

From: [NR]@nio.gov.uk
To: "Pearson, Karen" <Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>
Cc: "Clark, Holly" <Holly.Clark@nio.gov.uk>, "NIO Covid-19" < covid-19@nio.gov.uk>
Subject: Re: Update on Engagement
Date: Mon, 23 Nov 2020 20:07:12 +0000
Importance: Normal
Inline-Images: image001.jpg

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]

On Mon, 23 Nov 2020 at 17:21, Pearson, Karen <Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk> wrote:

That would be really helpful [NR] thank you

From: [NR]@nio.gov.uk
Sent: 23 November 2020 17:13
To: Pearson, Karen <Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>
Cc: Clark, Holly <Holly.Clark@nio.gov.uk>; NIO Covid-19 < covid-19@nio.gov.uk>
Subject: Re: Update on Engagement

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]

On Mon, 23 Nov 2020 at 16:51, [redacted] NR [redacted]@nio.gov.uk> wrote:

Hi Karen,

Just to update here with a readout from the meeting at 2:30 between the Irish Ambassador to the UK and [redacted] NR (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,

[redacted] NR [redacted]

On Mon, 23 Nov 2020 at 15:42, [redacted] NR [redacted]@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,

NR

Readout

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

From: NR [mailto:NR@nio.gov.uk]
Sent: 23 November 2020 15:09
To: Pearson, Karen <Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>
Cc: Clark, Holly <Holly.Clark@nio.gov.uk>
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, [redacted] 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,

[redacted] NR [redacted]

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?

From: [redacted] NR [redacted]@nio.gov.uk]
Sent: 23 November 2020 14:08
To: Pearson, Karen <Karen.Pearson@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>
Cc: Clark, Holly <Holly.Clark@nio.gov.uk>
Subject: Re: Update on Engagement

Hi Karen,

Catherine has just come back to let us know that her and Sarah Tiffin from BE Dublin will be meeting Paul Sherlock, Laurence Simms and Anna McGillicuddy from Irish Government at 2:30.

I'll provide updates as soon as possible,

Thanks,

[redacted] NR [redacted]

On Mon, 23 Nov 2020 at 13:11 [redacted] **NR** [redacted]@nio.gov.uk> wrote:

Hi Karen,

Just to quickly update on this:

Catherine Page (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.

[redacted] **NR** [redacted] 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,

[redacted] **NR**

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