

**MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE MEETING: 9 DECEMBER 2021**

**Present:** First Minister (Chair)  
deputy First Minister (Chair)  
Minister for Communities  
Minister of Education  
Minister for the Economy  
Minister of Finance  
Minister of Health  
Minister for Infrastructure  
Minister of Justice

**Apologies:** Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

**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 First Minister chaired agenda items 1 - 2. The deputy First Minister chaired the remaining item.

**AGENDA ITEM 1**

**ECT Update**

1. The Secretary to the Executive noted that the ECT update paper had been circulated. She highlighted ongoing engagements at official and Ministerial level with key stakeholders in the other administrations and the hospitality, events and retail sectors, and advised that engagement was planned around enforcement and compliance with the PSNI and local government. She outlined the Plan B measures

announced by the Prime Minister to address the Omicron variant. The Secretary to the Executive noted that the ECT's Cross Departmental Working Group plans to commission work across all Departments to scenario plan the types of further measures which could be considered if, or when, Omicron takes hold in Northern Ireland.

## AGENDA ITEM 2

### **COVID report**

2. The Minister of Health, Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Advisor provided an update on the Omicron variant. The Minister of Health noted that the recent decline in hospital admissions had levelled out, and advised that the current restrictions should be sufficient if there was widespread compliance. The CMO reiterated the importance of adherence to and enforcement of the current measures and restrictions ahead of the Omicron variant becoming the dominant strain.
3. The CSA advised that Omicron spreads more easily than the delta variant, and noted evidence that the doubling time of Omicron could currently be between two and three days. He advised that Omicron would likely result in a steep rise in infections, and noted more data was required to determine both the extent to which it will lead to an increase in hospital admissions, and to understand how effective the booster vaccine might be in protecting against infection. He advised that it was unlikely Omicron could be prevented from becoming the dominant variant by sometime in January, but that its spread could be delayed.
4. Ministers discussed a number of issues, including support for healthcare workers, surge planning, the importance of consistent and coherent messaging from the Executive and statutory agencies with responsibilities for compliance and enforcement.

## AGENDA ITEM 3