

MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE MEETING: 10 JUNE 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

INTRODUCTION

The First Minister chaired agenda items 1 - 4.

AGENDA ITEM 1

Minutes of previous meetings

E (M) (21) 32 Minutes of the Executive Meeting of 3 June 2021

1. The Executive agreed the minutes of the Executive meeting of 3 June 2021.

Matters arising

LPP/LAP

AGENDA ITEM 2

Covid-19 Report by the Minister of Health

4. The Minister of Health gave an update on the vaccination programme and the number of positive cases of the Delta variant, noting that community testing had been used in Northern Ireland for the first time in response to the rise in cases in Kilkeel. He advised that the test, trace and protect system demonstrated an increased number of contacts per positive case.
5. The Chief Scientific Adviser gave a presentation on, and the Executive discussed, statistical data relating to the pandemic, including: the recent rise in positive cases; the age profile of positive cases, noting the significant rise in cases amongst those in the 18-30 age range but lower rates of infection in largely vaccinated age groups; incidence in local government areas; and case number comparisons with England, Scotland and Wales.
6. The CSA outlined some concerns in relation to the Delta variant, including that emerging data demonstrated it was more transmissible, resulted in a greater risk of hospitalisation, and that the Astra Zeneca and Pfizer vaccines afford less protection compared with the Alpha variant.

AGENDA ITEM 3

Actions from previous meetings

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

AGENDA ITEM 4

COVID Management

Appointment of the Head of the Civil Service

8. The Secretary to the Executive advised the Executive of the appointment of Dr Jayne Brady as the new Head of the Civil Service following a successful recruitment process. Jayne's start date was still to be agreed but was likely to be towards the end of the summer. The First Minister recorded her thanks to the Secretary to the Executive for the role she had played as interim Head of the Civil Service.

Executive COVID Taskforce – update

9. The Secretary to the Executive advised that the ECT dashboard and written update had been circulated to Ministers. She noted the Chief Economist had identified some encouraging signs of economic improvement in recent weeks, and advised that a dedicated Executive meeting to consider recovery will be scheduled for 22 June. She also advised that while the scope of the inquiry was still to be agreed, including NI participation, current and former Ministers would likely be called to give evidence to the planned UK wide public inquiry into the response to COVID-19, and that the inquiry would likely consider the response in NI care homes.

E (21) 135 (C) Pathway out of Restrictions – Proposals for Relaxation – Indoor/outdoor gatherings, household/bubbles, close contact services, licenced & unlicensed premises, live music/dancing

10. The First Minister introduced this paper.

11. In response to queries from the Minister of Education, the Secretary to the Executive indicated that further consideration would be given to restarting overnight residential stays for uniformed youth organisations, and to whether live music would be permitted in indoor settings in schools.

12. The Executive agreed:

- the proposed dates for the following relaxations with ratification dates of 17 June and 15 July,
- and recommendations in relation to a safer travelling messaging, and the use of LFTs.

From 21 June (subject to ratification on 17 June):

- a) To permit indoor gatherings in a domestic setting of ten people from no more than two households. If one household has ten members, the maximum is increased to 15 from no more than two households. (Does not include children 12 and under).
- b) To permit outdoor gatherings in a domestic setting of 15 people from an unlimited number of households. (Does not include children 12 and under).
- c) Remove the linked households/bubble provision.
- d) To permit outdoor gatherings to the maximum allowed as per risk assessment for venue across all sectors. Over 30 people must be an organised gathering and would require a risk assessment.
- e) Enable close contact services to open without appointments but with remaining mitigations.
- f) In licenced and unlicenced premises which provide or sell food and drink (whether or not including intoxicating liquor) for consumption on the premises, permit live

music at background or ambient levels; the volume must be such to enable visitors to conduct conversation at normal loudness of speech. No dancing.

- g) At outdoor events permit live music and dancing, without restriction to background or ambient levels.
- h) Permit live music, without restriction to background or ambient levels for rehearsal, recording or performance purposes in concert venues, theatres and other indoor venues which, for the duration of the rehearsal, recording or performance are set aside for that purpose. No dancing for audience but permitted as part of performance.
- i) Permit live music, without restriction to background or ambient levels for “other indoor venues” - can include a space within larger premises – for example a function room or conference suite within a hotel. In such circumstances access to the venue must be effectively controlled and managed and the venue must be sufficiently isolated from the rest of the premises to ensure that the volume of the music in the venue does not breach ambient or background levels in other parts of the premises. No dancing for audience but permitted as part of performance.

Note - entry to performances for audiences will be by ticket only. Tickets must be purchased in advance of the performance. Audiences for indoor events must have allocated seating and must remain seated (unless using facilities).

- j) Regulate for social distancing at minimum 1 meter for live music related activity in indoor seated venues and encourage social distancing in guidance for all outdoor events.
- k) EIS to prepare messaging around safer travel options.
- l) Return to decisions on the use of Lateral Flow Tests when the report from the learning events and pilots elsewhere are available.

From 1 July 2021 (subject to ratification on 17 June)

- m) A restart of overnight residentials for youth services as part of the continued phased reopening of youth services to facilitate delivery of the summer youth programme as part of the continued phased reopening of youth services.

From 22 July 2021 (Subject to ratification on 15 July)

- n) Remove any restrictions on live music and dancing in licenced and unlicenced premises which provide or sell food and drink (whether or not including intoxicating liquor) for consumption on the premises.

**E (21) 137 (C) Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations
(Northern Ireland) 2021: Third Review of the Need for the
Restrictions and Requirements**

13. The Minister of Health introduced this paper.

14. The Executive agree that:

- i. the requirement in regulation 2 for a review of the need for the restrictions and requirements in the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 (“the 2021 Regulations”) has been duly met;
- ii. the current restrictions and requirements in the 2021 Regulations, as amended, are at this point in time an appropriate and necessary response to the serious and imminent threat to public health which is posed by the incidence and spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) in Northern Ireland;
- iii. overall the restrictions and requirements imposed by these Regulations continue to be proportionate to what the Regulations seek to achieve, which is a public health response to that infectious disease threat;
- iv. the regulations will be reviewed again in 4 weeks’ time.

COVID Any other business

Live music event (Europa Hotel)

15. The Minister of Justice expressed concern that a live music event was scheduled to take place in the Europa Hotel on Saturday 12 June, in contravention of current restrictions.

16. The Minister for Communities advised that her department had explained to the hotel that the concert should not take place, and the Secretary to the Executive explained that there had been correspondence (which would be shared with Ministers) between her office and the hotel and also by DfC officials, to representatives of the performer, making clear that the concert would not serve as a test event. The Secretary to the Executive explained that discussions were ongoing between the hotel, Belfast City Council and the PSNI to make clear that the concert should not go ahead.

The deputy First Minister chaired the remainder of the agenda.

AGENDA ITEM 5

Other issues requiring Executive agreement

Irrelevant & Sensitive

Irrelevant & Sensitive

AGENDA ITEM 6

Any Other Business

Irrelevant & Sensitive

Irrelevant & Sensitive

Tributes to departing Executive Ministers

27. The deputy First Minister and other Executive Ministers placed on record their thanks and best wishes to the First Minister, Minister of Education, Minister for the Economy and Junior Minister Lyons as they left the Executive. The interim Head of the Civil Service placed on record her thanks, on behalf of the civil service, to the departing Ministers.

28. The First Ministers thanked Ministers for their kind words, and placed on record her thanks to the many civil servants she had worked with in her time as an Executive Minister.

Date of next meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Executive would take place on Thursday 17 June 2021.