

Northern
Ireland
Office

Covid 19 Mailbox <covid-19shared@nio.gov.uk>

Re: Update on Engagement

11 messages

NR @nio.gov.uk> 23 November 2020 at 16:51
To: "Pearson, Karen" <Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>
Cc: **NR** @nio.gov.uk>, Covid 19 Mailbox <covid-19@nio.gov.uk>

Hi Karen,

Just to update here with a readout from the meeting at 2:30 between the Irish Ambassador to the UK and Maya Sivagnanam (Head of FCDO Europe North).

Adrian was grateful for the heads up and appreciated that the situation was "evolving".

Adrian thought we were "ahead" of them on C-19 announcements: there would be no announcement on the Irish side until towards the end of the week. In Ireland, the three party leaders were having an exchange today and there would be two further Cabinet meetings before the announcement (tomorrow and a further one) as the Govt wanted the latest data before signing it off. The daily infection rate was holding firm around 400 which was "worrying"; in Adrian's view he would be "surprised" if the decision was for Level 5 restrictions to continue; there was likely to be "some easing" on non-essential retail, gyms and so on. The biggest issue was the hospitality sector e.g. whether there would be a differentiation between pubs serving food and those that didn't. On travel, he said there was little speculation; from 29 Nov the rules would change so that rather than 14 days quarantine using the EU traffic lights system, people who had a negative Covid test within 5 days of arrival could move around (which would help people from here).

Adrian asked about whether there would be any change to travel across the island of Ireland; I thought there would not be. He made the point that in Ireland, only 1.2% of the infection figure was attributed to foreign travel; 2/3 attributed to close contact; and 1/3 to community transmission. I also set out our engagement plan: Jonathan Black was talking to John Callinan at the same time; SOSNI would be talking to Coveney; and HMA would talk to DFA. Adrian thought that the trilateral on Wednesday would be "timely" for Ireland to share further thinking on their plans.

Finally, he said that he was keen to see Minister Morton once Covid restrictions had been lifted; I thought that was an excellent idea. And we agreed that there was hope on the horizon with vaccines in the works; he hoped that by Easter/Q2, some sense of normality would return.

Thanks,

NR

On Mon, 23 Nov 2020 at 15:42, **NR** @nio.gov.uk> wrote:
Thanks for this Karen,

Sorry to overload this chain but I think useful to have all of this in one place. The BE Dublin meeting with DfA has now taken place. The officials will brief Simon Coveney ahead of his call with SoSNI.

Thanks,

NRReadout

Officials could not comment on the detail of Ireland's arrangements for Christmas as these were still under discussion, as noted below (in the JB JC call), but they were grateful for the engagement and that we were giving consideration to how this would affect families who might want to gather from across the island. They asked about whether those coming into the UK from overseas would be eligible to form a bubble.

They noted that the call with SoSNI had been reduced to 15 minutes and given the broader agenda they were uncertain that it would be possible to go into detail with the Minister on that call, but agreed that the trilateral on Wednesday would provide an opportunity to discuss further, if needed.

On Mon, 23 Nov 2020 at 15:15, Pearson, Karen <Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk> wrote:

NR

Really helpful thank you. Our CMO and dCMO were also hearing Ireland is still working through the issues and "later this week" was the best estimate

Karen

[See recipients listed above]

Subject: Re: Update on Engagement

Hi Karen,

Please see below for a redout from Jonathan Black's call with John Callinan.

Thanks,

NR

JB began by explaining that he was calling to update on two announcements the UK were planning to make over the next few days:

- 1) Today, on post-lockdown tiering system (with NI doing something separate) and
- 2) Probably on Wednesday, on the plan for Christmas.

Jonathan then explained our current thinking, on 'christmas bubbles', travel, timing, the legal base and interaction with the tiering system. He also noted that SoSNI would likely cover this in his call with Coveney later today.

John noted his gratitude for the update and then set out the current thinking in Ireland. He noted that they were a couple of days behind, but would likely make a similar set of announcements on Thursday/Friday. On planning for the announcement, he said:

- They were currently focussed on what the exit to lockdown will look and feel like, as well as particular arrangements required for Christmas.
- The Government would have an initial discussion tomorrow, followed by a Cabinet meeting and a final decision later in the week.

He couldn't say exactly what that announcement would cover as no decisions had been made, but he expected there to be a lot of similarities with what Jonathan had set out. He thought that:

- At the end of the current lockdown period we would see an easing of restrictions on retail. The picture for hospitality was less certain, with decisions still to be made around indoor vs. outdoor and wet vs. dry.
- For Christmas, he would expect there to be some relaxation over the same type of time period, but no decisions had been made on household numbers yet.
- The 5k limit on travel would need to be eased to allow for some greater movement, at least across the island. No final decisions on what this will mean for the border as yet, but will want to help families to gather wherever possible.
- Some concern that lockdown has not done enough to bring the numbers to a safe and manageable level, particularly in NI, but acceptance that Christmas requires some movement.

