

## **FIRST MINISTER & DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER CALL**

**Wednesday 02 December 2020**

### **STEER**

1. COVID: You should welcome the news that the Pfizer/BioNTech coronavirus vaccine has been approved for widespread use in the UK, paving the way for its rollout in the coming weeks, and ask if there is anything you can do to support rollout in NI. You should also ask how the Executive plans to approach the next decision point in December, ahead of the current 2-week circuit-breaker lockdown ending. *[To note, officials provided TEO with the requested information on the test and release scheme that FM asked about on last week's call].*

2. 

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

4. Appointing a HOCS: You may wish to congratulate the FM and dFM on the appointment of Jenny Pyper as the new interim Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

5. 

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

### **ISSUES TO RAISE**

#### **COVID-19**

##### *Vaccine*

##### Lines to take:

- I welcome the hugely significant news that, today, regulatory approval has been received on the Pfizer vaccine.
- I would like to pay tribute to the efforts of everyone involved in order to get this over the line. It is a significant step forward in our fight against this disease and a remarkable achievement for the UK, as it is the first country in the world to approve the vaccine for widespread use.
- I would welcome the opportunity to discuss deployment plans for Northern Ireland in more detail.

##### *Circuit Break restrictions for NI*

- I would appreciate an update on the next decision point ahead of the 2 week 'circuit breaker' ending on 11 December.
- Is there anything I can do to assist communicating the message to encourage compliance to ensure NI achieves maximum benefit of the current restrictions?

#### *Mass testing*

- *(Depending on UKG announcements)* I am aware that a pilot testing programme is underway at Queen's University, as the Department of Health prepares for the wider roll-out of mass-testing. Is there anything I can do to help with the delivery of this exciting new technology?

#### *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 weather 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:

##### *Vaccine*

- Approval for the Pfizer vaccine has now been received from the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency.
- As for next steps, the Joint Committee on Vaccines and Immunisation (JCVI) will submit final advice to DHSC and DA Ministers in parallel on the prioritisation for the vaccine. PM approval will also be required.
- This paves the way for the roll out of the vaccine across the UK within the coming weeks. It is thought Northern Ireland will receive about 1.5m doses, with 25,000 coming next week in the first stage.

##### *COVID-19 Rates [as of 30 November]*

- The COVID-19 rate in Northern Ireland now stands at 133.1 cases per 100,000 over the past 7 days. This is a slight increase on last week's figure of 130.3.
- NI now has a lower incidence than England or Wales, though all indicators remain very high compared with Ireland.

##### *Testing*

- UKG Ministers are keen to announce the roll-out of mass testing across the UK. Further conversations are ongoing at Ministerial level, and NI is expected to receive 1.42m LFD tests. Each DA will receive financial support of up to a maximum of £14 per test - up to £19.9m total for NI.

### *ICU Capacity*

- As of 30 November, hospitals are operating at 94% occupancy, with two hospitals operating beyond capacity.
- There is a current total capacity of 111 ICU beds, with 15 currently unoccupied.

### *Economic Support*

Financial support:

- The spending review confirmed £918m in additional Barnett funding to NI for 2021-22.

Business support:

- Businesses and employees will benefit from the extension of the 80% furlough scheme and Self Employment Income Support Scheme (*to note, the level of support will be reviewed in January*).
- Likewise, Self-Employed Income Support grants will continue until the end of April.
- Other measures, including the VAT cut for hospitality and government-backed business loans, have also been extended.

### *Economy*

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

***Protocol and transition period***

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

***IGR Review***

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

***UK Internal Market Bill***

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

***Spending Review***

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

***UK Shared Prosperity Fund***

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

***Security***

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

***Legacy***

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**

**Irrelevant & Sensitive**



**Irrelevant & Sensitive**