: hotel rooms and services, transport, security and welfare services will need to be identified and put in place;
 - regulations: subject to confirmation, an immigration based solution is not the preferred route. Some health regulation amendments may be needed;

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- communications and engagement with carriers: it is likely that a digital booking platform will be procured, to enable people to book and pay for their own self isolation as part of their travel arrangements;
 - enforcement: enforcement issues will need to be considered as part of the overall plan.
4. The Irish Government is likely to put very similar arrangements in place. TEO are engaging further with Irish Government officials on 4 February, along with Cabinet Office, to assess the degree of alignment which can be achieved.
5. For context, Cabinet Office have advised us on numbers of people arriving in the UK per day:
- approximately 20,000
 - of which, 5,000 are hauliers and will be exempt
 - of the remaining 15,000 arrivals, approximately 2,500 are from Red list countries.
6. This may be behind the UKG decision to self-isolate only from Red list countries, whereas Scottish Government and Welsh Government are very likely to require self-isolation from all international travel unless the person is exempt.

Consideration and outline of next steps

7. There are no international flights here at present. Subject to confirmation, the working assumption is that passengers will be required to self-isolate as close as possible to their point of entry and that journeys should not exceed 90 minutes for risk management and public health purposes. For us this may mean that our citizens and residents returning from Red list countries are most likely to self-isolate in England or on arrival at Dublin. Because there are no direct routes into the CTA from Red list countries, all returnees will of necessity travelled via other routes. For example, Brazil to Portugal, Portugal to another European destination and onwards.

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8. Cabinet Office have offered the view that it is not essential for us to have arrangements in place on day 1 of implementation as we have no international flights. However, officials' advice is to proceed at pace with preparations to avoid NI appearing to be out of line and to maintain maximum possible alignment.
9. TEO officials are therefore working very closely with other administrations. There will be a number of key decisions for the Executive in coming days/weeks including:
- overall advice from the Minister of Health on the necessity and proportionality of the final package of proposals;
 - a decision will be needed on whether to restrict the policy to Red list countries or, like Scotland and Wales, restrict to all international travel unless an exemption applies; and
 - officials are exploring the best route to procurement of hotels and related services such as welfare, transport and security. UKG have offered to procure for the other administrations and this option can be explored along with the option of using our own frameworks if indeed they are suitable for this purpose. Financial consequences of the policy will also need to be established. The intention is that individuals will meet their own self isolation costs but officials will need to explore if there are other costs which might be incurred and which could fall to us.
10. Further updates will be provided to the Executive and decisions sought at key points.
11. That the Executive:
- Notes the ongoing work and future decisions.

THE RT. HON. ARLENE FOSTER MLA
First Minister

MICHELLE O'NEILL MLA
deputy First Minister

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