

REVIEW OF SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES

FOR INFO	
ISSUE: Summary of the current UK and NI situations	
<p>PRIVATE OFFICE COMMENTS: No action needed, but the submission helpfully draws together the key issues around the review.</p> <p>Paragraph 5 outlines the key areas of guidance that we expect to be published next week after the PM's announcement on Sunday:</p> <p>Public places (MHCLG) Work spaces (BEIS) Transport (DfT) Recreation (DCMS) Education (DfE)</p> <div>NR</div>	
<p>SPAD COMMENTS: Oliver agrees with the next steps and that we should support these through engagement opportunities around SoS travel to NI. No further comments from Isabel.</p>	
SECRETARY OF STATE COMMENTS:	

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To: Secretary of State

Date: 07 May 2020

Deadline: Urgent

COVID-19: REVIEW OF SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES: UPDATE

ISSUE: Ahead of the PM's announcement on the review of approach to social distancing measures, the Northern Ireland Executive has reviewed its own approach. It has been agreed that current restrictions will not be released, consistent with the announcement expected by the PM on Sunday. Agreement is sought on immediate next steps coming out of the review period. .

RECOMMENDATION: That you note the update and agree next steps [para 8], namely to

- Promote a consistent and coherent approach to Safer Spaces policy;
- Continue to lean into work by DHSC to develop the Track and Trace app, pushing for a UKG solution that works for Northern Ireland; and
- Continue to ensure clear communication of policies and approach to businesses and the public.

MINISTER OF STATE COMMENTS: *Robin Walker is considering in parallel*

NEXT STEPS:

From: Rebecca Nugent

Sent to SpAds: 07 May 2020

Clearing SCS: Mark Larmour

Additional materials: N/A

Clearing lawyer: N/A

BACKGROUND

1. Cabinet has been asked today (07 May) to agree whether current measures aimed at slowing the transmission of Covid-19 to protect the ability of the NHS to deal with the pandemic and reduce deaths should be maintained. Cabinet has also been asked to consider how to map out for citizens and businesses the transition out of the current phase. If agreed, an announcement will be made on Sunday 10 May. Today's review is in line with the statutory obligation on the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to review the current social distancing measures at three week intervals.

DETAIL

2. In the build up to this week's review of non-pharmaceutical interventions, including social distancing, it has become increasingly apparent across the four nations that the significance of this review point is less about signalling a change in approach and more about using the milestone to set out a credible road map for the medium/longer term. Approach across the devolved administrations has been cautious. Messaging has focused on measures that could be introduced or lifted when the time is right, basing approach on a dynamic response to the conditions rather than a set timeline (Ireland's road map is built around the latter).
3. The Northern Ireland Executive has today considered how to approach their review (due by 09 May). They are in a similar space to UKG and have agreed not to release the current set of restrictions. This is in line with what is expected to be announced by the PM on Sunday and as well as being consistent with the approach announced by the Irish Government on 01 May. The Executive does not intend to say much publicly before the PM's statement but a press release will confirm that measures will stay in place and the next review will be before 30 May. In addition, there may be something on the use of face masks to respond to growing public interest in this issue (the messaging will not require the use of face masks but will offer advice on things to consider when deciding on personal approach).
4. The delay in a public announcement on the review is linked to process rather than a divergence of positions - they will find it easier to announce once they've seen the PM's approach. As and when an announcement is made, we expect that this will include a road map towards a 'new normal'. It will emphasise that it is not a question of getting back to where we were before the outbreak of the pandemic, but a gradual, evidence based approach to the relaxation of restrictions to take the public to a 'new normal'. It will be presented as a contract between the Government and citizens.
5. Following the PM's announcement on Sunday, focus will shift towards the vehicles which will support the lifting of measures. In the policy space, this will be built around a suite of guidance to be published, and then updated over time, under the 'Safer Spaces' banner.
Key pieces of guidance are:

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Public places: (MHCLG): The guidance will cover a number of issues including high footfall in areas of dense population, multiple queues in competing spaces, pedestrian flows around spaces such as train stations, constraints on pedestrian movement (e.g. benches), areas with multiple stakeholders/owners, sanitation, and how to ensure everyone can still access areas (for example those with disabilities).

