

FROM: DENIS McMAHON

DATE: 16 March 2020

TO: MINISTER POOTS

SUB/1159/2020 - FOLLOW UP ON MEETING WITH INDUSTRY IN RELATION TO COVID-19

SUMMARY

Issue: Follow up on meeting with Industry in relation to COVID-19.

Timing: Desk Immediate.

SpAd Comments:

Financial Implications:* To be confirmed at a later date.

Employment of External Consultants Implications N/A

Legislation Implications:* N/A at this stage

Equality Implications: Mitigations will benefit people across all equality dimensions, particularly vulnerable people and those with dependents.

FOI Implications: Fully disclosable.

Rural Needs Implications: Mitigations will benefit people across Northern Ireland, including in rural areas.

Executive Referral: This submission is to be used for the purposes of the Executive Committee Meeting planned for this afternoon.

Presentational Issues: There will be a high-level of public interest on these issues.

Date Draft Press Release cleared by Press Office: N/A at present.

Recommendations: You are asked to agree the briefing note at Annex 1 as:

(a) the basis of discussions with Northern Ireland Executive colleagues; and

(b) a communication to the industry.

BACKGROUND

1. Following the meeting with industry stakeholders, we agreed a series of actions which will be taken forward in an effort to mitigate the risks and issues which will need to be addressed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was noted at the meeting that it will not be possible to mitigate all of these risks and issues; however it was agreed that we would begin with these and identify further actions as necessary, in collaboration with industry colleagues. The actions have been summarised at **Annex 1**.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. You are asked to agree the briefing note at **Annex 1** as:
 - (a) the basis of discussions with Northern Ireland Executive colleagues; and
 - (b) a communication to the industry.

DENIS McMAHON

Ext: Irrelevant & Sensitive

ATTACHMENTS

Annex 1 – List of agreed actions.

CC List

Fiona McCandless
Norman Fulton
Robert Huey
Brian Doherty
David Small
Tracey Teague
Steven Millar
Rosemary Agnew
Private Office
Press Office
Permanent Secretary's Office

ANNEX 1

The following actions were agreed at the meeting on 16 March 2020 between the DAERA Minister, officials and Agri-Food industry representatives:

1. The meeting will be repeated on a regular basis (up to three times a week) by teleconference or video call. This can remain in place for as long as required. The meeting will be used to share updates, including epidemiology, with the industry.
2. A central email/contact point will be set up and this will be in line with central contingency plans and C3 arrangements.
3. There will need to be clear messages at Northern Ireland Executive level, including public messages which reinforce the need for a sensible approach in the purchase of food and consumables (eg handwash). This will need to recognise that Northern Ireland produces enough food for 10 million people and also that Covid-19 is not believed to impact on food safety.
4. There needs to be a relaxation on restrictions to HGV drivers' hours in order to secure supplies. This needs to be put in place urgently, including any legislative arrangements which will be necessary.
5. All non-essential work in Departments needs to stop and this needs to be reflected in communications with the industry – for example we cannot afford to send non-essential consultations out to industry colleagues who will then need to respond.
6. It was agreed that joint FSA/Industry/Officials Groups will need to urgently agree protocols for the industry. For example, protocols in relation to farms, drivers, factory workers, office workers and distribution centres.
7. Industry to explore the possibility of redeploying underutilised personnel to areas where workers are needed most. This to be done in conjunction with DfE Offices. There is a need to look at flexibilities in terms of visas for fishing crews, where employees are from outside the UK.
8. There is an urgent need to consider cash flow issues which are likely to arise. Our ability to do this will depend on resources which are not yet in place, but it was agreed that the matter would be considered further and escalated as appropriate within Government. Essential services will need to include businesses in the wider food ecosystem – including businesses with more than 250 employees that are not currently covered in UKG business support arrangements. In addition there will be a need to look urgently at the issue of Business Interruption Insurance as this is not covered because Covid-19 is currently not categorised as a Notifiable Disease.
9. It was agreed that DAERA will discuss with industry colleagues environment and animal health contingency plans based on those produced previously for Brexit.