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**FROM: NAOMI LONG MLA
MINISTER OF JUSTICE**

DATE: 15 OCTOBER 2020

**TO: CONOR MURPHY MLA
MINISTER OF FINANCE**

**EXTENSION OF THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT AGREED FOR DERRY CITY AND
STRABANE DISTRICT TO ALL AREAS**

Thank you for your paper of today's date providing details of the intended structure of the support schemes your Department intends to roll out to businesses during the next 4 week period of increased Covid-19 related restrictions.

Firstly, I want to acknowledge that this work has been undertaken at pace and I share your view that it is crucial that we are in a position to start to roll out support ahead of the regulations coming into force to build confidence in the business community. I want to put on record my thanks to you and to your officials for turning this around at such speed.

Given that context, I also understand the limitations when it comes to underpinning evidence; however, I have some questions/comments which I wanted to share with you and which may be able to be addressed going forward:

1. I understand that the package for Derry and Strabane District Council area, whilst welcomed for its speed received some criticism that it was inadequate to cover the cost of enhanced restrictions. Clearly, this scheme is wider in scope which is welcome, but also doubles the amount each business may receive. Ideally, I would have liked to see a clearer justification for the amount (and the increase) in terms of what it would reasonably cover (e.g. how does it compare with the average profit of shops/businesses of those sizes) so as to have some sense of the VFM argument. I think this is important in terms of the impact that such a scheme, viewed as overly generous by Westminster, might have on future requests to Treasury for Covid-related funding.



2. Close contact services “are defined as ***including*** hairdressing, barbering, beauty, aesthetics, nails, makeup, tattoo, tanning, spa, sports and massage therapy, well-being and holistic locations, dress fitters, tailors and fashion designers. This also applies to those who provide mobile close contact services from their homes and in other people’s homes, delivering the close contact services detailed above in allied sectors such as the arts or entertainment, those in retail environments, as well as those studying hair and beauty in vocational training environments.” Without an exhaustive list of such services, it will be important to establish how and to what degree discretion will be applied to those whose may believe their businesses to be eligible outside of the listed examples.
3. Many of those who work in hair and beauty are self-employed and without fixed premises. It is important that they are also able to access support. In the first wave of the pandemic, many struggled to get access to any funds, including the Hardship Fund, which I understand is to be made available again by DfES. I think it would be important that processes are simplified, some relaxations introduced to the applications process and payments expedited through that fund to ensure that people are not excluded from much needed support as happened in the first round, when there was a combination of underspend and a significant cohort unable to access the fund.

I believe that the rest of my concerns were addressed by the discussion at Executive this afternoon.

This memo has been copied to Executive Colleagues, Executive Secretariat, the Attorney General, First Legislative Counsel and Departmental Solicitor’s Office.

Best regards,

PD

Naomi Long MLA
Minister of Justice