

## **CATCH UP WITH STEVE AIKEN, UUP LEADER - 29 APRIL**

### **STEER**

Short catch up with the UUP leader - though you will be mainly in listening mode. **Your main aim is to get his view of how the Northern Ireland Executive is cooperating on the response to Covid-19 and if necessary to encourage the parties to work together as much as possible.** Mr Aiken is likely to focus on lockdown easements and recovery plans and how they might align with the rest of the UK. He tends to have a more downbeat assessment of how the Executive is working, and **we are told is currently highly frustrated by Sinn Fein's conduct in recent weeks.**

Mr Aiken may raise last week's comments from the FM that NI might diverge from the rest of the UK in some areas of its Covid response (such as lockdown easements). Politically, we are keen to give the Executive some flexibility to differ from UKG on its Covid-19 as is needed (within reason) - so long as that is aligned to the scientific and medical advice and there is a strong basis for Northern Ireland needing to make its own specific changes. This continues to be a politically sensitive matter though as NI looks to be at an earlier stage of the virus than England some divergence may become inevitable.

### **SPEAKING POINTS**

#### *General*

- Thank you for this call - it is a good opportunity to hear your current thoughts on the response to Covid-19.

#### *Covid-19 - trend of the disease*

- Pleased to see that the wave 1 peak is less severe than originally expected. This demonstrates that current measures including social distancing restrictions are having an impact.

#### *Executive stability*

- Am keen to understand from you how it's feeling within the Executive, and how relations between parties are working presently.

#### *Lockdown easements*

- It is not impossible for some parts of the UK to have to tailor their measures on lockdown depending on their circumstances. The key is that it is guided by the science and medical advice from the 4 CMOs and we think about the practicality of doing so

- I hope you agree that close communications on the relaxation of measures will be key to moving forward in the best interests of the whole of the UK. It is also important for there to be communication with the Irish government.

#### *Recovery*

- Beyond this - my officials have begun to start to do some work on what post Covid-19 recovery looks like - and will want to be doing so in conjunction with the Executive;
- We need to think about economic recovery in particular, and how the Treasury and NIO can support this, we will also keep in regular touch with the Irish Government on this too.
- There will be some significant challenges ahead (you will have seen the projections of a contraction of 7.5% from Danske Bank this morning) but the UK Government will want to work closely with NIE on getting things back up and running when the time is right and laying the foundations for a sustainable recovery.;