



Northern
Ireland
Office

COBR COVID-19(M)(21)

24 NOVEMBER 2020

16:00-17:00

STEER

- The first agenda item is a COVID-19 situation report. We expect CDL to lead this and other sections.
- **The second item is to discuss plans for Christmas Planning. We expect CDL to lead, and expect that you may be asked to update on UKG engagement with the Irish Government. The Executive have agreed at a high level to the proposals. If there is agreement, plans could be announced this evening.**
- The third item on communications is likely to cover any plans for a X-UK announcement on the winter plan.

Agenda

1. Situation Report
2. Winter Plan: Christmas
3. Communications

1. Situation Report

Steer: We expect you will largely be in listening mode for this item. There will be an update on the situation in the UK, which has seen a large drop in cases in the past 2 days. Cases in NI have also continued to fall to around 150 cases per 100,000 - having stalled at around 200 for over a week.

We do not anticipate that you will need to make any point in this section.

2. Winter Plan: Christmas

Steer: We expect CDL to lead, and expect that you may be asked to update on UKG engagement with the Irish Government. The Executive has now agreed at a high level to the plans, and we expect that they will be able to agree at COBR. You may wish to draw out that UKG has been flexible, considered NI specific concerns and adapted plans with this in mind. It is worth noting that dFM will not want to participate in any joint press conference to announce this policy but would consider a joint statement.

Points to make

- [On NI Executive progress/discussions] I am pleased with the joint approach achieved last week and was happy to see the Executive come together quickly to give their support to the principles for UK-wide proposals.
- I am also pleased to see that the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland have been considered, with extra time for travellers to and from Northern Ireland to reach their destination.
- [On Irish Engagement] The NI Executive were clear in their ask for the UK Government to engage with the Irish Government. I have continued my close engagement with the Irish Foreign Minister and he appreciated early discussion of the UK Government's proposals as the Irish Cabinet prepares to discuss their own approach to Christmas with meetings taking place today and again on Friday.
- I will continue to facilitate discussions with the Executive and Irish Government to ensure measures are coherent on the island of Ireland.
- [On NI Case Rates and restrictions] I welcome the recent decrease in case rates in Northern Ireland and was pleased to see the Executive agreed on a way forward last week with minimal delay.

Background

The high-level principles include:

- Easing of national restrictions for 5 days from 23-27 December. Travellers to and from NI will be able to travel the day before or after.
- 'Christmas bubbles' of 3 households
- Travel across the UK to facilitate families being together for Christmas (students should be returning home before this point).

Points which may be further discussed at COBR are:

- The definition of a household, in Wales a household might include a family and a person living alone (extended household). UKG have proposed that each nation will be able to define 'household' to account for specific circumstances.

Engagement with Ireland pre-announcement

UKG engaged with Irish Government yesterday to discuss the upcoming Christmas Planning meeting. As the Executive has now agreed to the high-level principles for Christmas planning, we expect NIE to take forward further engagement with the Irish Government on policy details. UKG will wish to stay in contact with the Irish Government as their Christmas plans are announced this week. Irish Government were appreciative of the notice given and indicated that they were slightly behind the UK Government, and that:

- Irish Cabinet will meet on Tuesday and Friday to discuss December and Christmas. For December in general, a move from level 5 restrictions to level 3 may be considered. See **Annex A** for a summary of levels in Ireland. Level 3 allows dining in restaurants and visits from one household to another.
- On Wednesday and Thursday, public health officials will also meet to decide what to recommend. Simon Coveney indicated that he would consider an approach similar to that of the UK if scientific advice allowed.

3. Communications

Steer: The third item on communications is likely to cover any plans for a X-UK announcement on the winter plan. Subject to agreement UKG recommends:

- Announcing the policy on a cross-UK basis;
- Work between communications teams to prepare the announcement of the policy and agree the timing. A proposed draft statement has been drafted.
- Collaborating between legal teams to support drafting of legislation;
- Committing to continued collaboration on any mitigations that may be required to manage the potential risk.
- Publishing the cross-UK guidance alongside any announcement;
- There will also be a UK-wide communications campaign which will accompany any announcement and will be shared with DAs, encouraging compliance and emphasising four-nations alignment. NIO comms will update separately on this and flag any issues. We are in touch with NICS to resolve any issues.

As above, a joint press conference was considered but is unlikely as dFM has expressed a preference not to join; but to consider a joint statement instead, once a draft text has been circulated.

Annex A: Levels of restrictions in Ireland

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
 Visitors	10 from 3 households	6 from 2 or 3 households	1 other household	No visitors permitted	No visitors permitted
 Gatherings	50 outside your home or garden	6 indoor 15 outdoor	No social or family gatherings	No indoor gatherings	No Except funerals or weddings
 Weddings	100 people can attend	50 people can attend	25 people can attend	6 people can attend	6 people can attend
 Indoor events	100 Up to 100 can attend indoor gatherings	50 But up to 100 in larger venues	No indoor gatherings	No indoor gatherings	No indoor gatherings
 Sports fixtures	100 indoor 200 outdoor	50 indoor 100 outdoor	No matches or events (except elite sport)	No matches or events (except elite sport)	No matches or events
 Bars, cafes & restaurants	Open with protective measures in place	Open 6 people from up to 3 households	Open. Take away or delivery. Outdoor dining only. Max 15 patrons	Open. Take away or delivery. Outdoor dining only. Max 15 patrons	Open. Take away food or delivery only.
 Wet pubs	Open	Open Groups of six from 3 households	Open Additional restrictions	Open outdoor only limited to a max of 15	Only offer takeaway or delivery service
 Domestic travel	No restrictions	No restrictions	Stay in your county/region apart from work/education/essential purposes	Stay in your county/region apart from work/education/essential purposes	Stay at home except to exercise within 5km from home
 Public transport	Travel off-peak hours or walk/cycle, if possible	Peak hours essential workers/ purposes only; 50% capacity	All hours essential workers/ purposes only; 50% capacity	Avoid public transport; essential workers/ purposes only; 25% capacity	Avoid public transport; essential workers/ purposes only; 25% capacity

Graphic: Paul Scott/IRISH TIMES GRAPHICS

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