

FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER TRILATERAL - FRI 27 MARCH

STEER

This meeting is taking place in lieu of the joint board - which we are pausing in order to allow everyone to focus on Covid-19. The meeting will, therefore, largely focus on the Covid-19 response. A key objective is to continue to ensure the Executive feels supported, and that their voice is heard in the UK wide response. The Executive is now working much more collegiately, and Michelle and Arlene are putting on a strong united front. In terms of what they may raise with you: the issue of testing is rising up the agenda North and South, with media scrutiny around what some see as an insufficient volume of testing. Providing PPE to healthcare workers and key workers is a high profile issue with some threats of walkouts being issued by unions this week.

On NDNA, Sinn Fein have communicated some anxiety via officials about Covid-19 being used to create unnecessary delay on the delivery of elements of NDNA - language legislation and the De Souza reforms for instance. To that end, you may wish to assure both FM and dFM that we will keep delivery timings under review and have a further discussion when the joint board meets before the end of April.

SPEAKING POINTS

COVID-19

- Really useful that we can meet in this format alongside our regular contact on Covid-19, and I'm really pleased that close working between the NIO, Northern Ireland Departments and the rest of the UK Government is in place;
- Really important that, we all keep talking and sharing data and information on emerging issues and proposals - if we are sharing information between our two Governments it's important that our two central teams are aware and able to help coordinate;
- I also want to say how much I welcome the united front and leadership that you are both displaying - I know it is not always easy but your leadership at this time is hugely appreciated by everyone.
- The additional guidance issued by DoH to the Health Trusts will assist in providing the essential care and support services that patients need if the pandemic moves into different phases [proposals include field hospitals, redeployment of staff, procurement of additional PPE and ventilators].
- As such I recognise the difficult but important decisions that DoH are making to ensure that we can deal with the expected surge of patients with Covid-19 including closing two A&E hospitals, ending hospital visits and more stringent prioritisation practices.

Work with Irish Government

- Good work is also being taken forward to join up the approaches taken in Northern Ireland, the rest of Great Britain and Ireland;
- Officials are now engaging regularly and you will know that David Sterling joins a trilateral group involving the NIO and Irish Government;
- Our offices are also setting up a Quad meeting between ourselves and the Tanaiste next week;

Financial/Funding

- The UK Government has set out a package of measures to protect public services, people and businesses through this period of disruption caused by COVID-19.
- Businesses and workers in NI have benefitted from measures to provide wage support, loan facilities, tax deferments and sick pay.
- The Chancellor has put in place a comprehensive package of support for self employed workers in the UK. The measures announced will apply right across the UK.
 - The Government will pay self-employed people, who have been adversely affected by coronavirus, a taxable grant worth **80%** of their average monthly profits over the last 3 years, up to **£2,500** per month.
 - The scheme will be open for at least 3 months from early June and will be extended if necessary.
 - This provides the same support as for those furloughed PAYE employees and is one of the most generous schemes in the world.
 - The scheme covers 95% of individuals who make the majority of their earnings from self-employment.

NDNA

I&S

If raised

PPE supply. [This is devolved and the responsibility of DoH]

- 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.
- I recognise the significant work being taken forward by the NICS and UKG on PPE supply including providing appropriate guidance and distribution of existing equipment to front line staff as well as focusing on securing replacement and alternative PPE stock.
- I welcome the engagement by the NI Executive with local industry in helping to meet demand and will work to ensure that NI requirements are understood as part of the UKG approach to supply.

Testing

- I welcome the announcements by Minister Swann to significantly increase the level of testing up to an overall capability of 1,100 tests per day.
- It will be important for the NI expert working group to engage with wider colleagues to ensure joined up thinking.
- As you will be aware PHE are working to evaluate other test providers on a four nation approach to increase testing capacity
- Important with a four nations approach, that data on the NI projected testing requirements are clearly articulated.

Construction sites.

- Obviously, this is a devolved issue which you will need to take a decision on - but I am happy to consider what more we can do if there is more we can do as the UK Government to support you

Accessing powers in Coronavirus Act.

- I've asked my officials to engage closely with yours so that the powers in the emergency legislation can be used as necessary in Northern Ireland.

Joint Committee - if raised.

- The meeting will take place via video conference due to COVID-19 restrictions. A representative of the Republic of Ireland is expected to attend but we have had no

confirmation as yet. We will be in touch regarding the Joint Committee once we have more clarity on delegations.

Legacy - if raised

I&S

Abortion regulations (pushing back on not letting the Assembly take forward)

I&S

Abortion regulations and Covid-19 (provision so that pills can be taken at home)

- The Regulations for Northern Ireland, when they come into force, provide an approval power for the NI Department of Health to be able to approve the provision of abortion services in places other than those listed in the regulations. This includes being able to respond to Covid-19 circumstances as necessary.
- In relation to access to services in England - the Government has been continuing to engage on this issue with the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (who are contracted to provide the Central Booking System for the UK Government scheme) to ensure continued access, and we will continue to keep the issue under review.

If asked about home use of both abortion pills in England in light of Covid-19

To note: An announcement was made in error on Monday in relation to a temporary approval for England in light of covid-19 to allow both abortion pills to be taken at home for early medical abortions. This approval has since been withdrawn.

- Public safety and continued access to services is our priority during this difficult period. While there will be no changes to abortion procedures, any travel to a clinic to access abortion services will be classified as essential travel.