

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER
Diane Dodds MLA



From: Diane Dodds MLA
Minister for the Economy

Date: 21/1/2021

To: Robin Swann MLA
Minister of Health

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Sixth review of Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) Regulations

Thank you for your draft Executive paper of 20th January 2021 regarding the above.

The paper sets out clearly the range of factors and pressures facing the health service and the developing context. I would like to pay tribute and express my gratitude to all those providing care and dealing with such difficult circumstances.

While the proposed extension of the regulations will create further economic difficulties, it also brings greater certainty. It will be important to continue to reinforce public messaging regarding adherence and behaviours.

The suggestion that a step-wise approach of gradual loosening of restrictions will be necessary should be further explored and I would like to raise the possibility of investigating whether this could be introduced before 5 March, for example consideration of the reintroduction of click and collect, considering whether some close contact services might be allowed to be provided where face to face positioning is not required.

Any decision to extend the period of restrictions must be accompanied by an extension of our support to the businesses impacted, and I look forward to working with the Finance Minister to ensure there is adequate budget cover in addition to that proposed to be allocated in January monitoring.

An extension should also consider the impacts on schools and workers.

The suggestion that TEO lead and coordinate the development of a refreshed 'Pathway to Recovery' and bring recommendations to the Executive on the process and methodology for relaxing restrictions before the next review of the regulations on 18 February 2021 is to be welcomed.

This should take on board lessons learned from easing of restrictions following the previous two waves of the pandemic. Those in the tourism and hospitality sectors continue to reiterate the need for notice of any easing of restrictions to prepare their businesses for re-opening.

I note also the reference to the possibility that easing of restrictions may not be considered until Easter. Given this is a popular time for social gatherings and families wanting to take a short break, aligned with the fact that many tourism businesses have had little/no income since Spring 2020, it is worth reiterating the need for advance notice as to what (if any) easements will be expected by this period.

The extended period will also defer the 'recovery' phase for NI's air connectivity, both domestically and internationally.

It will be important that a recovery strategy reflects on the economic evidence that can be provided by DfE and that it seeks to ensure the timing and design of the overall recovery approach can promote as strong and sustained an economic bounce-back as possible.

It must also take account of those that have been disproportionately impacted across society including young workers, females and those in low paid jobs.

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

Yours sincerely,

Personal Data

DIANE DODDS MLA
Minister for the Economy