

From: Mike Brennan

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Date: 20 May 2020

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To: 1. **Special Adviser**
2. **Minister**

NORTHERN IRELAND ENGAGEMENT FORUM ON COVID -19 UPDATE.

Issue: To provide the most recent update of the work of the NI Engagement Forum.

Timing: Desk Immediate

Executive Referral: Yes.

PfG Implications: N/A.

Presentational Issues: High interest from Media, Political Parties.

Freedom of Information: Fully Disclosable

Financial Implications: Budget is available to meet the cost of facilitating the Forum.

Legislative Implications: N/A

Statutory Equality Implications: Compliant with Section 75.

Recommendation: It is recommended that you:

- Note the contents of the submission;
- Note the attached "Readout" from the Labour Relations Agency (LRA) at **Annex A**

Background

1. On Thursday 14th May 2020, the tenth meeting the NI Engagement Forum took place, focusing mainly on the latest Executive 5 Phase Plan.
2. The LRA's readout of the meeting is attached at **Annex A**.
3. You dialled into the meeting for a short period and you may have picked up a sense of the mood of the Forum members, specifically with regard to the 'Coronavirus Executive Approach to Decision Making. The Forum were

concerned that the Executive's current recovery plan does not contain indicative timescales for each of the five stages.

4. They also believed that there needs to be an expansive programme of testing, tracing and isolation, aligned with the availability of appropriate PPE.
5. I also joined the meeting and made the Forum aware of your intention to request their further engagement and input into two urgent pieces of work; namely the BEIS 8 Guidance documents, and the proposed DfE Recovery paper for the Executive.
6. Forum members were willing to take on these pieces of work, however they were concerned around the tight deadlines and whether it was realistic to complete this substantive piece of work within the proposed timescale.

RECOMMENDATION

7. It is recommended that you:
 - Note the contents of the submission;
 - Note the attached "Readout" from the Labour Relations Agency (LRA) at **Annex A**.

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ANNEX A

Readout from the Engagement Forum's meeting on Thursday, 14th May.

1. Members of the Forum pleased that the Minister was able to call into the meeting and spoke so positively about the continuing role that the Forum can play in supporting the Executive work to address Covid-19;
2. Welcomed the Minister's invite to review the BEIS safety guidance documents and also to have the opportunity to comment on DfE's draft economic recovery roadmap;
3. Received a general update from Mike Brennan which developed into a wider discussion on the Executive's Approach to Decision Making plan;
4. Forum unhappy that the Executive current recovery plan does not contain indicative timescales for each of the five stages;
5. Forum also disappointed that its own document 'Staying Safe- Restarting the NI Economy', submitted to the Minister on 8 May, would appear to have had no influence on the Executive's recovery plan;
6. There needs to be an expansive programme of testing, tracing, and isolation aligned to the availability of appropriate PPE to ensure that the Executive's efforts to restart the economic are not compromised;
7. A sectoral approach to restarting the economy is too rigid and does not reflect the diversity of businesses operating within individual sectors;
8. Unite raised concerns about health and safety compliance at meat plants, agreed that the LRA should facilitate a discussion between trade union representatives from Unite and NIPSA and the affected companies, to also involve the HSE.

The next meeting of the Forum will be Thursday 21st May at 2pm