

Meeting with Robin Swann
Monday 5 October
16:20

OBJECTIVES

- This is your first meeting with Robin since you met him with the PM in August, and is a good opportunity to build your relationship and discuss key issues relating to the healthcare system and Covid-19.
- Specifically, you can explore how NIO can support NIE and his team in Health as NI head into the winter.
- The bilateral will take place before a Quad meeting with FM/dFM later in the week which Robin may also attend. [QUAD - still tbc with Irish Government]
- There is an emergency Executive taking place today in the context of increasing cases, especially in border areas, including Newry and Armagh - with a corresponding outbreak in Monaghan. This meeting also presents a good chance to explore the Executive's plans around border outbreaks.

MAIN POINTS TO RAISE

Covid

- I am keen to begin a more regular rhythm of engagement between us to understand health related concerns facing the health and social care system this winter.
- It's very concerning to see the growing number of cases and new restrictions in Northern Ireland, and now feels like the right time to engage more so that UKG can do all we can to support NI in the coming months.

Testing / PPE / ICU and hospital capacity

- How is the testing situation at the moment?
- I understand improvements have been made across the UK since a the period of extreme pressure a few weeks ago but I would be interested to hear your thoughts on this.
- I note that you announced plans for a second Nightingale facility in County Antrim in preparation for the winter. Does NI have enough capacity to sustain hospitalisations if cases continue to increase at the current rate?
- I'm informed that PPE is in a good place and there's a rolling 12 week stock available. Do you have any concerns around PPE or supply chains that UKG can assist with?

Cross border issues

- I was happy to see the cooperation between the CMO (NI) and the Acting CMO (IE) leading to a clear message for people in both Derry Londonderry and Strabane, and Donegal.
- As areas on both sides of the borders continue to show high cases, I would be grateful for an update on cooperation with Irish Government in this area
- I am hoping to convene a discussion at the quad over the coming week, is there anything else you would like to see discussed?

Reform of Healthcare

- How is the surge of new cases and hospitalisations impacting healthcare reform plans?

Working together

- I'm extremely keen for NIO and DoH officials to work closely with each other and for UKG to support the NI Executive and amplify important messages where that is possible and appropriate.
- I am aware that NIO officials have sought to establish official-level relations on a number of key areas and support this as an effective way to assist going forward.
- [Background] NIO officials wrote last week to DoH to note that we are keen to assist in any way we can, and to establish relations at an official level with DoH leads on key areas - including testing, hospital and ICU capacity, ventilators, winter planning for Covid, and modelling and assumption for winter. We have not yet received a response, which has also been the case with previous requests.

BACKGROUND

Covid

NI restrictions

- Over the weekend both Robin Swann and Connor Murphy have indicated that the executive is actively considering additional planned interventions to deal with the spread of Covid-19, possibly including a circuit breaker. It is worth noting that public health experts in ROI have recommended the highest level of restrictions be applied to the whole country. With the public health bodies now working more closely together on both sides of the border, this may mean NI and ROI working more in lockstep.
- The new restrictions in Derry Londonderry and Strabane for pubs, restaurants, cafes and hotels mean they will only be able to open for takeaway, delivery and outdoor dining. People are also being advised to avoid unnecessary travel within the council area and to and from it. Where journeys are necessary, advice is to walk, cycle or use private transport. Schools and other educational settings will

stay open. Under the new rules, all museums, galleries and cultural attractions in the council area are to remain closed. Hotels will only be allowed to provide a service to overnight guests.

- Restrictions were extended across NI from 22 September and households are not allowed to mix in private dwellings (some exemptions continue).

NI outbreaks

- The rate of individuals per 100,000 to have tested positive in the last 7 days is now greater than 100 in seven council areas.

Ireland restrictions

- Ireland's National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) have recommended that the highest level restrictions should be introduced across the Republic of Ireland. A decision is to be made on this recommendation at Tuesday's Cabinet meeting.
- At Level 5, schools remain open with protective measures; tightly restricted numbers are allowed for weddings and funerals - otherwise no indoor or outdoor gatherings are allowed; no sporting events are to take place; religious services take place online, as with any cultural activities; all but essential retail and personal services are closed; hotels are open for non-essential and non-tourist purposes only; bars, cafes, restaurants and pubs are available for take away or delivery only; and people are asked to work from home, and to stay at home.

Testing/ PPE / ICU Capacity

- Robin Swann announced a plan for a second Nightingale facility in Northern Ireland at the start of September as part of a surge plan ahead of winter. It will be a step-down facility, located in Whiteabbey Hospital, Co Antrim, and will include 100 intermediate care beds.
- There has been significant pressure on testing across the UK which is partly due to schools and universities returning. At a recent press conference, Robin Swann said NI is testing more people per population than other parts of the UK and Ireland, but you may wish to make sure he doesn't have any concerns around capacity at the moment.

Cross Border Issues

- Although there has been high-profile joined up working with the announcement made on Donegal-NI travel, NI's CMO has pointed at some remaining problems and asked Public Health Agencies in NI and IE to review their sharing of data in the light of the response to the outbreak in Donegal and the Derry Londonderry and Strabane council area.
- This is one area that we anticipate a more regular quad meeting could improve NI/IE working.
- This is especially relevant now that there is an outbreak in Armagh and Monaghan