Work spaces: (BEIS): Guidance is expected to be published on Monday. BEIS research suggests that there is a substantial number of companies who could open under the current measures but require guidance. The guidance will be aimed at them as well as those who cannot currently open.

Transport: (DfT): Guidance will focus on use of public transport and private vehicles.

Recreation: (DCMS): Guidance is expected to focus on how to maximise the ability for the public to use public and private spaces for recreation. This will follow a phased approach, with guidance about outdoor sports facilities and visitor attractions due to be published earlier than guidance on indoor cultural facilities and leisure venues.

Education: (DfE): We have not had sight of the guidance but we expect it to cover which children can attend education and childcare settings and how social distancing should be implemented in those settings.

6. Across each of these areas, it is expected that Northern Ireland, along with Scotland and Wales, will align as far as possible with the approach set out by UKG. Key considerations for Northern Ireland will be how to incorporate cross border services (transport) and ensure that approach does not create perverse incentives on the island of Ireland to cross the border (work places; recreation - there has been some media coverage this week on the use of golf courses, suggesting residents from Northern Ireland can use Irish golf courses). If some amenities or work opportunities are open one side of the border, but not the other, it may increase the risk that citizens will cross the border in order to access services or opportunities they cannot get in their country of residence. The Executive therefore has a challenge ahead in balancing its public health challenges with the political reality that will guide views within the Executive. The reopening of schools has the potential to be politically sensitive, noting the pressure on the Executive when Ireland closed schools earlier than Northern Ireland. Term dates are different in Northern Ireland compared to England/Wales so the immediate 'value' of reopening schools will be different.
7. Operationally, attention will be on the development and deployment of new technology to support Testing, Tracking and Tracing strategies. Work on the Track and Trace App, being developed by DHSC and NHSX, is our priority. In line with your steer on 04 May that officials should lean into DHSC work on the app, noting the importance for Unionists of the UK offering a viable solution, we have facilitated discussions between DHSC, NHSX, Northern Ireland's Department of Health and Ireland's Department of Health this week, exploring respective approaches and aims. There is an appetite to work together to develop compatible solutions - with a further meeting planned for a week's time.

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Ireland has confirmed that they want an approach that serves the whole of the island of Ireland. Focus is on addressing two issues: interoperability of the UK and Ireland apps; and data protection considerations, including how to ensure the safety and security of the data, especially in relation to those working on law enforcement and security issues.

NEXT STEPS

8. To support the Executive in its approach, and to promote to the greatest extent possible alignment across the UK, it will be important to ensure that UKG departments are sharing details of policies and approach with the Northern Ireland Civil Service as early as possible and to lean into Whitehall departments to ensure understanding of Northern Ireland needs and interests. A growing frustration this week from the devolved administrations has been the delay in sharing details of UKG thinking ahead of the review point, frustrating the ability to minimise divergence. As such, NIO priorities for the week ahead are:
- To promote a consistent and coherent approach to measures across the five areas of guidance at **para 5**, ensuring links between UKG and NICS departments on these policy areas, identifying areas of divergence as approach by Northern Ireland becomes clearer, and mitigating any risks attached;
 - To continue to lean into work by DHSC to develop the Track and Trace app to push for a UKG solution that works for Northern Ireland; and

I&S

Do you agree?

9. In support of the above full use will be made of engagement opportunities across the department, including your [Secretary of State] meetings with the First and Deputy First Minister and the next Quad meeting (possibly Tuesday). Relevant material will also be included in your briefing for your appearance at the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC) on 14 May. Officials will work with your office and the Engagement team to identify and create additional opportunities as required.

COPY LIST: Minister Walker; PUS; Director General; Directors; Deputy Directors; Covid Preparedness Team, Covid Economy Team, Covid Policy team