

BRIEFING | FM, dFM call - 3-3.30

FOR INFORMATION
ISSUE: Briefing for meeting with FM and dFM
PRIVATE OFFICE COMMENTS: The time here would probably be best used for you to outline how we see the process working There probably isn't that much to say her <div data-bbox="211 653 298 709" style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">NR</div>
SPAD COMMENTS:
SECRETARY OF STATE COMMENTS:

FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER - TUE 28 APRIL

STEER

This meeting is at the request of the FM/dFM's office, but is being driven by the need to have a specific UKG dialogue on Covid coordination alongside the Quad meetings and to be demonstrating that the Executive are making all efforts link in with UKG specifically and join up approaches and share concerns or risks. The meeting will likely focus on lockdown easements and recovery plans. The FM's SpAd has mentioned that other issues that may be raised include guidance on opening cemeteries during lockdown and constraints on travelling for exercise.

In a press conference last week the FM signalled that NI might, in some ways, diverge from the UK in some areas of its Covid response (e.g lockdown easements) The parties might look to take your temperature on this point. Politically, we are keen to give the Executive some flexibility to differ from UKG on its Covid-19 as is needed (within reason) - so long as that is aligned to the scientific and medical advice and there is a strong basis for Northern Ireland needing to make its own specific changes. This continues to be a politically sensitive matter.

Ahead of the Quad - it will be important to emphasise that with the Irish and UKG review points on lockdown measures (5th May in Ireland, 7th of May in the UK) **[NOT CONFIRMED]** it is vital that we are all communicating about our plans, and that any differences of approach are clearly communicated and the reasons behind them are clearly understood.

The DUP have signalled that they would like this meeting to be regular (possibly weekly) - which is something we would welcome and if your diary permits we should agree to a weekly series of meetings.

SPEAKING POINTS

General

- Thank you for this meeting - it is a good opportunity to discuss our current priorities in the response to Covid-19. I know that our teams have all been working well together, but helpful for us to speak at a political level regularly.
- Regular engagement on the challenging breadth of issues continues through the cross-Government committees, and officials in my Department continue to work closely with NI officials on a daily basis.
- Following on from my useful meeting with Minister Swann, I am keen to further understand your priorities at the moment, and where my department can provide further support.

Covid-19 - trend of the disease

- Pleased to see that the wave 1 peak is less severe than originally expected. This demonstrates that current measures including social distancing restrictions are having an impact.

PPE

- I'm glad that both the Northern Ireland Executive and the UK Government have taken a four-nations approach to PPE.
- My officials will continue to work closely with officials in the Department of Health, the Department of Finance and UK Government departments to ensure that Northern Ireland receives the PPE needed.

Track and Trace

- I understand that there has been good engagement with DHSC and NHSX on the Track and Trace app and it will be interesting to hear how you see this developing in Northern Ireland (FM announced in yesterday's press release that NI will be part of the contact tracing app)

Lockdown easements

- It would be good to understand your latest thinking on your approach to the review of lockdown measures.
- As I've said publicly, it is not impossible for some parts of the UK to have to tailor their measures on lockdown depending on their circumstances - but I hope you agree that it is vital that we have a commonality of approach, that we explore the same issues to inform our approach even if our approach differs. The key is that it is guided by the science and medical advice from the 4 CMOs and we think about the practicality of doing so;
- Close communication on the relaxation of measures will also be key - it is vital that the reasons behind the differences are understood and clearly communicated to each other - dialogue on this will be vital in the next 2 weeks.

Recovery

- Beyond this - my officials have begun work on what post Covid-19 recovery looks like - and will want to do so in conjunction with your teams;
- We need to think about economic recovery in particular and what needs to happen to get Northern Ireland back on its feet.
- There will be some significant challenges ahead (you will have seen the projections of a contraction of 7.5% from Danske Bank this morning) but the UK Government will want to work closely with you on getting things back up and running when the time is right and laying the foundations for a sustainable recovery.;

- I'd like us to have another conversation and take forward that vital work - alongside setting out a new timetable for implementation of New Decade New Approach

Quad this week

- I'm looking forward to the Quad this week, I think that is a really vital opportunity to discuss lockdown easements ahead of our review points, we might also want to discuss recovery work and the need to be working together where possible;
- I'd like us to agree another joint statement, as it's important that the public see we are talking to each other. My officials will draft a statement and share it with you.

If raised - testing

- I note the capacity for testing has risen to approximately 1,700 tests per day which is welcome news along with the expansion of testing to include frontline workers and members of their households.
- I also note the role out of increased testing including sentinel surveillance being introduced in GP surgeries, and the scaling up of testing in care homes for all residents and healthcare staff where there are outbreaks.

If raised - travelling for exercise

- You'll have seen from our press conferences that the CMO team for England is emphasising common sense around this rather than being overly prescriptive - we continue to emphasise that people shouldn't travel unnecessarily but the key is that if you exercise outside you should maintain a 2 metres distance from anyone else.
 - **Background:** DUP Spad has fed back that he thinks there is currently some confusion over whether the current regulations put constraints on travelling for exercise - some people prefer to drive to a green space to exercise for example. The NIE are reportedly considering whether to make changes to the regulations on this.

If raised - Declan Kearney comments

- It's very important that the Executive remains calm and visibly united during this time;
- Comments such as those made by Minister Kearney last week are not helpful, or true, we've been clear that ending the lockdown too early would not help the economy in any case.
- Important that we are all showing the public that we are working together at this time, and putting our political differences aside.
 - **Background:** Junior TEO Minister Declan Kearney said last Tuesday that 'some right-wing elements in the British Cabinet, and also some unionists in the north of Ireland' are 'putting corporate greed over public welfare' by arguing for a relaxation of lockdown measures in order to resume economic activity.

Mary Lou McDonald subsequently told BBC Talkback that Kearney was right to make his comments and that she 'absolutely agrees' with him. The FM's SpAd has indicated that Kearney's comments may be raised, so lines have been provided - however, it would be best to avoid this topic as far as possible, given the presence of the dFM at the meeting.