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Cc: [Name Redacted]@cabinetoffice.gov.uk, Zainab Agha
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[Name Redacted]
Subject: Actions from SoSNI/Simon Coveney Chat this morning
Date: Tue, 5 Jan 2021 12:48:06 +0000

Hi Tom,

Our SoS has just talked with [Name Redacted] following an action from yesterday's CDL/DAs call to assess opportunities for alignment between the UK and Ireland on International Travel. I've inserted a readout below.

Three actions came out of the call which I'm hoping you can help with, and make sure that I'm not stepping on anyone's toes in Cabinet Office. In particular, I'm hoping you can update us on any plans for a negative PCR test being required:

- For international travel
- For air travel within the UK

Please also note action 2, asking that we engage at an official level with Irish Government to assess their next steps and the potential for joined up comms and/or policy on international travel.

I've cc'd FCDO colleagues and TO colleagues to make sure they're up to date on this.

The actions in full are:

- Point:** Irish Govt are looking to discuss international travel at a Cabinet tomorrow. Passengers travelling to Ireland may require a negative PCR test to get in (law not guidance). This would mean that GB people could travel to Ireland in the same way as other passengers.
Action: I'll talk with BE Dublin about contacting DfA for the latest news on this. If we get a clear steer it's worth considering how this might be communicated, CO would probably lead on this, SoSNI raised the idea of a joint statement on travel with Ireland.
- Point:** Covid testing between UK regions might be brought in (SoSNI), we're unsure how much this was a spontaneous remark and how much it reflects UKG planning. DUP may have issue with this. SoSNI also raised that tests for people travelling to the UK from abroad could be brought in.
Action: I'll check in with Tom Lindsell's team in the C-19 taskforce on this, confirming if this is under consideration. [underway!]
- Point:** The idea of people moving from Belfast to Dublin (and vice versa) was raised. A test for people travelling from GB to NI could reduce this problem. We'll need to consider this after the two actions above.

The full readout is below:

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- 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.

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