

**MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE MEETING: 20 JANUARY 2022**

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

**INTRODUCTION**

The deputy First Minister chaired items 1 – 3 with the First Minister chairing the remaining item on the meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 1

**Minutes from previous meetings**

**E (M) (22) 02          Minutes of the Executive Meeting of 13 January 2022**

1. The Executive agreed the minutes of the Executive meeting of 13 January 2022.

AGENDA ITEM 2

**Executive COVID Taskforce update**

2. The Secretary to the Executive provided an update on the work of the Executive COVID Taskforce. She noted the level of financial resource available to the end of the financial year and advised of progress on the COVID Financial Support Schemes. She noted that workplace absences across Departments and sectors continue to be managed through business as usual or business continuity plans, and provided an update on polling conducted on behalf of the Taskforce's Adherence Group.
3. In response to a query from the Minister of Finance, the Minister for the Economy agreed to provide further information regarding the hotel sector's requirement for financial support.

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

4. The Minister of Health advised of a reduction in the number of days for which confirmed cases of COVID-19 were required to self-isolate, with positive cases able to leave self-isolation on day 6 provided they have had two negative lateral flow tests, at least 24 hours apart, no earlier than day 5 and day 6.
5. The Chief Scientific Advisor provided an update on the current position, noting a recent increase in case numbers driven largely by increases in the 0-11 and 11-15 age groups. He noted a decline of around 10% in hospital admissions, and that the majority of inpatients do not become seriously ill. He advised that hospital pressures were following the optimistic modelling scenario.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 3**

##### **E (22) 014 (C)      Proof of Exemption from Face Coverings Requirements**

6. The deputy First Minister introduced this paper.
7. The Executive:

- noted the outline of the Public Information Campaign which reinforced that there remained a legal requirement to wear face coverings in specified indoor settings and that face coverings were an important measure to reduce the risk from COVID;
- agreed that the requirement to provide proof of exemption should be removed from the Regulations; and
- agreed that the reasonable excuse of 'severe distress' should be reinserted into the Regulations to exempt from the face covering requirements the types of cases highlighted by Ministers which may fall short of the DDA test but were nonetheless genuine;
- agreed that these changes should come into effect from 21<sup>st</sup> January 2022.

#### **E (22) 016 (C)      Covid–19: Relaxation of Omicron restrictions**

8. The deputy First Minister introduced this paper.
9. The Minister for Infrastructure, Minister of Justice and Minister of Health recorded their concerns that details of the proposed relaxations had been presented as conclusions in the media in advance of the meeting.
10. The Executive:
  - Noted the proposed phased approach to removing the restrictions implemented in response to the Omicron variant and agreed the measures outlined in Annex A; and
  - Noted the Autumn-Winter/baseline measures in place and that further advice on those will follow.

**E (22) 018 (C) Further Financial Assistance for Private Bus and Coach Sector Due to Coronavirus**

11. The Minister for Infrastructure introduced this paper.

12. The Executive:

- Approved the Minister for Infrastructure's proposal to provide financial assistance to mitigate in part the effect of the financial pressures on bus and coach operators, covering the period 1 April 2021 to 31 January 2022, by means of a further scheme provided for in accordance with the Financial Assistance Act (NI) 2009;
- Agreed that the First Minister and deputy First Minister should make a determination under the Financial Assistance Act (Northern Ireland) 2009 and designate the Department for Infrastructure as the relevant department to make a scheme of financial assistance;
- Noted this is subject to a successful bid to cover the cost of the third scheme

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

**AGENDA ITEM 4**

**E (22) 015 2021-22 January Monitoring Round**

13. The Minister of Finance introduced this paper.

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

15. The Executive:

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

e) agreed the proposed additional flexibility to DE for COVID-19 funding;

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

**Date of next meeting**

18. The next scheduled meeting of the Executive will take place on Thursday 27 January.

## **Annex A**

### **Relaxations to COVID restrictions – 20 January 2022**

The Executive has agreed the following steps:

From 21 January at 12 noon:

- In hospitality settings - the requirement to be seated whilst consuming food and/or drink and for table service in premises that provide alcohol will be removed as will the rule of 6.
- In domestic settings - guidance regarding the cap on the number of households meeting indoors will be removed. (A maximum number of 30 people permitted to gather will be retained in regulation.)
- On face coverings – the requirement to provide proof of exemption will be removed and the reasonable excuse of ‘severe distress’ will be reintroduced.
- The guidance on working from home will revert to working from home where you can with employers encouraged to facilitate this.

From 26 January at 12 noon:

- Nightclubs will be permitted to open.
- Dancing and indoor standing events can resume.
- In relation to COVID-status certification – the legal requirement will continue to apply in relation to nightclubs and indoor unseated or partially seated events with 500 people or more. For other settings where COVID status certificates are currently required, guidance would strongly encourage their continued use.
- In workplaces - the requirement for offices to take reasonable measures for 2m social distancing will be removed. Guidance remains in place that risk assessments should be carried out.