



Northern  
Ireland  
Office

## **PM C-19 UK-Wide Delivery Strategy Meeting**

**MEETING TO BE HELD AT CABINET ROOM, No10 DOWNING ST**

**Saturday 11 April 2020 1030 - 1115**

### **AGENDA**

**1. UK-wide delivery - Lucy Smith, Cabinet Office. Paper attached.**

### **NI UPDATE**

- As of 10 April there have been 92 deaths and 1589 confirmed cases in NI.
- Over 800 health care workers have been tested.
- This weekend, a testing programme for non-health critical workers will begin - 200 of these workers will have been tested by Easter Monday.
- A shipment of 5.5 million items of PPE arrived in NI this week from the UK government
- The Republic of Ireland will extend its Covid-19 restrictions for a further three weeks until 5 May.

### **Steer**

This is an opportunity for you to set out to the C-19 Ministerial group the work that you have done with the Executive and the Irish Government to deliver a four nations approach to the COVID-19 situation. You can flag the work done, including around PPE, to demonstrate the positive benefits of the Union.

But it is also an opportunity to remind colleagues that the Executive has found COVID-19 a challenge and to remind them of the need to maintain close relations

with the Irish Government to support the stability of the Executive. This will particularly be the case as decisions on future social distancing are taken.

### **SPEAKING NOTES FOR NIO / NIE WORKING RELATIONSHIP**

#### *Positive engagement*

I, as well as my Department, have had positive engagement with the NI Executive and continue to work closely with Ministers and the NI Civil Service. Examples of this would be;

- I and my officials have worked hard to support the Executive in its approach to C-19. This crisis has put a significant strain on the Executive which we shouldn't under-estimate.
- My officials are working closely with NI officials. A NIO Director attends NI's Ministerial Civil Contingencies Group, which has opened up a high-level information flows and requests for support. My officials are also embedded into the Executive's Command, Control and Co-ordination structures - the NI Hub.
- This week we had the second successful Quad meeting between FM&dFM, and NIE/IG health ministers. The discussion covered social distancing, testing, oxygen supplies and ferries/ hauliers.
- I have regular meetings with FM/dFM and party leaders.
- The delivery this week of five million items of PPE by DHSC was well received by the NIE.
- My officials have worked with the Executive to improve the relevant data feeds to CCS, with work ongoing to address outstanding gaps. This helps CCS and cabinet understand the NI picture when making UK wide decisions.

#### *Areas for improvement*

- Important that as we take decisions we involve the Executive where we are taking decisions with a UK-wide impact.
- Ministers and NICS officials have raised concerns around Information flow from MIGs. If official announcements are made immediately after meeting, the NIE has a difficult time preparing appropriate messaging.

## **SPEAKING NOTES ON SOCIAL DISTANCING**

### *Importance of relationship with Ireland*

- Noting the Taoiseach's announcement on Friday regarding restrictions extending until 5 May, it will be vital to coordinate any adjustments to the social distancing guidance, and our eventual exit strategy, with the Irish Government. We should avoid a situation where divergent guidance between the UK Government and Irish Government leaves both politicians and communities in Northern Ireland feeling torn between the two governments' approaches along traditional dividing lines. We saw the damage this did on school closures.
- The UK and Ireland do not need to take the same approach. But we should try to take *similar* approaches where practicable. Where there is unavoidable divergence, we should work together to properly communicate that, and support the Executive in managing the approach for Northern Ireland.
- I'm holding weekly quads with the First Minister, deputy First Minister, Tánaiste and both jurisdictions' health ministers. These are proving helpful in managing issues and encouraging join-up and I plan to continue this close engagement alongside continued bilateral work with the FM and dFM.
- We are all agreed on the messaging for Easter Weekend and have agreed to stay in touch on social distancing messaging. In general, there has been good compliance with the social distancing measures in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Executive has warned that the police will be out on the roads over the weekend and will stop people if they believe they are traveling outside the social distancing rules.
- It will be important to continue to promote a consistent approach across the four nations, and the importance of staying in touch with Ireland on these issues.

### **Lines to take for relevant points in the paper:**

#### **Health**

**Health:** The paper states that data flows have improved but there are gaps in our understanding of demand for ventilators and PPE.

#### **Action in paper:**

**DHSC, supported by Cabinet Office, should conclude its work to clarify the model, gain its endorsement by all governments, and ensure a single instruction to DIT/FCO.**

**Lines to Take**

- There has been good progress this week with my officials working in collaboration with NI DoH and CCS to improve NI datasets for the CCS dashboard. This provides useful information to understand both the overall UK picture as well as the situation in each of the DAs.
- Further work has also been undertaken to understand NI's PPE and ventilator situation.
- It continues to be important that the four nation approach is acted upon in a meaningful way. The example of NI providing data on its PPE stock followed by the allocation of supply of 5.5m of PPE demonstrates that this data is being acted upon.
- I agree with the importance of a four nations approach to procurement as this enables us to get the best deal for the UK. We need to be flexible to the circumstances of each of the DAs.
- *[If asked about media reports of NI led procurement from China] NIE is currently pursuing all feasible supply routes, internationally and locally, working closely with the NHS and Republic of Ireland to do so. (The MoU between NI and IG also references that both Governments "will work together in appropriate areas that may arise, such as procurement").*

