

Departmental Comments provided by: Name Redacted

- I am very aware that the non-food pub sector is very keen to re-open. These establishments have been closed for some six months and this is a significant challenge for these businesses.
- While much of our tourism and hospitality industry has had the opportunity to generate much needed revenue over the Summer, this has not been possible for non-food pubs.
- At our last meeting, the Executive agreed that no further restrictions would be lifted in the short term, and no new indicative dates for lifting these restrictions would be set.
- This causes considerable difficulty for non-food pubs which hoped to re-open on 1st September. Based on figures from Hospitality Ulster, it is estimated that of 1,200 pubs and bars in NI, 600 do not serve food and therefore are not permitted to open.
- I am very keen that we, as an Executive, consider a new indicative re-opening date, which would of course be subject to the containment of COVID.
- If the Minister for Health cannot support the agreement of a new indicative re-opening date then it is incumbent on the Department of Health and the Public Health Agency to clearly set out under what conditions non-food pubs can open and work with the industry to put in place the right conditions.
- We cannot keep the traditional pub sector closed indefinitely.

If pressed on support if non-food pubs cannot open

- My Department led on the re-opening of the hospitality sector alongside the tourism sector as hospitality has such a close nexus with tourism. However we have no policy or regulatory responsibility for the licensed trade.
- Any consideration of a financial support package for non-food pubs would need to be considered by Department for Communities who have regulatory control of this sector and would be best placed to judge the extent and scale of the impact and how best any financial support could be administered.
- Based on figures from Hospitality Ulster, it is estimated that of 1,200 pubs and bars in NI, 600 do not serve food and therefore are not permitted to open.
- Hospitality Ulster estimate that each of those premises is losing an average of £1k per week to cover rent, rates etc. which would equate to £2.5m per month or £30m per year. The level of support required will rise when furlough ends and staff costs would also need to be covered.
- Whilst economic development policy sits within the remit of my Department, I would suggest it is not logical to conclude that it is responsible for every facet of the economy, or has the capacity or capability to develop and administer support for every individual, business or sector across the Northern Ireland economy.
- My Department led on the development and administration of three business support measures which have collectively provided over £338million in support to businesses to date. This has represented a huge undertaking for my officials, and significant departmental resources continue to be allocated to managing the outworking of the schemes.
- The Executive as a whole needs to consider how we deal with a range of sectors impacted by closure – non-food pubs, theatres and entertainment

venues, conference centres as well as the airline and travel agencies impacted by travel restrictions.

Background

1. Of some 1,200 pubs and bars in NI it is estimated that 50% to 60% are not permitted to open as they are unable to avail of the option to serve food (defined in the COVID regulations as a 'main table meal').
2. It is estimated that, on average, each of the 600 premises that are unable to open are losing £1k per week covering rent/rates etc. This would equate to £2.5m/month or £30m/year – this would increase when furlough ends and staff costs need to be covered with an average of 10 staff per business.
3. Officials have been in contact with DfC and they have indicated that they are not considering any intervention or mitigation measures for non-food pubs as they do not see such intervention as within their policy remit.

FROM: DIANE DODDS MLA

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

DATE:

TO: MLA

“DEPARTMENT” DRAFT EXECUTIVE PAPER:

Thank you for your draft Executive paper of 1 September 2020 regarding the above.

I am very aware that the non-food pub sector is very keen to re-open. These establishments have been closed for some six months and this is a significant challenge for these businesses. While much of our tourism and hospitality industry has had the opportunity to generate much needed revenue over the summer, this has not been possible for non-food pubs.

At our last previous meeting on 24 August, the Executive agreed that no further restrictions would be lifted in the short term, and no new indicative dates for lifting these restrictions would be set. This has caused considerable difficulty for non-food pubs which hoped to re-open on 1st September.

~~I am very keen that we, as an Executive, consider a new indicative re-opening date, which would of course be subject to the containment of COVID. If, as Minister for Health, you cannot support the agreement of a new indicative re-opening date~~To facilitate the re-opening of wet pubs, then it is incumbent on the Department of Health and the Public Health Agency to set out under what conditions non-food pubs can open and work with the industry to put in place the right conditions. We cannot have a position where this part of the industry is closed indefinitely with no prospect of re-opening.

~~I welcome the decision taken at today's Executive Meeting that the Junior Ministers should engage with the industry to plan a way forward that will allow non-food pubs to open. I am confident that they will find a reasonable path to deliver this and I look forward to working with you in progressing it.~~ould seek your urgent consideration of this issue for discussion at the Executive meeting tomorrow.

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

DIANE DODDS MLA