

MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE MEETING: 25 MARCH 2021

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)

Interim Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service
Head of Executive and Central Advisory Division
Dr Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer
Dr Declan Bradley, Deputy Chief Scientific Adviser
Ms Karen Pearson, Director, EU Relations, TEO

INTRODUCTION

The deputy First Minister chaired agenda items 1 – 4.

AGENDA ITEM 1

Minutes of previous meetings

E (M) (21) 21

Minutes of the Executive Meeting of 16 March 2021

1. The Executive agreed the minutes of the Executive meeting of 16 March 2021.

AGENDA ITEM 2

COVID-19 Update

2. The Minister of Health provided an update on, and the Executive discussed, matters relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, including hospital admissions; the position in care homes; the vaccination programme roll-out; and potential availability of the Moderna vaccine.
3. The Deputy Chief Scientific Adviser gave a presentation on statistical data relating to the pandemic, including the R number; positivity rates; testing capacity; and mobility trends.

AGENDA ITEM 3

Actions from previous meeting

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

AGENDA ITEM 4

COVID Management

Executive COVID Taskforce

5. The Secretary to the Executive provided an update on the work of the Executive COVID Taskforce, advising that advice on a strong messaging campaign would be provided to the Executive ahead of the Easter break.
6. The Minister for the Economy requested that her concern be recorded that the length and complexity of the Executive's review process was threatening the continued existence of businesses already heavily impacted by the ongoing restrictions. She requested urgent consideration of papers which she had submitted to the Taskforce. The Minister also considered that the Executive needed to seek

input from economists and those involved in community renewal to develop a wider and more inclusive process.

7. The Secretary to the Executive confirmed that amongst the expertise available to the ECT was that of the Chief Economists and advised that matters being raised by Departments and brought to the Taskforce for consideration were looked at in the context of a range of impacts across all sectors, the potential to impact on progress already made in lifting restrictions and possible unintended consequences / repercussions.
8. In response to the First Minister, she confirmed that the Taskforce was urgently reviewing the current restrictions applying to funerals, and other church services.
9. The Chief Medical Officer advised the Executive on the impact of new COVID variants, reiterating his view that a phased, cautious approach to easement of restrictions was the safest option.

E (21) 073 (C) Limited Reopening of Sure Start and Youth Services

10. The deputy First Minister advised that this paper had been subject to the agreed Executive process for assessing relaxations proposed outside of the four-week consideration timeline.
11. The Minister of Education introduced this paper.
12. The deputy First Minister invited comment from the Minister of Justice, who welcomed the reopening of Youth Services, and advised of the need for a consistent approach to youth engagement in the run-up to the summer period.
13. The Executive agreed to the limited reopening of Sure Start and Youth Services as outlined in Executive Memorandum E (21) 073 (C) – Limited Reopening of Sure Start and Youth Services.

E (21) 072 (C) International Travel - Executive COVID Taskforce (ECT) Update 4

14. The deputy First Minister introduced, and the Executive discussed, this paper.

15. The Executive:

- (i) agreed that its approach should be based on the Red List, and that its content would be kept under regular review. The arrangements for managed isolation should be flexible enough to enable a broader approach on international travel to be put in place should the need arise;
- (ii) noted the update on the contract discussions and agreed the scope of the arrangements;
- (iii) agreed the designation of airports; and
- (iv) agreed how to manage the travel implications arising from the decision to remove the Stay Home requirement from 12 April.

E (21) 070 (C) COVID Restrictions Business Support Scheme (CRBSS) & Large Tourism Hospitality Business Support Grant (LTHBSS) - Extending Payments Beyond 31 March 2021

16. The Minister for the Economy introduced this paper.

17. The Executive:

- (i) agreed to the extension of the COVID Restrictions Business Support Scheme & Large Tourism Hospitality Business Support Grant beyond 31 March 2021, despite significant VfM concerns;
- (ii) committed to provide additional funding as long as the restrictions continued, i.e. up to £5 million per week; and
- (iii) agreed to the Minister for the Economy's intention to issue a Ministerial Direction to the DfE Accounting Officer to proceed.

The First Minister chaired the remaining items on the agenda

AGENDA ITEM 5

Other issues requiring Executive agreement

Irrelevant & Sensitive

Irrelevant & Sensitive

AGENDA ITEM 6

Note of Urgent Decision

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

E (UP) (21) 07 2020-21 Further Funding Allocations (Stage 4)

AGENDA ITEM 7

Any Other Business

Sports Sustainability Fund

29. The Minister for Communities updated the Executive on Sports Sustainability Fund
- Financial Support to Sustain the Sports Sector.

Irrelevant & Sensitive

Date of next meeting

32. The next scheduled Executive meeting would take on Thursday 1 April.

33. The First Minister advised that an additional meeting may be convened earlier to consider the Minister of Finance's budget paper.