

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER
Diane Dodds MLA



From: Diane Dodds MLA
Minister for the Economy

Date: 14 April 2020

To: Robin Swann
Minister for Health

Netherleigh
Massey Avenue
Belfast BT4 2JP
Tel: **I&S**
email: private.office@economy-ni.gov.uk

**DoH EXECUTIVE PAPER FIRST REVIEW THE HEALTH PROTECTION
(CORONAVIRUS, RESTRICTIONS) (NORTHERN IRELAND) REGULATIONS 2020**

Thank you for your draft Executive paper of 12 April 2020 regarding the above.

I fully appreciate the impact that COVID 19 has had on families across Northern Ireland. The daily death toll from this virus is truly horrendous.

The health impacts of the pandemic are rightly positioned as our first concern and as Ministers it is our duty to protect our citizens.

In that regard I am broadly content with the following recommendations:

- i. The requirement in Regulation 2 (2) for a review of the Regulations has been met;
- ii. The Regulations continue to be an appropriate response to the serious and imminent threat to public health which is posed by the incidence and spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) in Northern Ireland;
- iii. the restrictions and requirements imposed by these Regulations continue to be proportionate to what they (the Regulations) seek to achieve, which is a public health response to that infectious disease threat; and
- iv. all of the restrictions and requirements set out in the Regulations continue to be necessary to prevent, protect against, control or provide a public health response to the incidence and spread of coronavirus infection in Northern Ireland.

As an Executive we must also consider the totality of the impacts of this pandemic and ensure our decisions are balanced, proportionate and effective. This means the future of our economy must also feature in the decisions we make.

As Minister for the Economy I need to mitigate against the worst impacts of this unprecedented situation by protecting as many livelihoods as possible, as the economic impact can also have knock on effects on broader health issues.

You will be aware of the shutdown in global economic activity. Commentators, including the Office of Budget Responsibility, are now anticipating massive falls in GDP during quarter two of this year. It is estimated that every month of the shutdown brings a full year's loss of GDP of 2% or 3%. So every month of lockdown is the equivalent of a normal recession on its own.

Recessions have major health consequences. It is often the case that those areas that are hit hardest are those that are the most deprived, have older populations and older industrial structures. They are precisely the kind of areas least able to withstand a devastating recession.

At this stage in our fight against Covid-19 I wanted to ensure that these important economic impacts are also part of the Executive considerations and response.

In this context I would be grateful for more detail on:

- How the recommendations in the paper have adapted and responded to the revised modelling which we received last week;
- Your assessment of how sector specific guidance on workplace distancing could be deployed to bring these sectors, for example construction, back to work in safe conditions without reversing the progress made; and
- The impact on the quality and scale of other key health service interventions, (e.g. cancer treatments) due to the expansion and prioritisation of Covid-19 treatment.

The need to also consider the areas outlined above does not deflect from my view that the health impacts of the pandemic are rightly positioned as our first concern.

I am copying this to the Attorney General, Departmental Solicitor's Office, First Legislative Counsel and to Executive Secretariat.

Personal Data

DIANE DODDS MLA
Minister for the Economy