

**Departmental Comments provided by: June Ingram**

- The First Minister and deputy First Minister have written to Executive colleagues regarding the potential restrictions from 11 December 2020.  
The paper includes a summary of the issues and proposals related to the hospitality sector, as well as the DfE input on the hospitality sector and an annex on economic impacts.
- The paper also contains summary advice from CMO/CSA as well as an Annex containing a summary of the current restrictions, the legal default position at 11 December and the position at 15 October, and comments from CMO and CSA on each of the key restrictions. It is suggested that should the Executive be minded to remove some or all restrictions on 11 December, Annex A is a helpful indicator of mitigations which can then be considered.
- The CMO & CSA have provided a range of **options**:
  - The Executive have previously indicated as a policy objective that  $R_t$  should be kept at 1 or less;
  - to have a reasonable chance of achieving this objective, it will be necessary to keep the hospitality sector and close contact services (or non-essential retail) shut if other sectors are to open;
  - Any reduction in restrictions beyond this is highly likely to lead to  $R_t$  rising to above 1;
  - Prior to 15 October  $R_t$  was around 1.4 – 1.6;
  - CMO/CSA's most recent modelling suggests that after Dec 11  $R_t$  will need to stay below 1.6, and preferably below 1.4, in order to ensure that no further restrictions are required before the end of December;
  - If  $R_t$  were to rise as high as 1.8 then additional restrictions will be required around Christmas;

There is considerable uncertainty around the impact of increased inter-generational mixing at Christmas on Rt, but it is likely to increase Rt for hospital admissions and bed occupancy;

- In light of the above observations, if the primary objective of the Executive is to suppress the epidemic by maintaining Rt at less than 1, no relaxations should be permitted after 11 December and the current restrictions should be extended;
- If Executive is minded to allow Rt to rise for economic and societal reasons, then the restrictions in place before 15th October would be associated with Rt of 1-4 -1.6 if behaviours were similar to those at that time;
- CMO/CSA believe in practice, that interactions are likely to increase in the run up to Christmas. Therefore **as a minimum they recommend that wet pubs should remain closed**, as has been decided for higher incidence areas across the UK and in ROI and in many parts of Europe;
- Alternatively, closure of other sectors could be considered; hospitality could open while closing close contact services, non-essential retail and leisure/entertainment to achieve the same impact;
- If the Executive would prefer to go further, **some considerations are included in the attached Annex**;
- Whatever decision is reached, CMO/CSA will keep the evolving situation under close review and will advise the Executive if appears likely that the capacity of the hospital system will be overrun at any stage.

### Recommendation Sought

- It is recommended that Executive colleagues:
  - Note the advice and recommendations from CMO and CSA on each of the key restrictions;
  - Consider the proposed restrictions in the context of the arrangements for the Christmas period;
  - Note that engagement with the hospitality sector has taken place and consider the suggestions put forward by them; and
  - Agree the restrictions that need to be in place when the current Regulations expire on 10 December.

- The paper provides a range of options, however, it does not provide any accompanying analysis of the specific impact each option may have on the R Rate.
- CMO and CSA advice suggests that the COVID impact of reopening Hospitality as a sector would be equivalent to the combined impact of close contact services, non-essential retail and leisure/entertainment. From an economy perspective the indications are that the economic impacts from such a choice would potentially be greater with reopening the combined package of close contact services, non-essential retail and leisure/entertainment. As a package the employment impact would be somewhat greater, and the GVA impact materially greater, while the indications from previous experience, and in other parts of the UK, suggest that sectors such as retail and close contact services can respond to the re-emergence of demand quite quickly.
- From a narrow economy perspective obviously the restrictions are highly impactful in curtailing economic activity and the maximum unwinding of those restrictions could be expected to have the greatest positive impact in the very short term. Obviously, beyond the very short term, the future pathway of the pandemic, and the chosen policy response to any further surges, could clearly come into play since that too would have downstream economic, societal and health impacts.
- The paper does not consider any alternative interventions for example the re-introduction of shielding or impact of the traditional closure of the construction sector over the festive period and or position of care homes.
- These potential trade-offs have particular importance with the advent of vaccine, mass testing.
- DfE officials have this week written to colleagues in TEO & DoH asking for an update to the Executive paper (E (200 219 (C) from 24 September on non-pharmaceutical interventions:
  - Update the paper to reflect the current position;
  - Provide an analysis across each of the cohorts to reflect the movement over the intervening twelve weeks when the sectors have experienced a variety of trading restrictions – this could be either on a week by week movement or monthly review depending on resource required to turn this around;

- Provide an analysis of whether the four options remain extant and valid; and
- An updated analysis of the sources of transmission/ infection – e.g. is it the domestic setting, care homes, sporting events etc.
- It is considered the provision of such data would provide an up to date empirical assessment of the impact of previous interventions.
- The paper fails to take into the four principles outlined in the Minister's letter to Executive colleagues of 9 October ("Preparing for the Next Stage of the COVID Response").
- In addition, the stop/ start nature highlights the necessity for a Covid 19 Strategy, and as detailed in our response to the Terms of Reference Paper for the Covid Task Force, this has not been included in their work schedule.
- Further points which require clarification relate to:
  - the visitor attraction position; what constitutes unnecessary travel; when restrictions might be removed – the ongoing uncertainty for businesses; grant support schemes will not compensate for loss of earnings and the economic impact of maintaining the current restrictions should not be underestimated; have the implications of accommodation remaining closed in the run up to Christmas been considered given the numbers travelling back?; the paper also suggests that if the restrictions in place at 15<sup>th</sup> October are to be preferred then wet pubs should also be closed. Is the suggestion, therefore, that alcohol can only be served in other venues with a main meal; while the paper indicates that the 2 metre rule is guidance, it needs to be clarified whether or not businesses which cannot implement this for logistical or economic reasons can still operate with 1 metre provided other mitigations are in place.

**FROM: DIANE DODDS MLA**

**Our Ref:**  
**Your Ref: E (20)277 (C)**

**DATE: December 2020**

**TO: Rt. Honourable Diane Dodds MLA**  
**Michelle O'Neill**

**DRAFT EXECUTIVE PAPER – RESTRICTIONS FROM 11  
DECEMBER**

Thank you for your Executive paper of 3 December 2020 regarding the above.

I have considered the paper and note that while it provides a range of options it does not provide any accompanying analysis of the specific impact each option may have on the R Rate. I consider the provision of such data would have been critical and provided the Executive with an up to date empirical assessment of the impact of previous interventions.

My correspondence to Executive colleagues of 9 October (“Preparing for the Next Stage of the COVID Response detailed the need for a wider consideration of the impact of proposed interventions. I am disappointed the principles detailed in my letter do not appear have been considered in the drafting of this paper.

As such, the paper does not consider any alternative interventions for example the potential re-introduction of shielding or impact of the traditional closure of the construction sector over the festive period and or position of care homes.

From a narrow economy perspective obviously the restrictions are highly impactful in curtailing economic activity and the maximum unwinding of those restrictions could be expected to have the greatest positive impact in the very short term.

In addition, the stop/ start nature highlights the necessity for a Covid 19 Strategy, and as detailed in our response to the Terms of Reference Paper for the Covid Task Force, this has not been included in their work schedule.

I look forward to exploring these issues in more detail at today's Executive meeting.

I am copying this to the Attorney General, Departmental Solicitor's Office, First Legislative Counsel and to Executive Secretariat.

**DIANE DODDS MLA**