**Public Sector Response:** The paper states that ongoing co-ordination is required between reserved and devolved policy areas on key workstreams, for example support for the vulnerable

**Action in paper:**

**While in some of these areas the DAs might wish to introduce different policies, early engagement from UKG departments is likely to mean greater alignment, and additional opportunities for a UK-wide response.**

**Lines to Take**

- We are seeing earlier engagement with the Northern Ireland Executive which has been welcomed. It has also allowed the Executive to consider how approach compares - and the implications if it does not - with approach in Ireland.
- And our external engagement confirms that the role of UKG in responding to Covid-19 in Northern Ireland, for example the charities' funding announcement this week and the four nation approach to ensuring PPE, is noted and welcomed.

- Going into a new week, a coordinated and four nation approach to support for the vulnerable, both shielded and non-shielded, will be important and impactful, as well as support for agri-food producers.

**Economy:** The paper states that businesses have asked for more consistency in administrations' guidance and have reported confusion on areas such as whether businesses should close; which of their workers can continue to send children to school and the package of support they can access.

**Action in paper:**

**Ideally, future iterations of guidance would be issued on a UK-wide basis, even if consistency is not achievable and part of its function is to communicate differences clearly, or make links to other products.**

### **Lines to Take**

- We have listened and engaged with a wide range of business and business representatives across the UK on how best we can support them through this difficult period. This has resulted in the following further decisions from the Chancellor:
  - a ban on banks being able to demand debt-risking personal guarantees on loans of less than £250,000 to speed up the process of lending and reduce financial risk for applicants;
  - an expansion of the already-running Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) to allow viable small businesses affected by Covid-19 to apply, no longer limiting it to those unable to secure commercial financing;
  - for small business loans of more than £250,000, personal guarantees will be limited to just 20% of any amount outstanding on the lending after any other recoveries from business assets, with lenders continuing to be prohibited from asking business owners to put their house on the line.
- The NIO has signposted this information on Gov.uk to make it easier for NI businesses to access.

**Communications:** Paper notes that there is a premium put by the public, key workforces and business on joined-up communications. There have been examples of this not working, of DAs getting out ahead of UKG comms; and of UKG making announcements for England without ensuring equivalents are ready for S, W, NI.

**Action in paper:**

**We recommend Ministers chairing MIGs with the DAs include an agenda item on comms, where they can ask about forthcoming announcements and agree any comms coming directly out of the meeting. On the latter, content being**

**created for announcements in England should be shared with DAs as early as possible.**

### **Lines to Take**

- I would suggest that this action here also includes the territorial offices as well as the DAs.
- It has been the case that particularly for announcements at the daily press conferences, information has often come very late in order to land the messages effectively in the nations.
- I understand the central comms hub is working to address this with the DAs and TOs, and the situation is improving.
- Insight data including polling and focus groups Northern Ireland is also improving to provide as much useable information as possible to inform the comms campaign there.

**Social distancing review point:** The paper states that the review of social distancing measures is critical in maintaining an appropriately aligned response across the UK.

### **Action in paper:**

**We recommend engagement with the Devolved Administrations to maintain a joined up approach to the social distancing review:**

- a. A COBR meeting to be scheduled towards the end of next week to discuss the findings of the social distancing review**
- b. Official-level engagement with the DAs including CMO and CSA with their DA equivalents. We recommend the papers that go to COBR next week have also been worked on in advance by DA officials in the preparation phase.**

### **Lines to Take**

- To date, Northern Ireland has been respecting the social distancing guidelines. Executive ministers are expected to deliver a firm message at today's daily press conference.
- Heading into the Easter weekend, PSNI is monitoring compliance. It is likely that response will shift towards enforcement, noting a small rise in traffic. An equivalent approach is being taken in Ireland, where yesterday saw checkpoints near the border preventing people travelling to second homes for the Easter weekend.
- Promoting a consistent approach across the four nations, is important, but also important for Northern Ireland to be aware of measures being taken in Ireland

and if possible to be aligned with them. If it's not possible to align, we should clearly communicate why, and support the Executive in managing their own approach.

**Action in paper: Letter from DAs re social distancing**

**Ministers will also want to respond to the recent letter from the three devolved governments about social distancing to set out the process and emphasise the importance of a joined up approach on communicating to the public.**

**Lines to Take**

- It will be vital to coordinate any adjustments to the social distancing guidance with the Irish Government. We cannot have a situation where divergent guidance between the UK Government and Irish Government leaves both politicians and communities in Northern Ireland feeling torn between the two governments' approaches along traditional dividing lines.
- The UK and Ireland do not need to take the same approach. But we should try to take *similar* approaches where practicable. Where there is unavoidable divergence, we should work together to properly communicate that, and support the Executive in managing the approach for Northern Ireland.
- There may well be times when Northern Ireland's approach is better aligned to the Irish Government's approach than to the UK Government's approach, taking into account the practical reality of the island of Ireland. In any event, communication will be key.