

North South Ministerial Council  
Joint Secretariat



An Chomhairle Aireachta  
Thuaidh Theas  
An Chomhrúnaíocht

# **NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

## **HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY MEETING**

### **NSMC JOINT SECRETARIAT OFFICES, ARMAGH AND BY VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**26 MARCH 2021**

## **JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ**

1. The twenty-third North South Ministerial Council Health and Food Safety meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh and by videoconference on 26 March 2021. The meeting was attended by Robin Swann MLA, Minister of Health, Declan Kearney MLA, Junior Minister, Stephen Donnelly TD, Minister for Health and Roderic O’Gorman TD, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Minister Swann chaired the meeting.

### **RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

2. Ministers re-iterated their appreciation to all those who have played a part in the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular the health and social care workers who have led the front line response. The Council received a briefing from the Chief Medical Officers on the current public health situation. The Council discussed the ongoing response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the continued close and productive cooperation that has taken place between Health Ministers, Chief Medical Officers and health administrations in both jurisdictions in delivering an effective public health response.
3. The Council welcomed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between both Departments of Health to address co-operation and mutual support in critical care delivery. They noted the ongoing co-operation with regard to contact tracing, including the established process in place for the sharing of the necessary details between the Public Health Agency and the Health Service Executive.

4. Ministers welcomed the ongoing collaboration between the two jurisdictions on the further development of the proximity app and noted the ongoing discussions between the two Administrations on a data sharing agreement in relation to passengers arriving into each jurisdiction. They noted that officials from both jurisdictions will continue to consider the relevant learnings from the various phases of the pandemic and exchange views to foster commonality in their approach, where possible, and provide a progress update at a future NSMC Health Meeting.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF UK WITHDRAWAL FROM THE EU**

5. Ministers discussed the implications of UK withdrawal from the EU and the Council noted the update provided on the matter.

## **REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME**

6. Ministers welcomed the progress made to date in implementing the Council's current work programme in the Health sector and noted that Departments of Health have identified additional areas which have potential for further development and collaboration between the health authorities in both jurisdictions.
7. The Council also noted the proposed revisions to the work programme in the area of Child Protection which covers a three year period to 2024.
8. The Council agreed the updated work programme and noted that work to ensure the work programme reflects the priorities of each Administration will continue, and that a further draft revised work programme will be presented for consideration at a future NSMC Health sectoral meeting.

## **HEALTH AND CHILD PROTECTION**

### **HEALTH PROMOTION, SUICIDE PREVENTION AND OTHER COOPERATION UPDATES**

9. Ministers noted the continued progress on the development and implementation of strategies to prevent the harm related to alcohol and drug misuse in both jurisdictions. They also noted the successful enactment of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018, which is designed to address the health impacts of harmful consumption of alcohol in Ireland by reducing consumption levels, by delaying the age at which young people begin to drink and by regulating the sale and supply of alcohol products.
10. The Council noted the Department of Health (NI) consultation "*Making Life Better – Preventing Harm and Empowering Recovery: A Strategic Framework to Tackle the Harm from Substance Use*".
11. Ministers noted the potential for further collaboration on issues connected with alcohol and drug use and the developments in relation to obesity prevention policy in both jurisdictions.
12. They also noted that following the UK withdrawal from the EU, tobacco and related products on sale in Northern Ireland must continue to comply with the requirements of the EU Tobacco Products Directive.

13. Ministers noted the update on suicide prevention initiatives in both jurisdictions including, joint working on the Self Harm Registry and the continued collaboration between the Public Health Agency and the National Office for Suicide Prevention in working with the GAA/IRFU/Ulster rugby on a health and wellbeing project.
14. The Council noted the updates on the All-Island Congenital Heart Disease Network and the North/South Living Donor Exchange Kidney Transplant Service.

### **CANCER AND HEALTH RESEARCH CO-OPERATION**

15. The Council noted that over 700 cross-border patients have received treatment at the North West Cancer Centre since November 2016, demonstrating how health cooperation delivers real benefits to citizens.
16. Ministers noted that a renewed Memorandum of Understanding on the Ireland-Northern Ireland-National Cancer Institute Cancer Consortium was agreed by both Health Ministers and the Director of the US National Cancer Institute on 16 March 2021.
17. They also noted the work of the US-Ireland R&D Partnership in relation to cancer research including work combining international expertise from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, Queen's University Belfast, the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Centre and GE Global Research.
18. The Council noted that the Health Research Board (HRB) has recently amended its Host Institution Policy to enable eligibility for Northern Ireland research performing institutions to apply to act as a HRB host institution for HRB grants.
19. Ministers welcomed the update on the ongoing work of the All Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care (AIIHPC).
20. The Council noted the importance of continuing to support the ongoing work of the AIIHPC to improve palliative care and quality of life for people with life-limiting conditions and their carers across the island of Ireland.

### **CHILD PROTECTION**

21. The Council approved the revised Child Protection work programme and the priorities set out for a three year period until 31 December 2024.
22. Ministers noted the latest position provided on other matters including the updating of the "*Protocol between Northern Ireland and Ireland for Handling Inter-Jurisdictional child cases*" and that an updated Protocol will be considered at a future meeting of the NSMC.
23. The Council noted that a knowledge exchange forum of child protection practitioners working at an operational level from both jurisdictions has been established with an initial focus on the sharing of learning from implementation of the Signs of Safety methodology being taken forward in both jurisdictions. Ministers noted that additional opportunities to extend the remit of the group will be developed in consultation with the NSMC Child Protection Officials Group and an update will be provided to a future meeting of the Council.

## **FOOD SAFETY PROMOTION BOARD (safefood)**

### **PROGRESS REPORT**

24. Ray Dolan, CEO of *safefood* provided an overview of the work of *safefood* and updates on campaigns related to weight management, handwashing and Christmas food safety. The Council noted that *safefood* has developed and distributed various resources in educational settings, delivered events including webinars and a podcast series and promoted healthy eating guidelines.
25. The Council noted that *safefood* has engaged with customers on social media, and carried out research in relation to food allergens, sustainable food policy, and fiscal and pricing policies related to food and non-alcoholic drinks
26. Ministers received an update on the work of *safefood* networks including Community Food Initiatives and Knowledge Networks, and on progress in the tripartite initiative between *safefood*, the Public Health Agency and the Food Standards Agency NI in rolling out minimum nutritional standards for catering for staff and visitors in health and social care settings whilst supporting nutrition standards for food in schools.

### **CEO RECRUITMENT**

27. Ministers approved the process for the recruitment of the Chief Executive of *safefood*.

### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

28. The Council agreed that the next NSMC Health and Food Safety meeting will be held in late 2021.

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26 March 2021**

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