

QUAD BRIEFING

FOR INFORMATION

ISSUE: Briefing for your meeting tomorrow.

PRIVATE OFFICE COMMENTS: The meeting is at 1.15-2pm. In attendance from the NI Executive and Irish Government will be:

- Tánaiste
- First Minister
- deputy First Minister
- Robin Swann, NI health minister (understand the NI CMO will join Robin)
- Simon Harris, Irish health minister

Some positive things you can raise:

- *Positive exchange of letters with the Tánaiste on frontier workers.*
- *The MoU that was published on Tuesday.*
- *[If agreed] Joint media lines/Easter messaging*

Also attached in the box email tonight is a PDF, which shows comparisons of the UK Government, Northern Ireland Executive and Irish Government positions on social distancing and testing. This is useful to see the divergences in approaches and may be helpful for you to have to hand in the meeting.

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SECRETARY OF STATE COMMENTS:

FM, dFM & TÁNAISTE QUAD MEETING - THURSDAY 9 APRIL

STEER

- You are convening a meeting with the Tánaiste to discuss the COVID-19 response with the First Minister, deputy First Minister and the NI and Irish health ministers.
- A broad structure for a discussion (which the Tánaiste has also been briefed to follow) is set out below - but for handling purposes with the Executive it is important that we signal that there is no formal agenda.
- Again, this will be an opportunity to reassure the Northern Ireland parties and public that you continue to be committed to working with the Executive and the Irish Government in response to the pandemic. A further joint statement will be issued after the meeting.
- The meeting is also a useful forum to discuss the key issues of common concern - social distancing, PPE supply and testing - with the aim of gaining an understanding of the Irish approach to these issues, and in particular, emphasising the benefits of maintaining a joined-up approach where possible. You may wish to raise early thinking about coming out of this crisis, recognising that divergence will and with the UK will create debate about which approach is right. It is important the group keep each other updated on plans to make changes and continue to be led by the scientific advice.
- You will want to note the UKG contribution of over 5m pieces of PPE to Northern Ireland as part of the four nation approach, as well as recognising progress on securing critical freight routes across the Irish Sea.
- We should reflect the tension we saw last week in the Executive through its public messaging and strongly encourage the First Minister and deputy First Minister to be presenting a united front in public, which has been much more apparent in recent days.

SPEAKING POINTS

- Glad to have the opportunity to meet in this format again following our very useful discussion last week;
- It's vital that we continue to keep each other updated on our respective strategies, and identify where we can be joined up - as we've seen already, it will raise questions if our approaches diverge too much;
- It would be useful if we could start with everyone giving a brief update on Covid-19;

Testing

- Testing patients and frontline healthcare staff is a crucial part of our response to the virus and we are intending to expand this to critical workers.
- On 2 April, the Government announced plans to increase Coronavirus testing to 100,000 tests; this for the whole of the UK. Swab testing will be scaled up for those with a medical need and the most critical workers to 25,000 a day by mid to late April
- UKG is consulting with DAs on the approach to allocation of tests based on prioritisation of key workers. Understand Ireland is also ramping up testing and also developing a new contact tracing app - interested to hear how this is going.

Social Distancing

- In the UK we have restricted movement outside to buying necessities; exercise (once per day recommended); any medical need, including providing care to others; and travelling to work if absolutely necessary.
- Non-essential businesses closed - but not including construction sites. Police have powers to enforce social distancing measures - fixed penalty fines starting at £30 and up to £120 fine for second time offenders. Police may also use "reasonable force" to return a person home.
- Note this is broadly similar to the approach being adopted in Ireland - though your rules are I believe a little more stringent. It is too early yet to assess the impact of these measures on our fight against Covid 19.
- It will be important to ensure communication on any easing of social distancing measures so that the policy lands effectively in Northern Ireland.
- We can learn from our experience over the last few weeks the importance of communicating policy clearly and in a way that works with approach on all fronts.

PPE

- We experienced some distribution problems while we dealt with the surge in demand. But we are now confident enough supply is reaching the frontline.
- Over the last few weeks, over 580 million items of PPE have been delivered, including over 5 million items of PPE to Northern Ireland.
- **CURRENT SITUATION: The UK Government delivered over 2.2 million items of PPE to the NI Executive on Tuesday and added to Monday's shipment - this is a total of over 4.9 million. There is one more batch to come. My officials are seeking an update on this batch today.**

Frontier Workers

- The Tanaiste and I have exchanged letters on this this week;
- In the UK, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme can apply to those who work in NI but are resident in Ireland, as long as their employer operates a PAYE system and holds a UK bank account;

- The Tanaiste might also want to update on what he has managed to confirm in respect of the scheme in Ireland.
- We should let all of our officials get together and think about how we can best communicate this.

Update from Health Ministers on public health cooperation and next steps

This will largely be for the two Health Ministers to update on the recently agreed memorandum of understanding between the NI and Ireland Departments of Health

- I want to welcome the published Memorandum of Understanding between the Ireland and Northern Ireland Health Departments and their agencies.
- It is great to see the ongoing contact and work between the respective Health Ministers. Everyone involved has shown fantastic leadership in getting the document agreed and published.

Executive Unity

- Now, more than ever, Northern Ireland needs a visibly united Executive, working together to protect the public - I want to welcome the leadership we've seen in recent days and the calmer and more unified approach we've seen coming from NI.
- I appreciate that it's inevitable that the parties in the Executive will not agree on everything - but I'm sure we all agree that now is the time for everyone to come together and channel all efforts into the work taking place to combat Covid-19;
- Where there are issues that are causing tension, Simon and I are both here to help as appropriate - but I would strongly encourage everyone around this table to do everything they can to lead their parties throughout this crisis and keep things as calm and as unified as possible. The public needs us to be completely focused on working together to combat this virus.

Identify areas where any greater coordination may be needed, incl. dedicated contact points

- In general, I'd like all to work closely on social distancing and exit plans. At present our approaches are generally aligned, which is positive;
- Important to continue to be led by the science. However, if either of us move in an uncoordinated way to separately tighten or relax our social distancing arrangements it will inevitably lead to concerns and debate in the public about whose approach is right, I would therefore propose that we keep each other closely updated of any plans to change our current arrangements.

Timing of next meeting

- I would propose we seek to meet again in 2 weeks, and that our offices look to find a time and date that works in the week commencing the 20th April.

Agree joint media lines

- I think we should have all received a draft joint statement, that we will issue after this meeting, these are important to demonstrate to the public that we are joined up and working closely - does anyone have any changes they would like to suggest to the wording or can I confirm we are all content to issue?