

**COVID-19 - Social Distancing Review, and the Joint Biosecurity Centre**

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**Via teleconference**

**19 June 2020  
Time TBC**

You are chairing a call with **First Ministers of Wales and Scotland**, and the **First and deputy First Ministers of Northern Ireland**.

The key **objectives** for the meeting are:

- To signal your commitment to regular engagement with First Ministers on the public delivery and policy response to Covid-19.
- To communicate UKG position on lifting any further social distancing measures ahead of the upcoming review point on July 4th, especially any softening of our position on the 2 metre social distancing rule.
- To listen to the latest Scotland, Wales and NI approaches towards social distancing measures and encourage aligned approaches where possible.
- To recognise the ongoing discussions between health ministers on the Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC) and continue to articulate its value to tackling COVID-19.

**The following will join by teleconference**

- **NICOLA STURGEON (FIRST MINISTER OF SCOTLAND)**
- **MARK DRAKEFORD (FIRST MINISTER OF WALES)**
- **ARLENE FOSTER (FIRST MINISTER OF NORTHERN IRELAND)**
- **MICHELLE O'NEILL (deputy FIRST MINISTER OF NORTHERN IRELAND)**
- **SECRETARIES OF STATES for THE TERRITORIAL OFFICES**

**AGENDA**

1. Outline of current UKG thinking ahead of next social distancing review point
2. Reflections on recent Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive reviews of social distancing measures
3. Update on the Joint Biosecurity Centre
4. Next steps

## ITEM 1: CURRENT UKG THINKING ON SOCIAL DISTANCING REVIEW

**Aim:** You have committed to regularly engage with FMs on the UK Government's approach to Covid-19. In this item you should reiterate your commitment to regular engagement with First Ministers, and set out that this will provide an important channel for ministerial engagement going forward; alongside other ministerial and official level conversations .

In this item you should provide FMs with an update on the latest UKG position on lifting of social distancing measures. FMs will be particularly interested in work being undertaken to review the 2 metre distancing rule.

### **You should introduce this item by:**

- Reiterating your commitment to regular engagement with First Ministers and set out that the conversation today is the start of
- Recognising that UKG and the DAs are all working through complex trade offs in decisions about easing social distancing measures and that we have a common interest in continuing to engage closely on plans.
- Recognising that UKG thinking on reviewing the 2 metre rule will be of particular interest; and that it would be helpful to discuss current DA thinking on this issue.
- Emphasising that, wherever possible, alignment in the approach taken by each administration supports clearer communications for citizens.

### **Points to make:**

- Regular calls between us are an important route for Covid-19 engagement on an ongoing basis. But it is not the only route as I know there are many other ministerial and official level discussions taking place to support many important aspects of our delivery and policy response. I know my colleagues the Health Secretary and the Minister for Business and Industry have been leading their own regular meetings
- The UK Government road map, laid out by the PM on 11 May, set out our provisional steps for easing social distancing restrictions, subject to the scientific advice. Next week UKG will take decisions on any measures to be eased in UKG's step 3 of that roadmap.
- The roadmap indicated that measures in step 3 would provisionally take effect from 4 July, although this is to be confirmed. The published roadmap also set out that changes made at step 3 might include opening at least some of the remaining businesses and premises that have had to close; this is also subject to decisions to be taken next week.
- As you will know from your own deliberations, these choices on how far we can lift social distancing measures, without increasing the further spread of Covid-19 are not easy. We are carefully considering these choices taking into account the scientific evidence and analysis and the very real life impact on any of these choices on people and businesses.
- As we are past the peak of the virus in the UK, it is likely that we will see localised flareups of the virus, as we are seeing in other countries, Germany, China now and so our measures may need to change in different ways in different times.

- By working and coordinating together we can make sure our approach is clear and consistent that advice and guidance to the public, citizens and businesses is clear and these discussions are a part of ensuring this.

**You should then**

- Invite the FMs to set out any reflections on the position you have outlined. You may want to suggest that they outline where their administration's thinking is on any future changes to the 2 metre restriction.

**You should close the discussion by setting out:**

- That the UKG is working towards its formal review checkpoint next week, and that you would expect to contact them with internal notice of these changes in advance of any public announcements. You may wish to caution that this may happen swiftly, and that you would appreciate their understanding of the fast paced nature of the situation.

