

**FIRST MINISTER, DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER**  
**AND TÁNAISTE QUAD MEETING**

**STEER**

No formal agenda has been circulated for this meeting - and it is more broadly designated as a catch up meeting on Covid-19.

We have received some reporting of continued tension between the FM & dFM, largely relating to a difficulty in agreeing lines in advance of their joint press conference, but both made an effort on Monday to point out that differences in opinion should be expected - this meeting might be a useful opportunity to gauge how the FM/dFM are working at present.

Whilst we do not have any formal asks of either Government at present, this meeting is a good opportunity to make the case for being joined up. It is also a useful forum to discuss the frontier worker issue that Colum Eastwood wrote to you about last week (attached). You may also wish to ask for an update on the progress of an MOU on Covid-19 between the Northern Ireland Executive and Irish Government, which have been told is close to being agreed but are yet to receive any detail about at the time of writing.

As with your FM/dFM meeting - it would be useful to indicate that this format of meeting (Quad, involving you, FM/dFM and Tanaiste) should continue to meet regularly - a fortnightly Quad meeting would be useful going forward.

**SPEAKING POINTS**

*COVID-19*

- Really welcome being able to meet in this format, really important that we get an opportunity to be able to meet regularly and exchange information and discuss our Covid-19 work;
- It would be useful if we could all give a brief update on Covid-19;
- To tackle the issue of incorrect information being put out the UK has set up a New rapid response unit. This Unit will operate from within the Cabinet Office and will tackling a range of harmful narratives online - from purported 'experts' issuing dangerous misinformation to criminal fraudsters running phishing scams.
- We are working to maximise our testing capacity and are targeting NHS frontline staff. We are also prioritising the testing of the most acutely ill and vulnerable patients in hospitals and key workers to help them get back to work as soon as possible.

- We continue to work closely with industry to design and manufacture new products to support our overriding aim to protect the NHS and save lives. One such device is a CPAP device [to help keep someone's airways open] which we hope will be helpful at earlier stages. However, we will still need mechanical ventilators.
- To date there are more than 8,000 ventilators available to NHS patients, with another 8,000 expected from both existing and new partners in the coming weeks. We have partnered with leading UK tech and engineering firms and smaller manufacturers to rapidly build existing, modified or newly designed ventilators at speed, with seven priority projects underway.

#### *Working Together*

- It's really important we continue to talk and share information - particularly where we can join up to ensure that support is being delivered to the public and businesses. As such, it will be important to understand each other's strategies and approaches.
- As we have seen, if our approaches diverge too much then we will all face questions about why we aren't taking the same approach;
- I welcome the work that's already begun at official level to coordinate and join up our responses on Covid-19 and I think it's important to reassure the public that we are all working together and pulling in the same direction;
- I'd like us to meet regularly in this format, and we should of course continue to stay in touch, this group is an excellent forum for discussing issues affecting us all and resolving issues between us, I suggest we should provisionally schedule a meeting every fortnight;

#### *NI/Ireland Health MoU*

- I'm informed that your two Governments are working together on a memorandum of understanding in relation to health and covid-19;
- I am encouraged this work is being taken forward, but would appreciate an update and summary of the content of the MOU;
- Once an MOU is signed, I am standing ready to welcome it publically;

#### *Frontier Workers*

- I wanted to raise an issue which the SDLP have written to me about, Colum has raised the issue of frontier workers, those that work in Ireland but live in Northern Ireland;
- His constituents believe that if they live in NI and work in Ireland they are not eligible for support schemes from either the UK Government or Irish Government;

- I've asked my officials to look into this, but I wanted to ask if this was something you were aware of or had plans to address, I think we should look to work together to find a solution on this;

#### *Health Strategy*

- NHS England is actively preparing for a number of scenarios as the coronavirus outbreak continues, alongside small teams of planners;
- Assuming NI is behind London on the curve, I was wondering if you could share your analysis on how many weeks behind London you factored in? What does this mean for your overall strategy?
- Are the NI health priorities consistent with those identified by NHS England or are there differences in the approach being taken here?
- Are you getting the support you need from my department?

#### *Supply Chains - if raised*

##### **BACKGROUND**

- Air freight services are largely unaffected, with Belfast International now a freight-only terminal.
- Freight goods are still moving in and out of Belfast and Larne Ports but this is now being restricted to 'essential goods' only.
- We understand that one of the three maritime ports, I&S is in financial difficulty. There is no indication yet that this will have any immediate impact on essential supply chains via freight services but we are working urgently with the NIE to understand the impact and what steps might need to be taken to mitigate it.

##### **LINE**

- I understand the importance of maintaining both freight and passenger links across our islands. I am keen to hear any concerns you have and I would be happy to raise these with UKG colleagues to see if there is anything we can do to address them.

#### *PPE supply - if raised*

- I am acutely aware that as the number of cases of patients presenting with COVID-19 increases, staff in primary, secondary and social care sectors are in danger of being at risk of infection transmission.
- Significant work is being taken forward by the NICS and UKG on PPE distribution as focusing on securing replacement and alternative PPE stock.

- Congratulations on the historic flight at the weekend to China for PPE. It would be useful to hear more detail on this and how supplies from the joint Irish government and the NI Executive order will be distributed.

*Testing - if raised*

- Increasing our testing capacity is absolutely crucial in our response to and our fight against coronavirus. This is particularly important for ensuring clinical cases are managed safely.
- We are ensuring we prioritise testing of the most acutely ill and vulnerable patients in hospitals and key workers to help them get back to work as soon as possible to support our NHS. Over 900 NHS frontline staff have been tested as part of our new testing scheme (critical care nurses and other staff in intensive care, emergency departments, ambulance services, GPs).
- I would welcome the opportunity to hear how you will be taking forward plans for testing and prioritisation of key groups.

*Legacy - if raised*

**I&S**

*Joint Committee - if raised.*

**I&S**