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COBR COVID-19 (M)(21)(2)

CABINET OFFICE BRIEFING ROOMS

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COVID-19(M)

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To be held via Video Teleconference

15 December 2021 at 17:15

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## AGENDA

1) Situation Report

2) UK Response to Omicron including testing capacity and supply, the booster campaign and financial support for response measures

3) Communications including X-UK booster campaign and UK-wide messaging over the festive period

CABINET OFFICE  
15 December 2021

**STEER**

1. This meeting will provide an update on the latest state of play surrounding Omicron and the UK response following the PMs statement on Sunday. This will likely focus on UKGs booster campaign, and UK-wide public messaging surrounding the campaign over the festive period. FM/dFM, Robin Swann, Michael McBride (NI CMO) will also be on the line.

*Agenda Item 1 - Situation Update*

2. The Chair will provide an update on the developing situation which will highlight the continued rise of cases across the UK, particularly in England and Scotland. He will then turn to each of the DAs to provide an update.
3. The NI Executive are due to discuss the Omicron situation tomorrow, however it is not anticipated they will implement further measures this side of Xmas. That said the Health Minister & CMO has been clear on the need to monitor the situation closely and be ready to introduce restrictions at pace should it prove necessary.

**Lines To Take (if required):**

- I continue to monitor the situation in Northern Ireland and support the measured and balanced approach that the NI Executive has taken.
- So far, in Northern Ireland there have been 10 cases of Omicron, however as the CMO has highlighted this is likely to increase rapidly over the festive period.
- It is therefore important we continue a coordinated approach over the festive period and seek alignment where possible to ensure we combat the threat of Omicron across the UK

*Agenda Item 2 - Booster Campaign*

4. To date NI has aligned with the rest of the UK in respect of the booster vaccine target including the commitment to offer booster vaccines to all those aged 18 and above by the end of the year.
5. It is however anticipated that each of the DAs will use this opportunity to make the case for additional financial support to ensure they can fulfil testing and booster vaccine targets by the end of the year.
6. The Chief Secretary of the Treasury (CST) will be in attendance at the meeting. HMT colleagues have advised it is unlikely he will commit to a specific figure at the meeting however we understand he will provide assurance that financial assistance and vaccines will be provided to ensure the DAs have adequate resources to deliver the booster campaign. You may wish to let CST lead on this item, supporting him should it prove necessary.

**Suggested Lines to Take:**

- I welcome that NI has also committed to the UKG target of offering all over 18s the booster vaccine before the end of this year.
- This will be a mammoth task and I am pleased that the Chief Secretary has provided

assurance that UKG will ensure adequate resources will be put in place to ensure this can be delivered right across the UK.

*Agenda Item 3- Communications including X-UK booster campaign*

7. We do not anticipate NI Ministers raising any concerns with the current Comms approach as to date the NI Executive has also adopted similar public messaging to UKG and has welcomed efforts by the NIO to amplify their key messaging. You may therefore wish to use this opportunity to encourage the continuation of coordinated communications to ensure messaging remains consistent across the UK.

**Suggested Lines to Take:**

- I welcome the coordinated and consistent communications approach that has been adopted for the booster campaign thus far. Maintaining this approach will be critical over the Xmas period.
- My Communications officials and I stand ready to support the NI Executive in amplifying this messaging across NI.