

**MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE MEETING: 22 DECEMBER 2021**

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

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

Dame Brenda King, Attorney General for Northern Ireland

Sir Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer  
Professor Ian Young, Chief Scientific Adviser

Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service  
Head of Executive and Central Advisory Division

**INTRODUCTION**

The deputy First Minister chaired agenda items 1 - 3. The First Minister chaired the remaining items.

AGENDA ITEM 1

**Minutes from previous meetings**

**E (M) (21) 56          Minutes of the Executive Meeting of 16 December 2021**

1. The Executive agreed the minutes of the Executive meeting of 16 December 2021, as amended.

AGENDA ITEM 2

## **COVID report**

### R paper update / Omicron modelling

2. The Chief Scientific Advisor provided an update on the current position, noting a substantial rise in case numbers. Testing was at its highest level since the pandemic began; test positivity has plateaued at 6%. The largest increase in cases had been seen in the 18-30 age group, and this was largely the result of the Omicron variant. Overall, Omicron now accounts for over 50% of new cases. Hospital admissions had declined. In terms of modelling, there remained a degree of uncertainty in terms of hospital admissions in the coming weeks. The CSA noted that Omicron would need to pose substantially less risk of hospitalisation compared to delta in order to avoid a severe impact on hospitals during January.

### AGENDA ITEM 3

#### **E (21) 260 (C)**

#### **ECT written update: Winter Planning – Impact of Omicron Variant**

3. The deputy First Minister introduced this paper prepared by the ECT, noting that it detailed a package of measures which, subject to Executive agreement, could be deployed from after Christmas to respond to the risk presented by the spread of the Omicron variant.
4. The Secretary to the Executive outlined, and Ministers discussed, the proposed measures in the paper. The Minister of Health noted that there may be a requirement to introduce further restrictions irrespective of the decisions taken at today's meeting, depending on the emerging data in relation to the Omicron variant. Ministers acknowledged that the situation would remain volatile and would have to be kept under continuous review.
5. The financial implications of the measures and the need to agree a package of support to those businesses affected were noted.

## ANNEX A

### Summary of Proposed Interventions

Sector	Proposed intervention
Home & community	<p>In household settings, guidance should strongly encourage that mixing should be reduced to a maximum of 3 households to take effect from 27 December.</p> <p>The guidance will treat returning students as part of their original household</p>
Workplace	<p>Guidance will be further strengthened to emphasise the importance working from home where possible. 27 December.</p> <p>There will be a legal requirement for businesses to take reasonable measures to achieve 2m social distancing in office spaces or, where this cannot be achieved, to provide alternative mitigations. 27 December.</p> <p>Guidance will strongly encourage the use of regular workplace testing. 27 December.</p>
Face coverings	<p>Amend the exemption to remove the 'without severe distress' element. 27 December with grace period to 7 January</p> <p>If exempt, the onus is on individual to prove. 27 December with a grace period to 7<sup>th</sup> January</p> <p>Statutory duty on businesses to take reasonable measures to promote compliance with face coverings requirements. 27 December with a grace period to 7<sup>th</sup> January.</p>
Retail & hospitality	<p>Legal duty on retail businesses to take all reasonable steps to minimize transmission of spread of Covid. 27 December.</p> <p>To be revisited on 30<sup>th</sup> December for other businesses.</p>
All hospitality	<p>Rule of 6 (or 10 persons from a single household) from 0600hrs on 27 December. (Confirm applies indoor only) Does not apply to weddings or civil partnership celebrations.</p> <p>Requirement to be seated from 0600 on 27 December. (Confirm applies indoor only)</p> <p>Prohibition on dancing from 0600hrs on 26<sup>th</sup> December. (Confirm applies indoor only) (Does not apply to wedding or civil partnership celebrations)</p>
Nightclubs	To close from 0600hrs on 26 December. This would not prevent premises pivoting to operate as public houses if they chose to do that.
Events	All indoor standing events to be prohibited from 0600hrs on 26 <sup>th</sup> December.

Sector	Proposed intervention
	<p>All other indoor seated and outdoor events to be revisited on 30<sup>th</sup> December.</p> <p>In the meantime strong guidance on use of LFD tests before attending.</p> <p>Strong guidance on encouraging face coverings at these events</p> <p>Strong guidance to discourage car sharing and encourage own household transport.</p>

Restrictions to be reviewed in line with the normal timetable for review of all restrictions.