

MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE MEETING: 16 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)

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

Patricia Donnelly, Head of NI Vaccination Programme

INTRODUCTION

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

AGENDA ITEM 1

Minutes from previous meetings

E (M) (21) 53 Minutes of the Executive Meeting of 2 December 2021

1. The Executive agreed the minutes of the Executive meeting of 2 December 2021

E (M) (21) 54 Minutes of the Executive Meeting of 9 December 2021

7. The Minister of Education outlined the preventative measures being taken by schools.

Vaccination Programme

8. Patricia Donnelly provided an update on the vaccination programme. She outlined the accelerated model for delivering the booster vaccine, including: GP practices providing vaccinations to over 18s where they have capacity; Trusts utilising larger venues for vaccine centres; and Community Pharmacies delivering to over 18s. Ministers placed on record their thanks to Patricia and all those involved in the vaccination programme.

R paper update / Omicron modelling

9. The Chief Scientific Advisor provided an update on the current position in relation to the delta variant, noting a steady level of cases and a slow decline in test positivity and hospital inpatients. He outlined the position in relation to the Omicron variant, advising that it was much more transmissible than delta (with a projected doubling time of around 2.4 days) and that without further intervention cases could rise to over 10k per day by the New Year. He noted that it was still not known the extent to which these cases will lead to hospital admissions, but suggested Omicron would need to be around 90% less severe than delta not to result in an increase in admissions. He provided some outline modelling and advised that in order for the 'pessimistic' scenario to be avoided additional measures may be necessary in addition to the accelerated booster vaccination programme. The Chief Medical Officer advised of the importance of introducing additional measures immediately after Christmas, and noted that the Health Service was likely to come under severe pressure.
10. Ministers discussed the factors involved in determining the introduction of additional measures to combat Omicron. The First Minister noted that the Executive would meet next Wednesday to consider additional data and discuss possible additional measures.