Covid-19 Update Friday 20th March 2020

This afternoon saw the third daily consecutive Press Conference hosted by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, who were flanked by Minster for Communities Deirdre Hargey, Minister for Infrastructure, Nichola Mallon and Minster for Economy, Diane Dodds.

Deputy First Minster Michelle O'Neill said government were *'ramping up their response to the crisis,'* with key issues relating to schools and energy being addressed.

At a UK wide level, Prime Minster Johnson announced important details relating to; the closure of cafes, pubs and restaurants (except for take-away food) and the UK government's commitment to pay wages up to £2,500 a month. See further detail below.

## Energy

- Economy Minister Diane Dodds says her department has taken steps to ensure NI's energy supply is not disrupted.
- She stated, "We have activated all of the necessary emergency systems to ensure that our energy supply is safe,"
- The minster says she hopes to announce measures next week to help "people who are more vulnerable to energy costs at a very difficult time."

## Workers / Employees

- The UK government will pay 80% of wages for employees not working, up to £2,500 a month, the chancellor says.
- Chancellor Rishi Sunak also said he would defer the next quarter of VAT payments for firms, until the end of June.
- It represents a £30bn injection into the economy.

## Cafes, pubs and restaurants

- The PM Boris Johnson says the government is strengthening the measures announced earlier this week.
- He said he was telling cafes, pubs, bars and restaurants (except for take-away food) to close tonight as soon as they reasonably can and not reopen tomorrow."
- Places like nightclubs, theatres, cinemas and gyms will also follow suit.

## Education

- Deputy First Minster says 'schools, as we know them are closed. There is no disjoint between myself and the Education Minister on this issue.'
- DFM continued, 'the situation is adaptable, we will address the situation again when pupils of key workers turn up at schools on Monday to be looked after.'

## Health

- As of 2pm on Friday 20 March, testing has resulted in nine new positive cases, bringing the total number of confirmed cases in Northern Ireland to 86. The total number of tests completed in Northern Ireland is 1,816. In ROI the current total of confirmed cases is 557.
- As Northern Ireland prepares for the Covid-19 surge, a concerted push is underway to recruit former health professionals back into the health and social care workforce.
- The measures together have the potential to add over 5,000 to the HSC workforce.
- Healthcare worker pay which was deducted due to recent strikes will be reinstated.
- On Thursday night, Health Minister Robin Swann said he has reached out to manufacturers across Northern Ireland to help produce more ventilators. Concerns have been raised that there are not enough to treat the number of people officials believe could fall seriously ill.
- The Department of Health said that in the case of an 80% infection rate, the NI death toll could be in the region of 14,000.

## Transport

- Infrastructure Minister, Nichola Mallon, has approved a reduction in the level of public transport provision as a response to the COVID-19 outbreak.
- From Monday 23 March, Translink Bus Services (Ulsterbus, Metro and Glider) will operate a reduced service timetable and NI Railways will operate a Saturday timetable. Translink is also reducing the service timetable for cross-border coach and Enterprise rail services.

## Goods

- Infrastructure Minister Nichola Mallon has confirmed that domestic drivers' hours' legislation has now been temporarily relaxed to enable retailers to deliver food and vital supplies to customers.
- In addition to the recent changes regarding deliveries to supermarkets and shops, this new legislation will relax drivers' hour's rules for home deliveries until 2 April, enabling the community, those having to stay indoors, work remotely or self-isolate to get supplies delivered to their door.