Jonathan noted the challenges referenced in NI, and the need to stay in close touch with each other and with the NIE to manage these issues. They then concluded by looking forward to the wider discussion on Wednesday and agreeing to stay in touch if anything changed over the course of the week.

On Mon, 23 Nov 2020 at 14:16, NR <[redacted]@nio.gov.uk> wrote:

Sorry Karen,

We'd hoped that the meeting between BE Dublin and Irish officials would be able to take place before the 2:30 engagements, but I think 2:30 was the earliest BE Dublin were offered when they talked with IG this morning.

I know this isn't ideal as you need feedback from this as soon as possible, so will keep pushing for readouts on my side,

Thanks,

NR

On Mon, 23 Nov 2020 at 14:13, Pearson, Karen <Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk> wrote:

Thanks. I thought there was to be a meeting this morning too?

[See recipients listed above]

Subject: Re: Update on Engagement

Hi Karen,

NR

has just come back to let us know that her an

NR

from BE Dublin will be meeting

NR

NR

from Irish Government at 2:30.

I'll provide updates as soon as possible,

Thanks,

NR

On Mon, 23 Nov 2020 at 13:11

NR

nio.gov.uk> wrote:

Hi Karen,

Just to quickly update on this:

NR

(BE Dublin) is due to speak with DfA shortly, and I've emphasised the need for quick engagement with her.

At 2:30, Jonathan Black and John Callinan will talk.

NR

(Head of FCDO Europe North) and the Irish Ambassador Adrian O'Neill at 2.30

At 4:30, SoSNI will talk with Simon Coveney.

Mark L is on leave today so Holly and I are probably the best contacts on this.

Happy to talk and will send you updates as they come through to me,

Thanks,

NR

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NR

Healthcare Lead

Constitution, Rights and Healthcare Policy Group

1 Horse Guards Road, London, SW1A 2HQ

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NR**Healthcare Lead****Constitution, Rights and Healthcare Policy Group**

1 Horse Guards Road, London, SW1A 2HQ

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[See recipients listed above]

23 November 2020 at 17:13

Hi Karen,

Sorry to have to flag this but the Coveney/SoSNI chat has slipped from 4:30 and PO are now trying to organise for 7:30. I'll provide updates as soon as I get them.

Thanks,

NR

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[See recipients listed above]

23 November 2020 at 17:21

That would be really helpful **NR** thank you

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[See recipients listed above]

23 November 2020 at 20:07

Hi Karen,

Sorry for the late email but the SoSNI / Coveney chat is now finished and here's a very informal readout, I'll send over something more formal if I get it.

Key Points

- IG have a cabinet meeting in the morning to discuss December plans. They're hoping to agree plans for the whole month.
- Ireland are considering easing their restrictions just as NI are about to enter a 2 week circuit breaker which will need some careful handling.
- SC liked the outline of UKG plans and said he would consider something similar if the numbers were in the right place.
- SC noted concern about IE/GB travel over the festive period

Thanks,

NR

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[See recipients listed above]

3 November 2020 at 20:29

Thanks

NR

Can I get a bit more on the last 2 bullet points please.

- Are they reaching a decision on Christmas tomorrow? What does the reference to the numbers being in the right place mean in terms of N/S families meeting?
- What is the "concern" reference in the last bullet point?

In overall, what is the NIO analysis on where Ireland will be on this in coming days? Need a bit more information please

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[See recipients listed above]

23 November 2020 at 21:15

Hi Karen,

Thanks for this I'll have to come back to you first thing tomorrow morning so that I can check in with Private Office and our Political Affairs teams on these points.

Thanks,

Name Redacted

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[See recipients listed above]

3 November 2020 at 21:35

Executive meets at 9 ...

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[See recipients listed above]

23 November 2020 at 21:51

Sorry Karen,

I hadn't realised it was 9am. Unfortunately, I'll still have to try to contact someone on this tomorrow morning. I wasn't on the call at 7:30 and have only seen what I've sent through.

The only steer I can give tonight is that there's another Irish Cabinet meeting on Friday which may be used to discuss December planning as well.

Will send more information as soon as possible tomorrow,

NR

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[See recipients listed above]

23 November 2020 at 22:04

O **NR** thanks. The info about a meeting on Friday is important.

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[See recipients listed above]

24 November 2020 at 09:00

Hi Karen,

Here's the latest we have from the call last night, I hope this is useful and sorry it's coming through just before the Exec.

- There will be 2 Irish cabinet meetings today and Friday. We therefore don't anticipate a final decision today on Christmas planning today.
- Irish Government are looking at options to go down to Tier 3 from Tier 5 during December
- SC welcomed information on our plans for Christmas, and will be working on their own. These could be similar to the UK's, but we don't have any detail on this.

The trilat will be a good opportunity to pick this up in slightly more detail tomorrow and a lot of the engagement we had mentioned that as a useful discussion point.

Thanks,

NR

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[See recipients listed above]

24 November 2020 at 09:08

Really helpful thanks

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12/12/2023, 15:36

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