

MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE MEETING: 1 APRIL 2021

MEETING CONDUCTED VIA ZOOM

Present: First Minister (Chair)
deputy First Minister (Chair)
Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Minister for Communities
Minister for the Economy
Minister of Education
Minister of Finance
Minister of Health
Minister for Infrastructure
Minister of Justice

In attendance: Junior Minister, TEO (Mr. Lyons)
Junior Minister, TEO (Mr. Kearney)

Interim Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service
Head of Executive and Central Advisory Division
Dr Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer
Professor Ian Young, Chief Scientific Adviser
Ms Karen Pearson, Director, EU Relations, TEO
Attorney General for Northern Ireland

INTRODUCTION

The First Minister chaired agenda items 1 – 4.

AGENDA ITEM 1

Minutes of previous meetings

E (M) (21) 22

Minutes of the Executive Meeting of 25 March 2021

1. The Executive agreed the minutes of the Executive meeting of 25 March 2021.

AGENDA ITEM 2

COVID-19 Update

2. The Minister of Health provided an update on, and the Executive discussed, matters relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, including hospital admissions; numbers in ICU; and the vaccination programme roll-out, including use of the SSE Arena, community pharmacies and GPs.
3. The Chief Scientific Adviser gave a presentation on, and the Executive discussed, statistical data relating to the pandemic, including the R number; positivity rates; testing capacity; incidence in local government areas; work under way to develop modelling to incorporate the impact of the vaccination programme; and collation of information on the impact of the vaccine on the level of outbreaks and mortality in care homes.
4. The Minister of Health reiterated that the vaccine programme was an additional tool in the pathway out of restrictions, but that there was still a strong requirement for adherence to the existing mitigations.

AGENDA ITEM 3

Actions from previous meeting

5. The First Minister advised that the action log had been circulated.

AGENDA ITEM 4

COVID Management

Executive COVID Taskforce

6. The Secretary to the Executive provided an update on the work of the Executive COVID Taskforce. She advised that a Dashboard briefing pack was being

developed to help inform Ministers of the factors considered by the Taskforce in drafting advice and recommendations for the Executive on easing of restrictions and steps towards recovery; and that this would be shared with Ministers ahead of the 15 April review meeting.

7. The Minister of Health reinforced the need for strong messaging in relation to decisions taken by the Executive, and relaxations now in place.

E (21) 077 (C) Pathway out of restrictions – Proposals for Relaxation

8. The First Minister introduced, and the Executive discussed, this paper.
9. **The meeting was adjourned at 11.55 a.m.** to enable Ministers to attend the Assembly.

10. The meeting was reconvened at 2.40 p.m.

11. The First Minister advised of her concern regarding proposals for numbers allowed to attend funerals, and the credibility of the Executive, in the context of the PPS decision on matters relating to the funeral of Bobby Storey announced earlier in the week. The Minister of Justice advised of prosecutorial confusion caused by lack of consistency in regulations at that time relating to attendance at funerals.
12. The Attorney General joined the meeting, and advised that she would be content to work with the Departmental Solicitor's Office and the Department of Health officials with a view to aligning the legal and health advice perspectives within the regulations.
13. Following discussion, the Executive:

ratified the following decisions coming into effect from 12 April:
 - a. permitting all pupils to return to school;

- b. increasing the numbers who could meet outdoors in a garden from six to 10 (including children) from two households;
- c. removal of the 'stay at home' provision in the legislation; moving to a stay local and work from home message;
- d. allowing contactless 'click and collect' for all non-essential retail;
- e. allowing outdoor sports training to resume by sports clubs affiliated with recognised sports Governing Bodies, in small groups of up to 15 people but with all indoor spaces closed except essential toilet facilities.

14. The Executive also reached the following decisions, which would also come into operation on 12 April 2021:

- 1. to permit potential marriage and civil partnership customers to view the facilities of venues used for marriages and civil partnerships, such as hotels and other venues, restricted to a maximum of four customers per visit.
- 2. to reopen outdoor retail, which comprised:
 - i. New & Used Car Retailers;
 - ii. Retailers of Light Motor Vehicles, Lorries & Trailers;
 - iii. Retailers of Caravans or Motorhomes;
 - iv. Retailers of Agricultural or Other Large Machinery;
 - v. Garden Centres, Plant Nurseries; and
 - vi. Car Washes.
- 3. To extend the provision for up to 15 people (including coaches), as previously agreed, to also include structured outdoor sports training organised by clubs/individuals affiliated to recognised sports governing bodies or representative organisations for sport and physical activity.

15. The Executive also agreed:

From 12 April, to increase the number permitted to attend marriages, civil partnerships and funerals, informed by a risk assessment for the venue; and in advance of that, to increase the number permitted to attend marriages, civil partnerships and funerals to 50, with effect from a date to be agreed following

engagement by officials. This number to include officiants; ushers and stewards who did not attend the service were not included in the permitted number.

16. The First Minister recorded her dissent with the delay in agreeing timing for the proposed decision to move from 25 to 50 people attending funerals, with a further subsequent amendment to a risk assessment approach, advising that it should have been possible to deliver any required change to the regulations in a faster timeframe.

17. Ministers expressed concern around any suggestion that insufficient NICS resources were available to carry out the necessary drafting work to make the required amendments to regulations to deliver on the Executive's agreed approach within the required time line; and the time-scales in the approach to decision making on easement of restrictions.

18. It was agreed that the Secretary to the Executive would review the resourcing issue and advise the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the ability to progress amendments to the regulations.

19. The Minister of Education requested, and the Executive agreed, that sports in schools could be included in the provision relating to structured outdoor sports training, with regulations to be amended accordingly to reflect this.

The deputy First Minister chaired the remaining items on the agenda

AGENDA ITEM 5

Other issues requiring Executive agreement

E (21) 076 Public Expenditure: Final Budget 2021-22

20. The Minister of Finance introduced, and the Executive discussed, this paper.

21. The Minister for the Economy clarified that payment to the Large Tourism Hospitality Business Support Grant, with a funding requirement of £2 million per

week, would be continued while restrictions remained in place, to be tapered off as required with the easing of restrictions. The Minister of Finance advised this funding was being provided from COVID funds, and that the situation would be kept under review.

Irrelevant & Sensitive

24. Following discussion, the Executive:

Irrelevant & Sensitive

Irrelevant & Sensitive

E (21) 078

Cross Departmental Group on Building Safety

Irrelevant & Sensitive

AGENDA ITEM 6

Note of Urgent Decision

29. The Executive noted the following urgent decision, taken in accordance with paragraph 2.14 of the Ministerial Code.

E (UP) (21) 08 Establishment of a Cancer Services Support Fund, a Mental Health Services Support Fund, a one off award to HSC Charitable Trust Funds and Additional Funding for Hospices

30. The Minister of Health advised that he would provide Ministers with a briefing paper on how the funding referred to in his Urgent Decision request would be allocated.

AGENDA ITEM 7

Any Other Business

Department for Communities – outstanding Executive papers

Irrelevant & Sensitive

Ports, Climate Change

Irrelevant & Sensitive

Ratification of Decisions

34. At the request of the Chief Medical Officer, it was agreed that decisions taken by the Executive at its meeting of 25 March in relation to easements of some restrictions, were now ratified for implementation.

Date of next meeting

35. The next scheduled Executive meeting in COVID/departamental format would be notified in due course.