**Background**

**DA Engagement**

FMs may raise concerns about UKG-DA engagement in light of the Ministerial Implementation Groups having been stood down, and DAs not being regular attendees at COVID-O meetings. This was highlighted in a letter from the First Minister of Wales and a letter from the DA Permanent Secretaries to the Cabinet Secretary on 12 June 2020 who cautioned against not involving DAs on a more substantive basis through the successor groups to the ministerial implementation groups which have been stood down.

Examples of current engagement if needed:

- DA Permanent Secretaries are invited to Cab Sec (O) meetings.
- UK Governance Group chair weekly senior level officials meetings that look at engagement across the C-19 response.
- Department-led ministerial meetings are taking place with DA ministers including weekly calls led by DHSoS with DA health ministers and a four nations call led by Minister Zahawi that BEIS SoS also may attend.

You will shortly be receiving advice which suggests that the bulk of the ministerial engagement should continue to happen through Department led ministerial engagement and that you convene regular (recommended fortnightly) calls with FMs to discuss cross-cutting issues. **We would expect that only a prioritised set of issues should come to the calls you chair, and these will be agreed with your private office.**

The advice will recognise that the exact frequency and timing of your engagement with FMs will need to be driven by milestones such as social distancing review points, but that

committing to a regular rhythm of engagement will clearly counter any claims that UKG is not engaging appropriately.

## **ITEM 2: REFLECTIONS ON RECENT DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATION REVIEWS OF SOCIAL DISTANCING**

**Aim:** To listen to the latest Scotland, Wales and NI approaches to social distancing announced on 18th June and encourage aligned approaches where possible.

### **You should introduce this item by:**

- Recognising that there are far more similarities than differences in the approaches of the nations of the UK, and that you are committed to ongoing regular engagement on Covid-19 to ensure that an aligned approach is taken wherever appropriate.

### **You should then:**

- Invite each First Minister to set out their reflections on the key considerations behind the decisions they have taken at their most recent review points, any lessons learned that they would like to share, and what the next steps might look like for them.

### **Points to make:**

- You may want to elicit FM views on the rationale for their changes, and explore their current thinking on further changes at the next review point.
- You may want to recognise the overall similarities between the approaches being taken by each administration; for example the Scottish Government has just announced the ability for people living alone to form extended households.

### **You should close the discussion by setting out:**

- The importance of close ongoing collaboration between UKG and DAs to ensure that, where possible and sensible, we take a UK-wide approach to messaging and communications to ensure that we foster a cohesive and collaboration relationship where possible and sensible.

### **Background: Changes to social distancing policy:**

While Northern Ireland continuously reviews its C-19 related policies, Scotland and Wales have recently made some key announcements (18 June Scotland, and tentatively 19 June Wales) to their own social distancing policy. The key areas of change in Scotland announced 18 June have been set out in annex 1.

### **Scotland:**

- Shielding: From 18 June, people shielding can go outside for walking/ wheeling/ running/ cycling. From 19 June, shielded individuals will be able to undertake

non-contact outdoor activities like golf, angling, kayaking etc. and will be able to meet up with people from other households, outdoors, providing they remain physically distanced. They will also be able to meet people from one other household in groups of no more than 8 as part of an 'extended household'.

- A full summary of changes can be found in annex 1.

**Wales:**

- The Welsh Government undertook a review on 18 June towards their social distancing policies. Any amendments will be announced at the 19 June early afternoon press conference, although some indication of the changes may be given during breakfast discussions that the First Minister of Wales may have. We have included some indication of changes provided to us in confidence in annex 2 but these should be treated as draft until they are confirmed.

A summary of social distancing policies across the UK can be found in annex 2.

**ITEM 3: UPDATE ON JOINT BIOSECURITY CENTRE**

**Aim:** To recognise the progress made, and the ongoing discussions, between health ministers on the establishment of a UK-wide Joint Biosecurity Centre and to affirm UKG's commitment to working with the DAs to establish an expert JBC which will support the ongoing decision-making taking place across all parts of the UK.

This item should be brief, reiterate the key opportunities the JBC presents, articulate its current progress and suggest that more detailed discussions can and should be had through the Health Secretary ministerial meetings and senior official groups.

**You should introduce this item by:**

- Emphasising the critical importance of a UK-wide approach in the next phase of suppressing the virus through more targeted local action.
- Stressing the importance of using data to make the right decisions for each part of the United Kingdom, something which the JBC can enable through providing situational awareness, analysis and guidance.
- Highlighting for the DAs the collaborative efforts of their officials and fellow ministers in this work.

