

## **SOSNI -FIRST MINISTER BRIEFING, - 1 MAY 2020**

### **SPEAKING POINTS**

#### *Update on process for next week and COBR*

- A priority for next week is preparations for and completion of the review on lockdown measures. There will be close communication throughout the week, including set piece meetings and senior official (Monday) and Ministerial (CDL on Tuesday) ahead of Thursday's COBR.

#### *UK/Ireland travel restrictions on arrivals*

#### *PM's statement*

- UK is past the peak of the epidemic.
- We will set out a comprehensive plan next week on getting the economy moving again.
- Emphasised the five key tests will need to be met before the plan can be put into action:
  - we can continue to protect the NHS and its ability to cope;
  - we must see a sustained fall in deaths;
  - we must be sure that the infection rate is falling;
  - we must overcome the operational and logistical challenges on testing and PPE;
  - we must make sure that the measures we take do not risk a second spike that would overwhelm the NHS.

#### *Track and trace*

- Tools such as the Trace and Trace app will be core parts of the contact tracing strategy and will enable an easing of lockdown measures.
- Ensuring the app is fit for purpose in Northern Ireland, both as a means of supporting policy and delivering on the ground is important. It should allow for movements across the land border and I'm keen to explore how the NHSX and Irish apps can work together.
- I have asked for a meeting to be set up on Monday between DHSC, NIO and DoHNI, followed by a trilateral discussion with Ireland (Tuesday). Ensuring these policy and operational links as the work develops is key.

#### *Working together on COVID-19 incl. 3 way forum*

#### *Timing of the Next meeting*

- I understand that we've got these in weekly on Thursdays so let's see how they fit in around any COBR meetings

#### *Economic Recovery*

- My officials have begun to start to do some work on what post Covid-19 recovery looks like;
- We need to think about how we can all link up on this.
- There will be some significant challenges ahead (you will have seen the projections of a contraction of 7.5% from Danske Bank this week) but the UK Government will want to work closely with NIE on getting things back up and running when the time is right and laying the foundations for a sustainable recovery.

*PPE - if raised*

- I'm glad that both the Northern Ireland Executive and the UK Government have taken a four-nations approach to PPE;
- My officials will continue to work closely with officials in the Department of Health, the Department of Finance and other UK Government departments to ensure that Northern Ireland receives a fair share of additional PPE that the UK Government procures.

*Testing - if raised*

- I welcome the news that over 2,200 tests were carried out in Northern Ireland yesterday, along with the expansion of testing to include frontline workers in other sectors as well as health and social care;
- I also note the roll out of sentinel surveillance being introduced in GP surgeries and emergency departments, and the scaling up of testing in care homes;
- I would welcome the opportunity to hear of any other updates.

*Enforcement of cross-border travel regulation breaches - if asked*

- I know the PSNI and An Garda Síochána are working hard to enforce the regulations in place to keep all Northern Irish and Irish citizens safe.
- This issue reinforces the point that close communications between us are absolutely vital, particularly as we seek to maintain the public's adherence to social distancing and save lives.

**Background:**

- *There has been some media coverage of perceived loopholes in ROI legislation, meaning that restrictions on travel for those entering from NI cannot be enforced by An Garda Síochána and social distancing regulations are being breached. However, the Irish government has confirmed that An Garda Síochána currently has no serious concerns about cross border travel happening in this way. The Irish government has also underlined the high levels of cooperation between An Garda Síochána and PSNI.*

- *Changing the legislation would require Irish parliamentary assent, which is not possible until a new government is formed in Ireland. So for now, the current arrangements have to stay in place. The issue has gained greater prominence because of evidence that infection rates are higher in Ireland's border region than in some other parts of the country (outside of Dublin). Ireland's Chief Medical Officer has explicitly rejected the idea that this is because of travel from NI residents.*
- *Irish ministers may seek some kind of commitment for PSNI to conduct greater checks within NI to prevent excessive travel by NI residents into Ireland in particular over the upcoming bank holiday weekends*