

FIRST MINISTER & DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER CALL

Wednesday 18 November 2020

STEER

1. Executive stability: you should deliver a strong message to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister about the importance of getting the Executive back onto a sustainable footing, following the Executive meeting last Thursday. There would be value in asking how they will approach the next decision making point for COVID restrictions, including how they can bring the three other parties along with any decision.

2.

3.

Irrelevant & Sensitive

ISSUES TO RAISE

Executive Stability

Lines to take:

- I know everyone recognises that the last week or so has been difficult and the way in which decisions played out in public was unhelpful. But the current crisis should continue to remind us why a stable, five party Executive is vital for the people of Northern Ireland.
- My sense is that there are real tensions in the Executive, and real frustrations among all parties. I am interested in how you think we can repair relationships and move forward as leaders of the Executive?
- **Has there been any progress in appointing an interim Head of the Civil Service?** It is important to have the right official as well as political leadership in TEO to help manage Executive decision-making.

NDNA Implementation

Irrelevant & Sensitive

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Protocol and transition period

Irrelevant & Sensitive

COVID-19

Lines to take:

End of five week circuit breaker:

- I am happy to see that a plan for the coming weeks is in place and appreciate the balance of economic and public health factors which the Executive had to consider. Is there anything that I can do to assist communicating this message and encouraging compliance?
- I noted the First Minister's comments from Monday on how difficult decisions must be made in the coming weeks as Northern Ireland approaches the festive period. What is your assessment of the measures currently in place?
- As testing progresses across the UK, including the introduction of more mass testing capabilities, I would appreciate an update on the Executive's approach to testing.
- Thinking ahead to Christmas, I appreciate that it is likely to be too early to make any decisions, but I am glad to see that this is on the agenda for the CDL/FM call this week, and I would appreciate any early indications of how the Executive might view this?.

ICU capacity and resourcing:

- I understand that hospital admissions are under continued strain. What is your assessment of the pressure on the healthcare system currently?
- Is there anything I can do to help with this?

Economic support

- The UK Government will continue to do whatever it takes to support businesses, jobs and the economy as the situation evolves. The extension of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to March will provide businesses with the support to come through these restrictions and the certainty to plan.
- The UK Government has taken unprecedented action to support NI, including the provision of an additional £2.8bn in spending.

Background:

COVID-19 Rates [as of 15 November]

- The COVID-19 rate in Northern Ireland now stands at 203.6 cases per 100,000 over the past 7 days compared to 208.4. This has continued to fall since the introduction of the circuit breaker albeit at a slower rate than in previous weeks.

The rate of transmission for cases has increased somewhat and is around 0.8 and rising

- This is in comparison to the UK which stands at 266.0 and Ireland at 51.2. Cases continue to fall in Ireland as Level 5 measures have taken effect.
- NI now has a lower incidence than England or Wales, though all indicators remain very high compared with Ireland.

Testing

- dFM has raised with you the possibility of mass testing in Northern Ireland similar to that in Liverpool. This could be a useful communications event which the Executive could focus on as a positive news story. We are not able to guarantee that Northern Ireland will be able to access this testing capacity but are engaging with Cabinet Office and No10 on this.

ICU Capacity:

- As of 14 November, hospitals are operating at 94% occupancy.
- There is a current capacity of 123 ICU beds, with 13 currently unoccupied.

Economy:

- Businesses and employees will benefit from the extension of the 80% furlough scheme and Self Employment Income Support Scheme.
- The Government has also announced new business and local authority grant measures that apply to England only. DAs have instead received additional Barnett allocations.
- On 5th November, the Government announced NI would receive an additional 400m, bringing the total additional Barnett to £2.8bn

ONLY IF RAISED

Legacy

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