

FIRST MINISTER & DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER CALL**Wednesday 28 October 2020****STEER**

FM/dFM focus will continue to be the ongoing Covid response. This is a useful opportunity, however, to remind them that:

Irrelevant & Sensitive

ISSUES TO RAISE***NDNA Implementation***

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Protocol and transition period

Irrelevant & Sensitive

COVID-19

Lines to take:

Circuit breaker:

- As we approach the two week point (Friday 30th) of the additional COVID-19 restrictions in Northern Ireland, how do you assess the effect of these new measures?
- What metrics will you use to decide whether the measures can be relaxed after 4 weeks?

ICU capacity:

- Over the past weeks there's been a sharp increase in COVID cases which has put pressure on ICU capacity in NI hospitals.
- What's your assessment on the capacity of the healthcare system to cope with more cases potentially requiring ICU in the coming weeks?
- Is there anything I can do to help with this?

Irish Government approach:

- The Irish Government decided to implement level 5 restrictions nationally - has this had any significant impact on Northern Ireland in practical terms?
- Would it be useful to discuss any issues arising at our next Quad meeting?

Background:

COVID-19 Rates [as of 26 October]

- The COVID-19 rate in Northern Ireland now stands at 362.9 cases per 100,000 over the past 7 days. This has fallen in recent days and NIE are hopeful that measures in place are now having some effect. NICS are keen to compare the methods in use across the UK.

- This is in comparison to the UK which stands at 227.2 and Ireland at 146.1 The overall UK rate continues to increase but the Level-5 measures in Ireland seem to be having some effect as cases fall from over 160 last week.
- NI entered into a 4 week 'circuit breaker' from Friday 16 October, to Friday 13 November.
- NICS officials have indicated further measures will need to be brought in for November, and the Executive will see a paper on this in the coming days. TEO officials are trying to achieve a balance between health and economy to achieve 5-party consensus.

ICU Capacity:

- As of 25 October, out of a total of 105 ICU beds, 37 had Covid patients, and 15 were available. (This doesn't include surge capacity at the Nightingale Hospital).
- The First Minister has said she expects hospital bed and ICU bed occupancy to peak over the next 10 days (said on 22 October).

Irish Government Approach inc cross border Travel:

- Level 5 restrictions apply in the ROI, with concerns expressed over rising cases, especially in the border regions. An Garda Síochána response measures are in place throughout Ireland to implement the 5km travel rules. This has included motorway checkpoints and has caused significant delays on Ireland's main roads, including on the motorway between Belfast and Dublin. Operation Fanacht resembles similar measures taken in March and when Donegal went into restrictions last month.
- With non essential retail closed in the ROI but open in NI, there were concerns over increased border travel which could lead to increased transmission.

IF RAISED: Intra-UK travel:

- A joint statement has been proposed and shared at official level. However, further edits will be suggested next week as NI officials push for more conciliatory language and Wales and Scotland push for a stronger message against cross-border travel. We will continue to closely monitor this but it could be some time before language is agreed.

IF RAISED: Economic support for NI:

- I appreciate this is a major challenge for NI's economy, especially the hospitality sector.
- The UK Government has taken unprecedented action to support NI, including the provision of an additional £2.4bn in spending.
- Commend the NIE on its swift work implementing tailored support packages for NI businesses, such as the COVID Restrictions Business Support Scheme.
- We want to continue working closely with the Executive to get the NI economy backup and running, and to lay the foundations for economic growth.
- Following the Chancellor's plan for jobs, businesses in NI will benefit from the Jobs Support Scheme, which is now more generous to employers, an increase in the Self Employment Grant and the extension of government backed loan schemes.

Abortion

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