

Meeting to Discuss High Level Joint Engagement in Relation to COVID

10:00 Thursday 10 September 2020

Attendees

Arlene Foster MLA – First Minister TEO
Michelle O'Neill MLA – deputy First Minister TEO
Robin Swann MLA – Minister of Health
Patricia McKeown – UNISON
Anne Speed - UNISON
Pat Cullen – Royal Collage of Nursing

Name Redacted

Name Redacted PS to JM Kearney
Dara O'Hagan
PS deputy First Minister TEO

Introduction

1. The deputy First Minister (dFM) welcomed everyone to the meeting. Patricia McKeown thanked Ministers for the opportunity to meet and highlighted that it was important to work together with Government. She stated that they had had meetings with other Government Ministers in relation to their role in response to Covid-19 and regarding the future Public Health model.

Preparedness for Covid-19

2. dFM highlighted the role Health Service members had in response to Covid-19 and thanked them for all their work. The Health Minister advised that there was a requirement for stronger messaging and more compliance from the public. He noted there had been an increase in Covid-19 cases and testing has been increased. The need to be prepared was recognised.

3. Minister Swann advised that the Future Public Health Model plans had been shared with Trade Union side and their comments would be considered. In response Trade Union side highlighted that they had asked for a meeting to review procurement and the conditions attached, including equipment and services that were necessary to support Health and Social Care.

4. **Name Redacted** suggested that there should be a coordinated approach across the UK in relation to sick pay as Social Care sector took unpaid leave when self-isolating. Patricia McKeown indicated that it would be useful to have reassurance that there were sufficient stocks of PPE. The Health Minister indicated that supplies of PPE had increased from a four week supply to a twelve week supply and that the details of these stocks were now being published. Contracts have been signed for another three warehouses and Minister Swann further advised that new suppliers were now providing the PPE compared to the initial Covid position.

5. The Health Minister recognised the importance of supporting the Primary Care sector in carrying out the flu vaccination programme and the role of the Covid centres in supporting this programme. This included training and engaging with GP surgeries and providing additional financial resources. He asked that Trade Unions encourage their members to get vaccinated.

6. Pat Cullen advised that there had been a significant increase in referrals in relation to Mental Health and Wellbeing including signs of PTSD, particularly in young people. The Minister advised that the new Mental Health and Wellbeing Resilience committee had met a number of times; he agreed that officials would confirm if Siobhan O'Neill, the mental health champion had met with Trade Unions.

Action – DoH to check with Siobhan O'Neill's office on engagement with Trade Unions.

7. In response to a query from the Trade Unions, the Minister advised that the review of Public Health England would not impact on the role of the PHA in NI; the same contacts and workstreams within PHE were still in place within the new organisation.

Winter Preparedness Event

8. The First Minister (FM) advised that Michael Gove was coordinating a Winter Preparedness event across the UK in relation to Covid and other pressures. The Executive have been asked for agenda items they wish to be included. Patricia

McKeown indicated that it would be useful to include social and economic impacts on disadvantaged groups, including women, disability, child abuse victims and domestic violence. It was recognised that NI had different public service structures compared to the rest of the UK and Health and Social Care has been disadvantaged financially.

Action – Consider Winter Preparedness agenda items.

Program for Government

9. Patricia McKeown indicated that submissions had been sent on the Programme for Government including Departmental plans that centred around Health and Social care. She indicated that there were commitments within the current program that needed to be revisited and emphasised that the voluntary sector required assistance, suggesting it was an Executive responsibility which they would like to discuss further.

10. The FM and dFM indicated that it would be useful to have regular meetings with Trade Union Congress.

Action – TEO to ask officials to examine how the Executive can engage with Trade Union side.

Public Sector Pay

11. Pat Cullen stated the importance of confidence building measures and staff moral and the importance of pushing the UK Government in regard to the Barnett Formula. Anne Speed asked FM and dFM to ask the UK Government to consider increases in pay arrangements within this financial year. It was further highlighted that the Royal Collage of Nursing do not wish pay to be referred back to the Pay Review Body. **WAS THERE ANY RESPONSE FROM FM ON THIS**

Staffing Legislation

12. Health Minister advised that officials were finalising the TOR and that the department would need additional capacity and resource to take this work forward. The Department will work with the Trade Union side. **Name Redacted** indicated that he had concerns around legislative time scales during the current Assembly mandate and the use of framework legislation had been discussed. Trade Union side are committed in helping get this legislation through.

Action – Trade Union side to provide details to the DoH.

Childcare and Schools Re-opening

13. It was recognised that school closures impact on the health care workforce. The FM advised that TEO had taken over this area of responsibility from other departments. The Education Minister is reviewing ways to support child care sector.

Reimbursement of Nurses Pay

14. Reimbursement of Nurses Pay was briefly discussed and Pat Cullen advised that nurses were inquiring when they might expect reimbursement.

Muckamore Abbey Hospital Inquiry

15. Pat Cullen thanked Ministers for the Public Inquiry into Muckamore Abbey Hospital and advised that the Royal Collage of Nursing would fully cooperate.