



Northern
Ireland
Office

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[URGENT COMMISSION]: SoS/Coveney Covid call tomorrow

6 messages

SOS Lewis <sos.lewis@nio.gov.uk>

4 January 2021 at 19:35

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

Cc: I&S NR @nio.gov.uk, Mark Larmour <mark.larmour@nio.gov.uk> I&S
@nio.gov.uk, Holly Clark <holly.clark@nio.gov.uk>, PS SOS <ps.sos@nio.gov.uk>, Ciaran Hayes
<ciaran.hayes@nio.gov.uk>

Hi Covid team,

Following the CDL/DA call earlier this evening, SoS has requested a call with the Irish Foreign Minister tomorrow, which has gone into the diary for 1100.

The CDL call produced an action to assess whether Ireland would be prepared to pursue a joint UK-Ireland approach to international travel. It was suggested that the PM reach out to the Taoiseach, but SoS would like to contact Coveney ahead of that.

For 1030 tomorrow morning, please could you send through a one pager outlining the UK's baseline position on international travel, along with some suggested lines SoS could take to make a persuasive case for a coordinated UK-Ireland approach? This could cite the usual lines on the CTA, for instance, as well as the point that such an approach could help to simplify public messaging for those in NI & Ireland in particular.

Appreciate the PM address at 2000 tonight may shed further light on what can or cannot be said. Feel free to get in touch with any queries and thanks in advance for the short turnaround.

Best,

NR



NIO Private Office

1 Horse Guards Road, London
Stormont House, Belfast
Ciarán Hayes (PPS)

NR

Irrelevant & Sensitive

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[See recipients listed above]

Hi NR

Thanks for this, we'll get to work on this now and have something ready for 10:30.

Thanks,

NR

[Quoted text hidden]



NR

Healthcare Lead

Constitution, Rights and Healthcare Policy Group

1 Horse Guards Road, London, SW1A 2HQ

Mobile:

I&S

[Quoted text hidden]

[See recipients listed above]

Thank you.

NR

(now copied) will want to feed in on appropriate lines to take for the Implementation Review meeting, which is now looking likely for 11th. DFA have confirmed this suits Coveney.

NR

[Quoted text hidden]

[See recipients listed above]

Thanks NR we're feeding in to the briefing on that.

NR

Head of Political Strategy

Political Affairs Group

Irrelevant & Sensitive

1 Horse Guards Road, London, SW1A 2HQ

[Quoted text hidden]

[See recipients listed above]

Hi all,

Please see below for the briefing which went to SoS for the 11:00 call today.

Thanks,

NR

 20210105 MEETING WITH SIMON COVENEY

[Quoted text hidden]

[See recipients listed above]

With thanks to **NR** & the team for the rapid turnaround for SoS' briefing, please see below for a short readout of the call.

In particular, SoS is keen for officials to find an appropriate option for travel convergence across the UK and Ireland, without creating a situation within the UK whereby tests are made mandatory for GB-NI travel only.

NR

PLEASE PROTECT

- SoS noted that an emerging challenge with the new variant is young people. Social media influencers sharing images of their Christmas/New Year holidays have fuelled the misconception that young people are immune.
- SC agreed, noting that Ireland has gone from having one of the lowest rates of infection in Europe, to one of the most rapidly growing. He indicated that the Irish Government are likely to shortly announce school closures until the end of January at the earliest, and construction may close also. SoS noted that UKG had decided to keep construction open.
- On travel, SC noted that the Taoiseach had asked him to bring some clarity to the situation. Ireland has been following the EU's traffic light system, with virtually all countries in 'red'. SC does not think that a GB-Ireland travel ban is sustainable (he cited the CTA in particular, but also agreed with SoS that freight was a major concern in this area).
- The IG are likely to bring forward recommendations today to end that travel ban, and replace it with an obligation for travellers to have a PCR test before beginning their journey, regardless of citizenship. He suggested this would be made a legal obligation, but acknowledged that the enforceability of this remained an open question. Making it a criminal act, he hoped, would be enough to dissuade significant numbers from breaking the rules.
- SoS said that UKG was likely to make similar moves in the coming days, which would help to unite UK-Ireland public messaging. He suggested a joint statement (PM/Taoiseach or SoS/SC), to help communicate this at the appropriate moment.
- SoS emphasised that it would be difficult for UKG to impose such a rule on GB-NI travel only, and work was ongoing to ascertain if PCR testing could be applied universally (including internal GB air travel). Both agreed that officials should continue to work together on the detail of these options.

Separately, and for Political Affairs to note:

- SoS and SC agreed that the next Quad meeting should be held in the coming weeks, given the mounting pressures across the UK and Ireland's public health systems.
- SoS noted that he expected progress with Irish language at a political level this week, ahead of the Implementation Review meeting, currently scheduled for 11th January. SC emphasised he was particularly keen to see progress in this area soon.

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