**Points to make:**

- Constructive discussions are underway between the Health Secretary and DA health ministers. I understand my friend the Health Secretary wrote to your health ministers on the 16th of June setting out his proposal for how we take this work forward in unity.
- Future conversations, will be taken forward at both official and ministerial level, will help to address any outstanding issues in more detail and clarify the specifics of any proposed agency agreements.

**You should close the discussion by setting out:**

- That this work is being driven at pace through the Health Secretary's weekly calls, reiterating the importance ensuring that all parts of the UK continue to work together in a spirit of collaboration to respond to this unprecedented crisis and the role of the JBC in providing high quality epidemiological expertise to support the decisions taken by UKG and the DAs in the next phase of crisis.

**Background:**

- The use of agency agreements as a way to establish the JBC on a UK-wide basis was presented at the Health Ministers' 4-nations call on Tuesday 9 June.
- This was followed by a more detailed discussion between senior UKG and DA officials on Friday 12 June. This aimed to address any outstanding questions on aspects such as function, remit, governance, data, staffing and decision making.
- On 16 June the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care wrote to his counterparts in the DAs to seek agreement in principle on agency arrangements to establish the JBC across the UK.
- The JBC team are currently drafting a proposal to be shared with the DAs on how a UK-wide JBC could work following the official-level discussion on Friday 12 June based on ministerial steers.
- On agency agreements:
  - Where functions have been devolved under the devolution settlements, provisions in the Scotland, Northern Ireland and Government of Wales Acts allow for "agency arrangements" to be established whereby UKG Ministers are permitted to exercise, as agents, the functions of their devolved counterparts.
  - The relevant Minister or Department in the devolved administration remains responsible for the functions discharged by UKG Ministers under agency arrangements.
  - Unlike in the Wales and Northern Ireland settlements, which involve only the agreement/MoU, the Scottish provisions require secondary legislation.
  - Work is proceeding to draft an Order in Council under the Scottish settlement to cater for the JBC.
  - Details of the agency arrangement underlying it can be brought together in an agreement/MoU after the Order is made, if necessary.
- You have already agreed with the JBC team to:
  - Onboard DA embeds into the JBC's analytical and response functions as quickly as possible.
  - Pursue agency agreements as a way to secure DA cooperation for a UK-wide approach.

**Next Steps:**

- In closing you may wish to reiterate that you are committed to continued regular

engagement at ministerial level on the Covid-19 response.

**Annex 1: Summary of changes in Scotland announced 18 June:**

From Friday 19th June:

- People who are shielding are able to leave their home for exercise (from 18th June) and to meet with 1 other household outdoors (max 8 people in total) with physical distancing. People who are shielding can take part in non-contact outdoor activities such as golf, hiking, fishing etc.
- People who are not shielding can now meet with more households outside. Limit increased from meeting 1 other household to meeting 2 households; 8 person overall limit and need for physical distancing remains. They can also use toilets indoors while visiting the outdoors of another household.
- Certain household types can now meet others indoors in an 'extended household'.
- People should continue to stay in their local area (broadly within five miles) as much as possible and should not travel further for leisure or recreation.

From Monday 22nd June

- Face coverings are mandatory on public transport.
- Places of worship can re-open for individual prayer or contemplation. Professional sport can resume – with public health restrictions remaining in place.
- Dental practices can re-open to see patients with urgent care needs.
- Construction sector can implement remaining phases of sectoral plan.
- College and university staff can return to make essential preparations for restart in Phase 3.
- Consistent with Phase 2, accommodation can be provided for those required to stay away from home for work purposes.

From Monday 29th June

- Indoor (non-office) workplaces resume once relevant guidance is implemented. Includes: factories, warehouses, labs and research facilities. Excludes: indoor workplaces due to open in Phase 3 (e.g. non-essential offices and call-centres).
- Street-access retail can re-open once guidance is implemented.
- Interiors of shopping centres / malls remain closed for non-essential shops until Phase 3.
- Outdoor markets can re-open once guidance is implemented.
- Relaxation on restrictions on housing moves.
- Outdoor sports courts can re-open.
- Playgrounds can re-open.
- Registration offices open for high priority tasks.
- Marriages & civil partnerships allowed with minimal attendees – outdoors only.

- Zoos and garden attractions can open for local access only (broadly within 5 miles) in this phase.

**Annex 2: UK-wide position on social distancing guidelines**

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Xpjl5m\\_cKbacjJqkW3a\\_WjLx\\_8RBezuxZ4C7pv0NsRo/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Xpjl5m_cKbacjJqkW3a_WjLx_8RBezuxZ4C7pv0NsRo/edit)